

BLOG STARTUP | SEO | WRITING | MONETIZATION

THE ULTIMATE BEGINNER'S BOOK ON BLOGGING

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The Beginner's Book on Blogging

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Chapter 1 An Introduction: My Experience with Blogging Over Four Years

Via my first and primary website for blogging, ABrotherAbroad.com, I've become a successful travel blogger and self-publisher over the last few years achieving on average 100,000 visitors a month and semi-passive income equivalent to that of a full-time job in the US. This income now supports my dream of indefinite travel, location independence, and time independence. Since starting my blog, and achieving a full-time income, I've repeated the process of starting other sites that generate semi-passive income as well as taught others my process for blogging – including content writing, site building, SEO – to help them repeat the same success and benefits I currently enjoy.

Throughout the process of creating my blog, planning and writing content, and monetizing my content, I learned many hard lessons through trial and error and repeating what works. Ultimately, I realized that successful blogging is all about applying a handful of best practices performed consistently and putting forth diligent work. That's it. No secrets. No magic bullet.

To create a successful blog, that draws in stable traffic and readership, solves problems for its readers, and generates a semi-passive income equal to that of a full time job, the creator and owner need two things...

1. The willingness to invest in diligent work.

Hundreds or thousands of hours researching, writing, learning, and testing what works for your style, your audience, and Google can't be replaced. The drive and intention I invested in my research and writing is half of what sets my site apart from the thousands of other aspiring travel bloggers that fail each year.

2. Applying an essential set of best practices for blogging success.

Knowing how to identify what problems your readers have and what they need, finding the best solution for them, and structuring that solution into good writing for your readers and search engines, then marketing your content in the "digital tribes" they live in and drawing in readers is step 1 and has a handful of best practices that anyone can use to succeed at.

Then, monetizing your writing and audience in an honest, mutually beneficial way is the second and equally important component for blogging success.

Best practices in these essential area, once learned, can be repeated for any site, any viable and validated niche (with a validated audience), or any small business to create a content hub that readers love and that pays the bills.

Those best practices are what this book is all about

Unfortunately, I didn't realize how to blog the right way – writing good content, that draws readers, and that pays - until about a year into my blogging “career” (if we can even call it that).

The Story of ABrotherAbroad.com and My Blogging Journey

“A Brother Abroad” started as a hobby, intended to be a simple record of my journey traveling the world, sharing the kinds of stories I loved to read before I took the jump into wandering around the world. I had no intention of becoming a professional blogger or writer, however, fate had a different plan for the long term.

After a year of traveling the world, I returned home to California giving myself one month to decide whether I would continue for the second year of travel, or if I would return to the rat race of the corporate world.

After a month of reviewing my desires and options I realized, I wasn't ready to return “home” yet, so I gave myself an additional year to travel – under the condition that *this time* I had to do everything better.

In the second year, I would volunteer more aiming to improve the situation wherever I went, I would venture to more places off of the beaten path to travel more unconventionally, and I would share the information about my travels in not just an entertaining way, but in a functional way that solved travel problems for others that weren't commonly addressed on travel blogs.

Whether the problem was an itinerary for motorbiking through Laos, questions on safety regarding hitchhiking through rural Turkey, or finding a narrative of the experience hopping fishing boats between islands in the Philippines to understand how to make it happen, I would aim to write in a more problem+solution focused way to ultimately contribute something worthwhile to the world after my travels.

Additionally, I set the goal of continually developing skills related to how I blogged. Coding, Search Engine Optimization, Social Media marketing, and generally blogging related business skills.

STAGE 1: TRANSITIONING TO PROBLEM-SOLVING WRITING

As I tinkered with my site and a handful of tools (primarily Google Analytics) in preparation for my travels and interacted with the handful of readers that graced my site with their presences, I realized that some types of posts were performing better than others. Some types of content

received more views than other types of posts on my site and seemingly attracted the attention of Google and travel forums like magnets. The content that performed better also better aligned with the questions people were asking the most, in comments, in travel forums, and on social media. I realized that, just as I'd planned to realign my writing process toward a problem + solution writing model, my best-performing articles always addressed a problem that wasn't solved well by anything else on the internet.

Eventually, I realized and accepted that as a traveler, the products of my efforts would be more useful, more impactful, and more successful if I responded to the needs of potential readers instead of writing blindly about the adventures at hand that I felt like writing about. More value would come from an email list and asking what people wanted to hear about, why they didn't travel, and what travel problems they needed solutions to.

My simple "travel journal" evolved into a travel resource that focused on delivering precise information to the problems people asked about the most, or engaged with the most – advice on travel gear, advice for staying fit, and how to undertake more adventurous experiences independently.

As I started my next year of travel, this shift, from instinct-driven travel writing about experiences to problem-focused solutions delivered via well-written articles, made my readership explode and ignited a new passion and purpose in my writing. I could see evidence that I was providing information that was needed, useful, and appreciated. With that shift, I decided to make a career of writing travel content – but self-published and on my terms.

With that shift, I had to continue learning how to translate my passions (travel and writing) into a sustainable, scalable, and lean business – a monetized blog – using the tools of the digital universe, e-commerce, and digital business.

STAGE 2: UNDERSTANDING THE BUSINESS of BLOGGING, SEARCH ENGINES, AND CONTENT MONETIZATION

For the following six months, by researching the nature of search engines and "search engine optimization (or "SEO") and by performing simple "market research", I learned how to identify who my target and optimal readers were, the content that my target readers needed, the problems they needed to be solved via information, and how to structure the writing in a way search engines love. I then used this data to write articles that engaged my readers emotionally while quickly giving them the answers (and feelings) they were looking for

Next, I learned how to present myself as an authority within my niche on the topics I evolved into writing about – travel, digital nomads, living as an expat, and fitness. Finally, I culminated this by monetizing my blog to make money in an honest, sustainable way mutually beneficial

for my readers and I and in a way that respected my the trust of my readers and truly filled a need for them.

Those six months of self-guided study were filled with immense learning. I scoured the internet intensely. I took courses wherein “pro bloggers” were all sharing their “secrets,” which were mostly hype and BS honestly. I connected with other bloggers frequently and continuously to learn the essentials of writing, marketing, and monetizing that were working for bloggers across niches (these were the true jackpots and most fulfilling learning experiences). At the end of the six serious months of studying the art and science of blogging, or about 18 months in total, I had accumulated the fundamental knowledge for successful blogging, content marketing, and online businesses that I creditd allowing me to reach my current success. In hindsight, I recognize that was the point where I had finally absorbed the essential fundamentals in blogging.

A summary of my most important lessons learning to blog:

1. **SEO first** – select all content based on SEO opportunities, validating competition and sufficient searches for the specific topic
2. **Target low competition SEO keywords** for writing
3. **Share your writing with your “tribes” and communities across the internet to build authority** on the topic by delivering value in a selfless way
4. **Do not monetize a blog until you have reached 10,000 sessions per month** and then monetize strategically, in line with your niche, your content, and your audience
5. **Write good content, for readers first**, designed to solve their initial problem and as many follow-on problems as possible, and structure the content secondarily for search engines. Writing good content *for people* is the best way to hedge against google updates

MY CAREER IN BLOGGING

I consider the end of that six months of study, trial, and error to be when my blogging “career” truly started. No longer just a hobby, but a craft with value to my readership and a means to support my life.

I continued to write as I was able to during my travels, sometimes one post per week, sometimes one post per month, and sometimes one post per day, but in the end, I averaged two posts a week over the last three years.

Since my initial, self-guided blogger boot camp I’ve been blogging for three additional years, honing my craft as a serious blogger

At the end of year one, I had established myself as an authority within the travel sub-niches of “one bagging” and minimalist travel as well as travel-friendly fitness. Via affiliate marketing,

honestly and transparently, I was making enough money to fully pay for my travels through Southeast Asia and South America.

Within year two, two extraordinary things happened. First, my site was accepted into one of the two best premium advertising networks, which doubled my income. Secondly, the pandemic hit.

Gaining admittance to a premium ad network, Mediavine, allowed me to focus less on strategic monetization and marketing, and simply put out more content with “market pull,” that was shareable, that people wanted, and that Google would quickly index, rank highly, and send searches too. This ad network paid from \$25 to \$90 per thousand visits to my site (or “RPMs”) and opened my eyes to how much potential truly lays in the field of blogging if treated as a business and as a career.

Secondly, during the pandemic, when global travel came to a stand still and while many travel blogs lost all traffic and income, I learned the value of thinking outside of the box, adaptiveness, and resilience. I shifted the focus niche of my content from travel guides and tutorials to fitness and self-development. BY doing this, I was able to not only keep my blog alive during the pandemic but grow it, in an honest way that served readers, keeping travel as the core theme, but still writing articles that benefited people unfortunately trapped at home during the pandemic.

In year three, I saw new heights, by pushing the limits of writing frequency and research and building authority in new niches of digital nomadism and self-development, being featured in top publications such as the New York Times, Trip Advisor Editorials, the San Diego Tribune, and more. Along the way, I’d begun aggregating the writing from my site and publishing it as books – “75 Strong,” which reached best-seller status on Amazon, and “The Trails: A New Guide to Traveling the World.”

Beyond these achievements, I used my site to conduct the first-ever openly published study on global digital nomads polling and engaging hundreds of digital nomads to publish an openly available study. I pushed my site’s income to more than double the average income in the United States, even though I was living in low-cost locations like Bali, Argentina, and Thailand thanks the location independent income blogging provides. And I reached readership of 100,000+ monthly readers, primarily directed to my site via Google.

NOW

Though achieving this kind of success took thoroughly researching and writing hundreds of articles (300 to be exact) and thousands of hours of invested work, the acts were well worth it. Today, my first site generates what I call a “semi-passive income” and allows me to focus on the things I am passionate about. On average, I spend 2 to 3 hours per day, Monday through

Thursday maintaining and growing my site – so ultimately about 8 to 12 hours a week and on average 10 hours a week of work. However, the best part is that this “work” doesn’t need to be done daily.

Over the last two years, there have been times where I’ve completely ignored my site for ~2 months and returned to find traffic and income still strong, then invested the equivalent “10 hours per week” over a burst sprint to catch up on continually investing in my site. I doubt there will ever come a day wherein I don’t have to do anything to my site but still make an income, but as time passes my income and readership still grows with less time invested thanks to compounding returns and my improved efficiency and technique in blogging.

More importantly, I know, from sharing my blogging process and techniques with friends, colleagues, and clients and watching their success, that you can do the same.

Now, I’m in a fantastic position with a semi-passive income, a platform to write and publish solving travelers’ problems as I wish, and using the opportunity to write and self publish while repeating the process with three other, smaller blogs I’ve created.

More importantly, I’ve decided to share the knowledge, best practices, and best processes for blogging in a manual – this manual – because for those who love to write, or are motivated enough to build their own hustle, I want them to have the same opportunity I had, but with a shorter runway to takeoff.

As cliché as it may sound, the saying is true: The best time to start a blog was 2010 and the second-best time is now.

Over my entire career as a professional blogger, ***two important ideas consistently prove true in blogging:***

- 1) There are no secrets. The best practices of blogging and content marketing are widely known, openly available, and all you need. Lucky for you, I’ll summarize the 80% you need to know here.
- 2) The key to blogging success is creating a sustainable plan, putting in diligent effort to see it through, adapting according to your learnings and changes in the industry, and sticking it out to the long term.

That’s it.

You don’t need expensive courses.

You don't need secrets.

You just need knowledge of what the fundamentals of blogging are and where to find them.

This manual delivers *all* of the fundamentals that you *need* so you can build a base level of success in blogging.

With drive, diligence, and dedication, you can have the same.

Good luck with your adventure to come.

SEPTEMBER 2021 INCOME REPORT FOR ABROTHERBROAD.COM

Ads: \$4,096

Affiliate Marketing: \$2,116

Book Sales: \$223

September 2021 Monthly Income for ABrotherAbroad.com: \$6,435

Chapter 2 How Blogs Work: The Business Model of Blogging

HOW BLOGS WORK

Once upon a time, blogs were true to their original name of “web logs.” Blogs were simply a place to record unstructured ideas that served little purpose beyond expression for the writer as just a “web log of thoughts.”

Today, however, blogs are a completely different animal thanks to a more professional and focused approach to writing, improvements in content management systems like WordPress and ease of building websites with platforms like Wix and Wordpress themes and page builders, the advent of premium programmatic ad networks like Mediavine and AdThrive, and the existence of robust affiliate networks such as Avantlink, CJ, and the Amazon Associate network. Blogs have risen in quality and financial opportunity to rival many magazines but on a smaller scale with more nimbleness and efficiency.

A REFRESHER: PRINT PUBLISHING’S EVOLUTION, AND HOW BLOGS ARE PUSHING “CONTENT” FORWARD

In the print publishing days, periodicals such as magazines, newspapers, and journals would routinely publish a collection articles monetized by 1) paid advertisements within the magazine purchased by brands and 2) subscription fees paid by readers.

Only extremely large magazines specializing in irreplaceable analysis and written by qualified/certified professionals will continue to successfully sell subscriptions

Today, the internet’s freedom of information has eliminated the incentive for many readers to pay for all but the major names in print. Even more, readers will only pay for a subscription if that publication specializes in a complex topic delivering extremely high quality, information-dense writing that is near irreplaceable and executed on an extremely large scale. Wall Street Journal, The Economist, and journals within the scientific community. All three magazines specialize in and deliver original research with vast, unique sources (Economist Studies), specialized analysis from *qualified* and certified experts (PhD’s writing for science journals), and a globally distributed network of information sources, support, and authority/influence within a powerful sector (Wall Street Journal in the finance sector).

As a testament to this, serial entrepreneur Robin Thurston is betting on an idea that the only way magazines can survive by (successfully) selling subscriptions is via offering massive amounts of content (not just a single magazine or content from a single platform) and additional value on top. Thurston purchased Outside magazine to add to his portfolio which

already included Backpacker, Ski Mag, Trail Runner, Yoga Journal, Climbing, Triathlete, Peloton, and 12 other outdoor and lifestyle titles. Thurston restructure the company, and revenue strategy, to offer *all* of these magazine titles under a single subscription along with unlimited digital content, unlimited access to Outside TV, and premium access to navigation tools, maps and more.

For magazines that do not have a sufficiently significant presence to command subscription fees and hide behind paywalls, the major sources of revenue for paying their writers and generating profits remain 1) programmatic ads delivered within articles, 2) affiliate marketing delivered as links directing to partnered brands' products, or 3) developing and delivering their own products.

The Takeway: Subscription is the only monetization model that bloggers shouldn't count on, and its no longer a model that large magazines can reliably count on (without significant business strategy and added value). So, most magazines and blogs are now on equal footing – in terms of monetization opportunities.

HOW BLOGS AND MAGAZINES MAKE MONEY: PROGRAMMATIC ADS AND AFFILIATE MARKETING

Programmatic Ads: An excellent revenue source for magazines and bloggers alike

Breeze through your favorite magazine's website, clicking through articles and you will undoubtedly see a plethora of well-placed advertisements automatically generated to target your preferences and recent searches. These ads are “programmatic ads,” low maintenance and low effort for the publisher, likely managed by a third party, and an easy way to pay the bills as a publisher, just like full-page ads used to pay the bills during the print era. These ads, programmatic ads, are one of the two main ways large publishers pay the bills now and are also one of the three primary ways bloggers generate revenue today.

As of 2021, Conde Nast publishing, which includes major magazines such as Vanity Fair, GQ, Vogue, Wired, and more, makes more than 70% of its revenue from ads.

Likewise, in 2021, roughly 60% of the income for my main blog came from programmatic ad revenue via Mediavine, supporting the idea that blogs are simply mini-magazines with similar business models and opportunities

AFFILIATE MARKETING: MAGAZINES AND BLOGS SAVE READERS TIME SHOPPING WHILE PAYING THE BILLS AS PUBLISHERS

Open an email newsletter from your favorite publication – such as Outside, GQ, Cosmopolitan, or the like – and at the very bottom you will likely see product recommendations with a link to the product. These product recommendations are highly targeted, and for every sale that occurs through the links clicked, your publication of choice receives a commission on the sale

for recommending the product usually ranging from 3% to 15% of the total sale. Open any Black Friday or Cyber Monday deal and you'll likely see tens of these links.

"Affiliate marketing" is how online magazines are bolstering a profit these days as they transition from print to digital – and this is exactly how bloggers make money too.

E-COMMERCE AND DEVELOPING/SELLING PRODUCTS: AN EXCELLENT WAY TO USE INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF READERS IN A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL WAY

The last revenue opportunity that publishers are growing in is the development and sales of their own products. This revenue source is by no means new, but is simply growing in response to the opportunity and ease of setting up digital sales channels and the possibility of outsourcing product creation.

The beauty of the opportunity lies in the intimate knowledge that *good* publishers (bloggers and magazines alike) have of their readers and their reader's needs. Bloggers should intimately know their audience and their needs, whether that means watching what content and topics perform the best, responding to emails, or engaging their readers on social media. For any successful blogger, the growth of their content catalog and readership came by analyzing what worked (what people were reading and visiting) and repeating. Publishers can use this knowledge to create specific products that respond to those needs.

In the case of GQ, in addition to the affiliate marketing sales revenue stream GQ had since 2018, the magazine created an online store, the "GQ Shop," and started by delivering a unique line of GQ branded t-shirts and sweat pants, to go beyond its affiliate sales.

In the case of bloggers, there is the opportunity to aggregate articles to self publish and sell as stand alone books, sold on their own site or published through Amazon Publishing, to create courses and trainings (which happened the main income driver for bloggers that make \$25,000+ per month), or to create physical products in which they build, sell, and ship via e-commerce channels.

Marketing and sales is commonly the most difficult aspect of a business and the "linchpin." As a successful blogger, with intimate knowledge of a target market and their needs, you have a built in customer base for developing and delivering the right product or service.

WHAT ARE BLOGS TODAY: MINI-MAGAZINES THAT FOCUS ON SOLVING PROBLEMS

This review of the evolving revenue strategies of magazines brings us to blogs.

Professional, moneymaking blogs are far from the online diaries of the 1990s. So, what are blogs today?

Blogs are mini-magazines that focus on problem-solving over entertainment.

Though many people use the internet for entertainment, most of the information they're looking for is sought after to solve a problem.

Though major publications, like the Wall Street Journal and New York Times, deliver the news authoritatively and reasonably accurately there are still plenty of problems that go unsolved for readers.

That is where blogs come in.

Successful, profit-generating blogs are structured as evergreen digital magazines that publish articles aimed at solving very specific problems. Whether that problem is the need for a recipe, a tutorial to learn how to change a car tire, best practices to get started investing, or a guide to traveling Argentina, blogs deliver the information in an ever adaptive way, routinely publishing more articles to the evergreen magazine as well as updating old content.

After proving authority within a topic, and generating a reliable stream of readership, blogs finance their existence by selling ad space on their site via the programmatic ads discussed and recommending trustworthy brands and products for a commission via affiliate marketing as discussed – just like the major magazines.

Blogs with significantly large readerships additionally deliver their own products, commonly in digital form, such as e-books, worksheets, trainings, courses, and (less often) physical products.

THE ADVANTAGE of BLOGS OVER LARGE MAGAZINES

- Freedom
- Agility and adaptiveness
- Low overhead

Not only do the best blogs monetize the same way as the best magazines, but they also have advantages *over* the best magazines.

First, **blogging is cheap and efficient**, requiring only the ongoing payment of monthly hosting (which can be as low as \$3 a month) and an SEO tool (my favorite tool only costs \$12 per month).

Whereas large magazines and publishing houses require hundreds of staff and the supporting infrastructure, a single blogger can deliver the same result – fantastic content – on a much smaller scale, with ongoing costs of ~\$3 to \$20 per month. If you *do* want to scale to match your magazine of choice you can always hire freelance writers and share a cut of your profits. Or, you could build your blog to a six-figure income solo and keep the profits to yourself. Very few writers at large magazines make that kind of income within their first few years of writing – but you can achieve that from a few years of blogging, as long as you apply a business centric approach.

Second, **blogs can pivot and adapt more quickly than magazines**, allowing you to survive rough patches in publishing or take advantage of exquisite opportunities more easily.

During the pandemic, I shifted my site's focus from travel to fitness within a single day and saw seamless transition and more success in readership, monetization, and positive reader feedback. If Travel + Leisure was to attempt becoming Muscle and Fitness in a day, it is very unlikely they could do so without an extreme dip in financial performance and reader satisfaction.

Thanks to the nature of *good* blogging, it is possible to write to solve virtually any problem and, especially for lifestyle bloggers, pivot just as easily and surprisingly quickly.

Additionally, when large industry changes occur, such as a troublesome Google algorithm update, a new trend such as Tik Tok or Google Web Stories, or a new technical or security issue such as Pagespeed hits and affects the entire publishing community, bloggers are poised to react swiftly, or dismiss as such. Considering most blogs consist of teams of 1 to 10 people with a single clear owner, researching, deciding, and applying a decision (action or inaction) can happen quickly, hence why the health of the blogger community within the publishing industry is arguable better than the health of the large, bureaucratic organizations that are still struggling to transition from print.

Last, **blogging delivers immense levels of freedom**. In blogging, you, the owner and writer, decide the content.

For better or worse, as a blogger, you decide the topics you write on and the messages you share. Unlike social media, you can choose to or choose not to deal with comments and naysayers. Unlike your job, you can choose to leave your blog for weeks or months at a time with, usually, a slight dip in traffic if any. Of all the careers I have had in my life, the experience of blogging is *the* most freeing and autonomous. No magazine staff position offers that level of freedom and adaptiveness. The freedom to take two weeks off to take a course, to mentally recharge, to "research" by wandering Laos or Ecuador, or to dissect the performance of a site and chart a strategy forward at your whim.

Bloggers are small, adaptive publishers that are increasingly influential in driving the direction of the publishing industry.

The Bottom Line: Today, blogs exist as micro-magazines that solve problems on evergreen topics and use the best monetization practices in the publishing industry, programmatic ads, and affiliate marketing, to generate a profit and finance their existence.

Chapter 3 The 20 Best Blogging Tips Upfront

DURING THE FIRST 6 MONTHS OF BLOGGING

1. Start with SEO Keyword research to decide the topics of all of your writing, choosing only low competition SEO keywords as your targets for topics.
2. Understand how to optimize your content for your target SEO keywords and the *searcher's intent*.
3. Master keyword research to accelerate your blogs' success and maintain low effort performance in the long run.
4. Use the WordPress platform hosted on your own domain and hosting (not on WordPress.com or WordPress.org) to create a lower-cost site with more control over design, SEO, and functionality.
5. After starting your blog and gaining momentum, optimize your site for Technical SEO by making the site/page loading speed as fast as possible using the Google Pagespeed Insights tester as your benchmark tool. Settle for minimum speed scores of 70+ and aim for 90+.
6. Structure your sites overall "content map" and structure to guide users through all of your content using well-organized topics, links in the site menu, "Start Here" posts, and "Pillar Posts".
7. Perform "competitor content benchmarking" when creating content to ensure you are 1) creating something better than what already exists on the topic and 2) targeting the appropriate searcher intent.
8. Create a constantly updated content plan detailing each post to be written, topic, keywords, and dictating essential metrics and traits (post length, searcher intent, related internal links, and primary monetization strategy) with a content mix conducive to sharing, ranking for keywords, and monetization in line with the strategy of your site and brand.
9. Forget Facebook, Instagram, and other Social platforms for marketing your blog posts...unless you already have a large following with high engagement (10k on Instagram or Facebook), as these have become "pay for play" and are subject to volatile algorithms. Focus on building a tribe of readers, organic traffic via search (Google and Pinterest), traffic via forums (Reddit, Quora, etc.), and a large list of email addresses for enduring relationships.

10. Use “low-algorithm dependent” forums and communities to connect with audiences, to build rapport within “tribes”, to share content valuable to the respective tribe, and jumpstart SEO (via burst traffic that happens with efficient sharing).
11. Learn which marketing channels are most effective for your site and content and conducive to your desires and personality, and invest most of your marketing efforts in those channels. Then, completely disregard the other channels...for now.
12. Monetize your site immediately via affiliate marketing, in the mid-term (10k to 25k sessions) with ads, and with your own products (info products, software, courses) in the long term. Steer clear of providing services as a monetization strategy *if* you intend to scale or focus income that is more passive than not to avoid trading time for money.
13. Aim to create an evergreen “content catalog” that will endure as an ever-growing resource, and refresh each piece of content quarterly for changes in SEO, searcher intent, and knowledge on the topic.
14. For the first 6 months on your site, focus solely on 1) Writing good content and 2) Building rapport in and sharing your content with your target “tribes”. Don’t worry about guest posting, linking building, building social media accounts, or selling sponsored posts in the first 6 months.

AFTER 6 MONTHS

15. After 6 months, begin refreshing and “re-optimizing” posts for SEO, relevance, and monetization.
16. Analyze the traffic, traffic sources, and SERP keywords for your top 20 results once per week. Optimize regularly (~monthly to quarterly) for user experience (UX), freshness, internal links, SEO, and new monetization opportunities.
17. Analyze your SERP results in Google Analytics to identify your “authority areas” recognized by Google. Then plan your content and refine your niche accordingly to expand on your authority topics progressively targeting more competitive keywords.
18. Revisit the business model for your site and overall strategy. Reassess your content catalog, niche, highest performing content, lowest-performing content, email marketing strategy (including lead magnets and opt-ins), highest performing marketing channels, lowest-performing marketing channels, and site content flow and site structure. Apply the Pareto Rule (80/20) to what you learn to create a new strategy for your site focusing on everything that works and eliminating all tasks that don’t show a history of success or significantly contribute to success.

19. Begin planning for an owned product (eBook, digital tool, course) that you can deliver on your site or Amazon as an additional revenue stream.
20. Just write. If you are determined to hit 100k monthly readers, realize that simply aiming to write as much as possible, ideally publishing daily, is *the* #1 most effective approach of bloggers aiming to break 100k monthly readers and a 6 figure income.
21. Write for people foremost, with emotional, engaging, informative, and concise content, and write for Google second. Google's artificial intelligence-powered algorithm is "learning" more and more to assess content as a human would. Pre-empt this by simply writing good content for *humans*, starting with your target audience.
22. Aim to write "evergreen content" about topics and keywords that will be useful and relevant indefinitely with the writing requiring an SEO refresh at most.
23. After the first six months, plan quarterly periods where-in you "tune-up" your blog by refreshing content more than six months old, refreshing content with a Google SERP CTR lower than 3%, and identifying and expanding on the topics in which Google is recognizing you and your site as an authority aiming for a cluster of posts (5 to 9 posts) and a pillar post for each cluster.
- 24. If after 1 year of blogging you have not achieved 10,000 sessions per month, reassess your blog and consider restarting in a new niche, and return to your "schoolhouse" to study the latest SEO tactics and best practices to restart fresh again.**
- 25. After you have scanned this entire book, come back and re-read this list.**

Chapter 4 About This Blogging Manual

THE GOALS of THIS BOOK

1. To get you started blogging *on the right path* as quickly and economically as possible
2. To help you internalize an “80% solution” approach to blogging, beginning with a focus on the essentials and the right things to be a base for building on adapting on going forward
3. To get you started blogging with accurate expectations, a healthy perspective on the long term and end states, and a sustainable plan for achieving those ends.

How This Book Is Written

1. **Chronologically according to my recommended blog development timeline, so read each chapter in the order listed:** The sections in the book, and the tools provided, are delivered in the most efficient order for the startup, growth, and maintenance processes of your blog. **If you have no idea where to start, then start at the beginning of this book** and work your way from beginning to end. This approach will take you from no blog to a successful and well-monetized blog, teaching you the fundamentals of what you need to know along the way. **If you are an experienced blogger, simply read through the chapters and read on the techniques you are unfamiliar with or need to improve on in blogging.** Also consider reading the intermediate version of this book
2. **As an 80% Solution to Blog Success for beginner the low intermediate level bloggers:** This book distills the essentials of what you need to know to create a successful blog, and discards as much fluff and low payoff work as possible. This book doesn't cover every approach possible to building a blog and leaves out many advanced practices intentionally to keep you focused on practical, results-oriented actions without confusion. The goal of this book is to deliver a streamlined approach to building a monetized blog that can be executed by anyone, with minimal resources, and (with effort and diligence) leads to success.
3. **With no “new ideas”, just simple, proven tactics:** There are no “new ideas under the sun,” just good ideas, repurposed and executed differently or diligently. None of the ideas in this book are purely mine. There are no secrets to success or magic bullets in this book. All of these ideas are simply ideas, tactics, and practices I learned, adopted, and executed (as detailed), ultimately contributing to my success. You will likely find nothing “new” here, but you will find everything you need.

- 4. As a guide, with encouragement to experiment after learning the basics:** There is an infinite number of ways to achieve any objective, and blogging is no different. The tactics in this book are simply the lowest effort, highest payoff tactics that worked for me in achieving my goals (several times), and are worth using as a base to start from.
-

Who is this book written for?

- **Aspiring bloggers and aspiring content creators** to build their own platform to share content and monetize
 - **Hustlers and side hustlers** that need to build an audience (for marketing and sales), or monetize an already existing audience
 - **Startups** seeking to use content marketing and inbound marketing (blogging for business) to build a customer base, establish a brand, and introduce their product or service to the world
 - **Experts** in any topic who wish to share their knowledge with the world or monetize their expertise – in parenting, travel, personal finance, gardening, cooking, or anything
 - **Thought leaders and professionals** aiming to build a brand, a reputation, or a community around their ideas and need a platform to share those audiences
-

For Aspiring Bloggers...

For those that are just starting to blog and need a practical education from the ground up, I recommend jumping through the following chapters and sections in the order listed.

Basic Blogging Concepts

- 1) Assessing the opportunity in blogging, and whether it is right for you
- 2) Managing Expectations: What you can expect from blogging
- 3) How Blogs Make Money
- 4) An Overview of the Blogging Process
- 5) The Milestones to Aim for In Blogging

Bloggng in Practice

- 6) Choosing Your Niche

- 7) Defining Your “Why” and Designing Your Brand
- 8) Building Your Site
- 9) A Brief Lesson on SEO
- 10) My Keyword Research Process
- 11) Monetizing Your Blog
- 12) Essential Ideas: Choosing Yourself (Ideas from Seth Godin)
- 13) Essential Ideas: Knowing Your “Why” (Ideas from Simon Senek)
- 14) Essential Ideas: 80/20 – Using the Pareto Principle to Focus on What Matters

Tips For New Bloggers Reading This Book

Every section provides valuable information that you *will* need at some point, and proceeding through the content in listed order is the recommended approach. Every tool you will need is provided in the order that you will apply it as you develop and grow your blog. As such, feel free to breeze through the entire manual to become familiar and return to sections as step-by-step guides through each phase in the blogging process.

For Experienced Bloggers Who Haven’t Hit 25,000 Monthly Sessions and Steady Monetization

This guide is still valuable to you. For experienced bloggers interested in “leveling up” by adding some missing skills, scan through the sections to identify tools and practices that you aren’t yet applying, and focus on only those sections. Then, if you would like to reassess your blog with fresh eyes, read through the entire manual and compare the recommended practices to your current practices. Feel free to skip between sections to focus on what is important for your blog to grow *now*. This book is written as a manual with straightforward processes and each section can be applied in isolation as a tool for solving your current problems (e.g., SEO, writing good content, marketing for more readers).

Additionally, I recommended reading part 2 of this book which is a separate volume that focuses on the following areas:

- Writing Content Clusters (AKA “Content Hubs”) of 5 to 7 posts + a pillar post on a single topic
- Analyzing Google Authority areas for your site and expanding with content clusters
- Google snippet targeting
- Advanced technical SEO: speed updates, UX
- Targeting competitor content as a source of keywords
- Analyzing competitor content for new potential “link magnets” within your industry
- Link building tactics (HARO, guest podcasting, publishing original research, creating “link magnetic posts,” etc.)
- Essential Google Analytics Techniques for Bloggers
- Essential Google Search Console Techniques for Bloggers
- How to increase on page engagement
- Advanced review of the Google Updates and why they matter
- Advance forum marketing
- Advanced Reddit marketing tactics
- Essential Competitor Analysis
 - Identifying competitors in the niche
 - Analyzing their backlink sources
 - Analyzing competitor’s keywords
 - Analyzing competitor’s income
 - Analyzing competitor traffic
- Advanced post refresh tactics
- Concepts: Niche evolution and “pivoting” a blog
- How to react to a Google Update + Understanding what they mean
- Buying expired domains and rebuilding expired sites for “pre-existing authority”
- Advanced tactic – Packaging posts and selling as a book on Amazon
- How to publish books on Amazon
- Advanced maintenance tactic: Interlinking hacks
- Concepts: 80/20 tactic in advanced blogging

Each Section of This Book Has The Following Components to Guide You Logically Through The Process of Creating a Successful Blog...

1. **“In This Section”**: Provides an overview of the topics covered in the chapter, allowing you to scan and skip sections for “just in time” learning as you work through the blog development process

2. **Takeaways up front:** If you're in a hurry, or need a reminder, these snippets will give everything you need
 3. **Action Items:** If you want to take action and make the potential results from this book real but don't know where to start, *do* the action items listed at the end of each section to apply the biggest lessons from each section
-

What You Can Achieve Through Blogging and What You Should Expect from Each Area

When you start blogging, you might not have a clear, defined objective (yet). However, you should know your reason for starting a blog. Knowing your reason to blog will help in effectively managing your expectations.

The major reasons to start blogging:

1. For-Profit
2. For Passion
3. To Establish a Reputation (as a thought leader)
4. Lead development and content marketing (for businesses and side hustlers)
5. To share your ideas

For-Profit (Semi-Passive Income)

Expect 1 to 2 years of full-time effort before significant profits become the norm for your site.

Blogging for profit requires a monetization plan upfront that grows with the audience size and shapes the content written to maximize your profits from each post – for instance, writing long tutorials and guides to maximize ad revenue, and writing product reviews and recommendations to maximize affiliate partnership revenue.

If you are blogging for profit, prioritize blogging for profit *throughout your path*, from day 1.

When blogging for profit, focus on...

- Consistently delivering well SEO'ed content built on good keyword research to create sustainable, compounding, long term, sustainable, low maintenance traffic.
- Monetize with affiliate marketing in the beginning, ads in the midterm, and marketing your own products to sell in the long term + a premium programmatic ads partner (Mediavine or AdThrive)
- Track as much as possible and optimize routinely (bi-weekly to monthly)
- Stay as lean as possible in your operations and aim for simplicity in your processes

For-profit, don't focus on...

- Hype or social media. Aim for evergreen content that will perform in the long term
-

Blogging For Passion

Blogging for passion or “hobby blogging” can be a form of artistic expression or simply a means to share thoughts, ideas, and information with the world to its own end. Though the primary focus is on enjoyment and expression, you should still take a structured approach to creating content and plan how your library of content pieces together for reader flow.

Doing SEO research and analyzing content that has gone viral will help you write about topics people need (naturally drawing in search engine traffic, social shares, and readers) instead of things you feel like writing about that have low traffic/share/reader potential. By taking a structured approach to planning and writing, you will naturally increase the number of people who see your work.

Blogging for passion while successfully building an audience requires the forethought of adding structure to the content that makes marketing (and SEO) easier without inhibiting your creative processes. The results will be content that is easier to digest and builds an audience more quickly than it otherwise would, helping you grow as a writer while maintaining artistic integrity.

Additionally, once a base of content, steady readership, and proven marketing channels are established you will increasingly have more artistic freedom without losing readership. *But*, the first step is structuring your site, content plan, and marketing plan to naturally attract readers.

When blogging for passion, focus on...

- Researching what your potential readers and target audience’s problems are and topics of interest are, so that you can continuously provide value to them – vice writing solely on gut instinct
- Cultivate relationships in “tribes” (Facebook groups, Reddit subs, forums, etc.), providing value consistently to create genuine connection and credibility first and (ultimately) a reliable marketing channel for your work
- Begin email marketing (building a list of email addresses and connecting routinely and genuinely via email) from the first day, to build your own tribe independent of other tribes/forums/channels. Email is the channel least controlled by algorithms and the whims of corporations’ duties to stockholders
- Learn the fundamentals of SEO to understand how to drive traffic to your site and structure content for the future, while maintaining artistic integrity
- Consider developing products aligned with your passion (and your audience) as the primary means of monetization *if* monetization is a concern for you with courses, books, worksheets, and workshops being excellent starters

For Passion blogging, do not focus on...

- Monetization – save that energy for writing good content that people love
-

Establishing a Reputation as a Topic Authority

A catalog of content displaying your expertise and original thought is a straightforward way of establishing yourself as a thought leader and ultimately establishing a reputation. Additionally, a catalog of well-written, valuable content can be an excellent complement to a resume, clearly demonstrating expertise.

Blogging for reputation and demonstrating expertise requires an ever-adapting content plan that tackles the largest and most prevalent problems in your niche (or industry) while keeping your finger on the pulse of current events. Publishing opinionative content (or republishing content) about the right thing at the right time will naturally improve your reach and chances for your content to go viral.

Additionally, planning your content well (using SEO and market research) will lead to your thoughts (the expression of your expertise) naturally being shared and ultimately resulting in opportunities being offered to you – jobs, gigs, speaking engagements, partnerships – similar to content marketing, but for your personal brand.

If blogging to bolster your reputation:

- Routinely write content on the most pressing issues in your niche/industry despite competitiveness *but* aim to provide a unique perspective and unique value in every piece
- Routinely write on current events and current issues to balance relevance with evergreen content
- Learn and understand SEO to ensure your content is still structured to be found and ranked by search engines, to ultimately attract the readers asking the questions (in Google) that you are aiming to answer
- Stay consistent with publishing, continuously providing value addressing a balance of current events and enduring issues in your industry of expertise

For Reputation blogging, don't focus on...

- All monetization strategies – if *pure* reputation is your goal, monetize via lead generation, consulting, and coaching
-

Lead Development & Marketing (For Your Other Business Or Hustle):

For businesses of all sizes, blogs can be a platform for “content marketing” - attracting readers with fresh, engaging, and informative content, building rapport and a genuine relationship during the experience, and ultimately guiding readers to a “conversion” or purchase of the product the reader is being targeted with. Readers that have a developed, genuine connection to the blog, and subsequently to the writers and brand behind it, can be cultivated into business leads or customers.

For lead development and content marketing...

- Focus heavily on SEO, aiming for high converting “buyer keywords”
- Aim for a cohesive content library that answers strings of questions from the reader, all in a single location.
- Begin email marketing from day 1 to build relationships with the reader.

Understanding the primary purposes of your blog will help you prioritize the tasks that matter and avoid the ones that don’t funnel as much energy as possible into the steps that lead directly to your “reason for blogging” and, more specifically, your objectives.

The Bottom Line on The Reasons to Blog

1. Blogging is a platform to share your voice. The blogging platform alone will not amplify your voice, but your work and approach to your blog, crafting your content, and marketing can amplify your voice and increase the number of eyes on your content and ears hearing your ideas.
2. Blogs are small businesses (to begin with). Structure, dictating clear objectives, and planning that leads from the current state to your target objective are all necessary for efficient success. Treat your blog as such, making every decision in line with your “reason”, and you will reap the benefits accordingly.
3. Before blogging identify your driving “why” and plan the path, using the tools and techniques in this book, accordingly.

Chapter 5 The Blogging Process Part 1: Understanding Blogging

The process of creating a *successful* blog is very straightforward if done right. Though there are an infinite number of approaches, the method to follow consists of a handful of best practices that use a minimum of resources and, with diligence and consistency, will create a successful blog.

This minimalist, one size fits all approach works because it incorporates plenty of options for “pivoting” your blog as you complete each task, adapting to repeat what works, better fill your audience’s needs, and using the knowledge we gain along the way about the quickest, most sustainable path to success for your blog.

Though it is possible to create a blog while omitting some of these “essential” tasks, success will absolutely come later, and possibly not at all. Save yourself time, effort, and heartache by designing taking this proven process, and adapting it to the creation of your blog.

To start this chapter, we will briefly review the steps for building *any* blog. In the sections that follow we’ll go in-depth into the process of blogging, from startup to steady-state, delivering the tactics you need to grow and road signs to be aware of along the way.

In This Section

- **An Overview of the Process of Blogging**

The Process of Blogging

1. Understand the opportunity in blogging, assess whether it is for you, and manage your expectations
2. Choose your niche

3. Define your brand, mission, how you'll execute, and your "why"
4. Build your site (find hosting, install WordPress, and build your site)
5. Develop your content strategy and plan
6. Understand SEO Essentials Fundamentals
7. Understand SEO Keyword Research Process (to inform your content plan and writing)
8. Understand On-Page SEO and SEO Writing: Content writing for search engines
9. Write Good Content: Content writing for user experience and engagement
10. Monetize Your Blog
11. Market Your Blog: How to Build an Audience and Get Readers on Your Site
12. Understand the Other Essential Concepts in Blogging

Understanding & Assessing the Opportunity of Blogging From Day 1 and How It Fits You

The opportunity of blogging is an immense one. As large, legacy publishers from the print age die or refuse to evolve, the opportunity for small content publishers (bloggers) grows even more vast. With a unique voice and a genuine message that people want to hear, anyone can step in and give the people what they want in this time of change.

But not everyone is cut out for blogging.

Hours of research and writing.

Months without success or observable achievement of goals.

Potentially years before a small publishing platform, website, or “blog” delivers an income that could sustain your life.

Is the sacrifice worth it?

That depends on you.

Are you cut out for the opportunity and the underlying challenge?

That depends on you.

In this section, we’ll take an objective look at the opportunities (and demands) of blogging as well as ask some pointed questions to help you decide if the opportunity is right for you, your level of drive, and your expectations.

If the opportunity *is* right for you, we’ll have successfully calibrated your expectations, making it easier to create a viable, long-term plan *for you*.

If the opportunity *isn’t right for* that’s fabulous too! We will have saved you hundreds of hours of effort and months of heartache before burning out. You will also have insight into a growing industry and an appreciation for “the making of” your favorite blogs.

Potentially, one day far down the road when your free time and aspirations have changed, you will return to this opportunity well informed and know the opportunity is right for you.

Now, let’s get into what you should reasonably expect from a blogging career, from start to success.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM BLOGGING

The opportunities within blogging are immense and limitless, but to stay motivated and plan our efforts (and expect success) reasonably, we must manage our expectations.

With realistic expectations for the number of hours you'll work, how much you'll need to learn, and how long you'll have to toil before reaching success, we can stave off the burnout that many bloggers experience. Working too hard, too fast, with too little return (they believe) and no idea where the finish line is are the root reasons why many bloggers stop short of their goal.

There is a pot of gold at the end of this "blogging rainbow". This section will give you an honest view of what to expect on the path to it.

In This Section

- **Things you should know up front:** Reasonable timelines and profits to expect (by niche) blogging
- **Reasons to blog:** The different objectives for blogging, deciding yours, and why both are important
- **Reasons *not* to blog:** Breaking down the misconceptions about blogging
- **Success in blogging:** What "success" looks like in blogging, on average and for outliers
- **What it takes to succeed in blogging** based on specific your objectives and goals
- **The ups and downs of blogging:** The setbacks you *will* experience, and how to prepare for them in the beginning

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Track as much as possible on your blog now. Later, this will allow you to analyze what works best, repeat *your* best practices, and dismiss anything that doesn't show results.
- You can always improve things later. For now, focus on getting started, not on delivering perfection.
- Know your reason for blogging: Profit, passion, reputation, or marketing for an existing business. Understanding your reason will help you determine the best tactics to use and avoid
- Average blogs monetize with ads and affiliate marketing. High-income blogs monetize with products and courses powered by great email marketing.
- Know the biggest pitfalls in blogging to be aware of (and expect them) on your path to success.
- Diversify your content and assess/adapt your old content and your current approaches to blogging routinely to pre-empt industry and tech changes

Things To Mention Now (That Will Be Handy Later in Your Blogging Career)

Before we get into the nitty-gritty, we'll review a quick list of important lessons to internalize now. *If* you remember to apply the tools and techniques from this list, you will *absolutely* speed up your timeline and achieve success much sooner than you could otherwise reasonably expect.

- 1. Track as much as possible on your blog now:** Record your tactics, intentions, goals, keywords used for posts, things that work, details of how you monetize, and more.
- 2. Your niche and audience will evolve as you grow:** Niche and audience evolution is natural. Adapting to these opportunities and changes is part of blog growth and good business in blogging.
- 3. You can improve posts, your website, and any content later.** Thanks to the nature and flexibility of the internet, SEO, and blogging, you can always rewrite and republish a post later. For now, aim to consistently deliver content that is “good enough” instead of inconsistently/rarely delivering *perfect* content. Then, plan to return and improve the posts and content later.

Track As Much As Possible From The Beginning: Google Analytics, Affiliate Links, and Post Metrics

The more you track (and measure) the more scientifically you can approach your analysis of what content topics, SEO topics and keywords, marketing channels, affiliate links and products, and social media platforms work best for you, your content, and your sub-niche.

Many bloggers make the mistake of simply “going with their gut” when deciding what to write and what to do in blogging. Though there is a lot of intuition involved in good blogging, the products of your efforts (posts, monetization, and marketing results) should be validated with tracked metrics. However, at some points in blogging it is more efficient to just “go with your gut.” By recording as much data as possible, you enable yourself to go back and analyze the instinct driven actions and choices and potentially discover new best practices, validated by results – whether clicks, readers, sales, or any other metric.

Additionally, when you have begun to see *slight* success (ranking highly in Google, increasing affiliate commissions) the best way to amplify your success is to examine what’s working, repeat it, and eliminate what isn’t working.

We’ll discuss this more later, but aim to track elements into your blog from the jump:

- **Enable Google Analytics and Google Search Console** tracking on your site
- **Track affiliate links** by each post they are embedded in, possible by adding an ID code to each link. This will allow you to analyze on a post-by-post and link-by-link basis what products, copy, and articles work best for generating affiliate sales based on your audience, your content, and your style
- **Record your writing intentions for each post** (target keywords with volumes and difficulty ratings). This will allow you to look at your objectives for each post 6 months later and analyze how “on target” you were.
- **Record the marketing used each post** (platform shared to, date, copy shared in the social post, notes on engagement).
- **Regularly record your site’s SERP result rankings** (ranking keywords, positions, CTR, title displayed, meta description displayed)
- **For each post, regularly record engagement metrics for posts** (pageviews, time on page, click-through rate for affiliate products)

[Understand That Your Niche, Focus, and Content Mix Will Change as Google and Your Audience Understand You, Connect With You, and Provide Feedback](#)

You can *always* go back and edit a blog post to target better keywords, improve the user experience, or focus on a different searcher intention later. Smart bloggers amplify the success of their site by constantly returning to and improving their mediocre content to gradually improve it.

This opportunity, to constantly go back and improve content gradually, is one more argument for writing evergreen content instead of seasonal content or current events based content.

What this means for you: Don’t obsess over making content “perfect”, simply do a “good” job and publish regularly . You can (and should) return to the content at a later date to refresh and improve it. Use the information from your tracking to improve each post systematically by targeting better keywords, answering the reader’s questions better, responding to “search intent” in a better way, and improving click through to affiliate partner products (via better copy, better link placement, and potentially better products) for improved monetization.

You Can Always Go Back and Rebuild Or “Optimize” Your Site, Your Posts, Or Your Brand. For Now, Just Get Started As Soon As Possible, and Adjust As You Go

“Perfect” is the enemy of “good enough”, and perfect rarely happens in blogging. It is more important to consistently deliver good, genuine, and selfless content to your readers than to infrequently deliver perfect content.

Understand that only 20% of your posts will likely drive 80% of the traffic to your site. This fact doesn't mean you need to skip the 80% that doesn't perform as well. This does mean that you “just write and publish.” Don't obsess. Don't overly polish. You can always return to polish your diamonds in the rough later.

The lesson: Just do the work well, do it diligently, and publish it. There will be ups, there will be downs, and there will eventually be a success. Don't get stuck on any single thing for too long. Just continue the process. This is the path to *long-term success* in blogging.

Action Items from This Section

- Setup Google Analytics and Google Search Console and tracking on your site
- Define your niche and sub-niche ASAP, but understand they will constantly evolve
- Don't aim for a “perfect product” now. Aim for a “good product” as you can always come back and improve later.
- When writing a post – record the target SEO keyword, estimated volume, your marketing actions for the post, and your objective for the post within the context of your site
- When including affiliate links, include a tracking ID for the post when generating the links
- Make a plan to return back to posts and refresh content, reassess and potentially retarget keywords, and generally improve the posts

Assessing The Opportunity of Blogging and How It Fits You on Day 1

The opportunities in blogging, both for-profit and as a means to express one's passions, are immense. However, the prospect of blogging is not for everyone. Diligence in research and writing over a couple years and a couple of hundred posts are the *minima* it will take to succeed in addition to resilience in the face on algorithm updates, bad luck, and general rough spots.

In this chapter, we'll look at the opportunity of blogging, the requirements, and the payoff you can reasonably expect. Then, we'll prompt you to make a gut check to see if blogging is right *for you*.

Either we'll motivate you by giving you a glimpse of your future reward, or save you time by asking the hard questions now. In any case, this is an essential chapter.

In This Section

- Average success in blogging, by niche: \$4,000 to \$9,000+
- Quantifying the effort it takes to succeed in blogging
- A glimpse of outlier success in blogging and how some bloggers make \$25,000+

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Validating Your Blogging Opportunity (niche, audience, competition, and potential profit) is the first step
- Assessing Yourself as a blogger: 2 years and 200 articles. Can you do it?
- Understanding what "success" looks like in blogging for the different types of bloggers: Varies by niche, \$4,000 to \$9,000 per month on average
- For the most probable niches that you'll target, ask yourself if the average monthly income is worth 2 years of diligent work and writing 200 pieces of well-researched, 1500-word articles.
- Ask yourself the following questions
- Can you set a weekly routine for writing and maintaining your blog, allowing for at least half a day of work (total)
- Outlier bloggers, making \$25,000+ per month, drive their incomes and break the \$10,000 per month ceiling using email marketing, growing their email lists, and mastering product creation
- Are your visions of blogging success more akin to the "outlier blogging success" (\$25,000+ per month)? If so, reconsider blogging as an option and realistically ask yourself if the average income levels by niche will work for you. If the answer is no, don't blog for now.

Average Success by Blogging Niche

1. **Personal Finance:** \$9,100 /mo. | Difficulty of Entry: 13
2. **Food:** \$9,100 / mo. | Difficulty Entry: 38
3. **Travel:** \$5,000 / mo. | Difficulty Entry: 78
4. **Marketing:** \$4,200 | Difficulty Entry: 68
5. **Lifestyle:** \$5,200 | Difficulty Entry: 69

(Note: Lower difficulty number implies the lower difficulty of entering the niche)

- The average blog making \$2,000 per month has 135,000 monthly visits (sessions)

What Work Should You Expect While Building A Successful Blog?

To build a successful blog, which we'll define as having 25,000 monthly sessions and an income of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per month or more, 2 years of "full-time work" is a reasonable period to expect. We are assuming that you will invest minimal cash into creating and marketing the site, and you are writing all of the content yourself.

Timelines will shorten, and the monthly profits *can* increase much sooner with the right cash investments, ideally into outsourcing content writing and buying automated tools that lend "leverage" to your efforts (high powered email marketing, artificial intelligence driven SEO tools, artificial intelligence driven writing tools, etc.). However, we'll save talk of the more significant, leveraging creating investments for the next book (part 2 of this book designed for intermediate and advanced bloggers) and set expectations at two years of diligent, intentional work to create a "successful" blogging business as a solo blogger.

The requirements of you (for success) will be:

1. Understanding basic search engine optimization (SEO) principles and keyword research
2. Understanding what search engines, specifically Google, need from content and websites to rank them: addressing searcher intent, on-page optimization, fast load speeds, mobile first design, and security

3. Understanding how to build a site via WordPress, change theme settings, install and remove WordPress plugins and make necessary changes later in response to changes in the blogging industry and Google
4. Willingness to write 150 to 200 pieces of *good*, well researched, well-written content, minimum 1500 words per article
5. Willingness to adapt marketing strategies (and methods of sharing/publicizing your content with the world) to create a strategy and plan that is sustainable, repeatable, and will work for you, your content, and your audience
6. Willingness to work diligently for 2 years

What Does It Take to Succeed in Blogging?

Regardless of which niche you choose to blog in, there are a few tasks to do and tools that you will need, either one time, routinely, or continuously. The tasks listed below should be high on your to-do list on your way to blogging success.

Routinely

- Publish new content routinely, monthly at a minimum, ideally weekly or more, as the faster your site's "content catalog" is filled, the sooner you will rank in Google, receive traffic, and reap the benefits.
- Perform SEO keyword research, searcher intent research and competitive benchmarking before writing *every* post. Never write anything without proper research.
- Post your new content and refreshed content in a genuine, engaging way in a specific marketing channel (Quora, Reddit, Forums, Facebook Groups) suitable to the content topic and posted in a way that tribes embrace and appreciate. The "tribe" involved with the marketing channel should receive more value than you do from the exchange of posting in *their* forum.

In the Long Term

- Work to be accepted and respected by "tribes" that you will "share" your content with, gaining rapport and recognition as a topic authority or expert along the way. This acceptance will 1) build a reliable marketing channel and 2) translate as validation of your knowledge and authority in the niche/industry, in Google, and beyond.
- Build your own tribe as a means to connect with followers directly whether via email, forums, or otherwise.

Tools

- **Invest in a good SEO keyword research tool (Keysearch, AHREFS, RankIQ, or SEMRush):** For quickly and efficiently brainstorming and screening SEO keywords and low competition. Only purchase additional tools when you've mastered the current tool. Additionally, be brutal about assessing whether an SEO tool delivers value (for you) that is sufficient relative to its cost.
- **Google Analytics + Google Search Console:** The best tools for tracking your site, researching the performance analytics of your site (readers, clicks between content, engagement, search performance, etc.), and getting the data necessary to improve your site and content
- **A WordPress Site (self-hosted) and WordPress Theme:** Using the free WordPress content management system (CMS) with a decent theme saves the costs of developing a website from scratch, allows you to manage the site yourself.

Continuous Education

To succeed in blogging you will need to learn continuously. First, you will need to learn *just enough* to get going. Then, you will need to continuously return to the topics you initially studied to stay up to date on best practices, identify opportunities to boost your site's performance and profits, and use newly developed tools and tactics. The topics you will *need* to learn to become a successful, self-sufficient blogger are as follows:

- **SEO:** Low competition keyword research, searcher intent research, on-page optimization best practices, technical SEO (UX and site speed)
- **WordPress:** Posting, administration, keeping your site secure, making your site as fast as possible
- **WordPress Page Building (using a page builder):** Using a WordPress page builder allows for maximum customization of your website without hiring anyone and tons of templates to choose from. Gutenberg (WordPress native page builder) is the builder of choice right now, to keep your site simple and fast. For those that prefer and require heavily visual sites, Elementor, Divi, Thrive Architect, and Cornerstone is the most popular. Pick one and run with it.
- **Basic Graphic Design:** For designing web pages, Pinterest pins, images for your site, and other simple tasks, aim to understand the basics of design
- **Basic Web Development:** Understanding basic HTML and CSS syntax make it easier to style and design webpages, posts, and content regardless of your theme.

A Glimpse of Outlier Success in Blogging

In blogging, most of the names you are familiar with and that spark your interest in becoming a blogger are likely outliers within the blogging community based on their income, audience, and overall performance. Though this *may* seem discouraging, "outlier" blogs achieve their success

partly due to diligence and effort, but primarily by following best practices, which should be inspiring because you have a hefty opportunity to achieve the same. Seriously.

Average successes in blogging (usually defined as making \$4,000 to \$9,000) come predominately from affiliate marketing and ads. However, at the higher end of this range (\$9,000+ to \$25,000+), bloggers begin creating and focusing on delivering their own products. Nearly 30% of bloggers making more than \$2,000 per month sell their own product via their own content and all of the bloggers making more than \$25,000 interviewed in Brandon Gaille Media's blogger income survey delivered a course that generated most of the blog's monthly income.

For successful bloggers, making \$2,000+ per month, the following traits and skills generally apply:

- Mastering affiliate marketing (link copy, link placement, aligning product to audience fit, etc.) is extremely important
- Email marketing is a key component to stable traffic and successfully selling the products that drive higher incomes.

Outlier bloggers (defined as \$25,000+ and roughly 3% of all professional bloggers) make their income primarily from courses and share the following traits:

- Outlier blogs generally receive the same amount of traffic as those in the \$7500-\$25,000 /mo. category, however, they have learned how to better monetize their audience with products, increase the rate of readers that become email subscribers, and convert email subscribers to customers at a higher rate
- An email list, usually between 1,000 and 10,000 emails, drives course sales and product sales and outlier bloggers are experts in converting traffic to email subscribers to product/course sales
- 80% of income for blogs making more than \$25,000 per month comes from courses
- Outlier bloggers have mastered product creation and generate a large portion of their income (usually over 90%) from their own course
- Every single blogger that makes over \$25,000 a month hosts a course that brings in a minimum of \$15,000 per month
- Without a course, blogs generally have a ceiling of \$10,000 per month
- The essential skills, for growing income beyond the average income mark and beyond are converting traffic to email subscribers, and developing products for their audience

Action Items and Takeaways for This Section

- For the most probable niches that you'll target, ask yourself if the average monthly income is worth 2 years of diligent work and writing 200 pieces of well-researched, 1500-word articles.
- Ask yourself the following questions
- Can you set a weekly routine for writing and maintaining your blog, allowing for at least half a day of work (total)
- Outlier bloggers, making \$25,000+ per month, drive their incomes and break the \$10,000 per month ceiling using email marketing, growing their email lists, and mastering product creation
- Are your visions of blogging success more akin to the "outlier blogging success" (\$25,000+ per month)? If so, reconsider blogging as an option and realistically ask yourself if the average income levels by niche will work for you. If the answer is no, don't blog for now.

Assessing Yourself as a Potential Blogger: Why You Should Blog...and Why You Shouldn't

Blogging in general is sometimes romanticized, sometimes misunderstood, and usually underestimated...in terms of workload and potential payoff. Let's make sure you have a clear view of the opportunity and that the opportunity is right for you.

In This Section

- My favorite reasons to blog (for profit and otherwise)
- A quick review of the common “ups and downs” of blogging
- Assessing yourself as a potential blogger: Asking the hard questions one more time
- Tips for handling the inevitable challenges in blogging
- My experience with blogging for profit (the ups and downs)

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Have a clear view of the specific reasons and benefits of blogging that are driving you, so you'll remember them in hard times.
- Be prepared to blog for 2 years and 200 articles before achieving success
- Google algorithm updates, social media algorithm updates, burnout, site hacks, and hosting issues are the biggest issues you *will* face during blogging. Plan for them *now*.
- Your best defense against Google updates is writing good content for humans.
- Your best defense against social media business model changes is sharing in groups owned by others, instead of building your own communities in social media (specifically on Facebook)
- Site issues will happen, so keep monthly backups to always have a “clean” copy of your site.
- Before moving forward, ask yourself if you are resilient enough to continue blogging through the hard times

My Favorite Reasons to Build a Blog as A Business

- **Location Independent Income:** The ability to work (and live) anywhere
- **Scalability:** Whether you continuously write and maintain the content, or hire writers to make more money, there is *always* a way to grow easily, smartly, and quickly in blogging

- **Low startup costs:** The only true investments are hosting (~\$30 per year) and an initial SEO keyword tool subscription (~\$13 per month). Everything else can be done with no monetary investment, and lots of sweat equity, drive, and passion
 - **Possibility of running multiple blogs at once and outsourcing as you please:** Once you learn how to successfully and efficiently build and operate one blog, building another, outsourcing, and collecting semi-passive income is a very real possibility. The skillsets and knowledge within “blogging” (market research, SEO, monetization, basic website design, and construction) are very transferable between niches.
 - **Building and growing is the hardest part:** Once a site is built, the niche is defined, the audience is understood, and you have a handle on best practices unique to your site, maintenance and continuing to provide value to readers in a sustainable is a much simpler, enjoyable experience
-

Don't get me wrong. Blogging isn't all roses and cupcakes. There are downsides you should *very much* be aware of before committing to building your own site.

The Pitfalls of Blogging You Should Be Aware Of

- **Lots of time and mental energy until You Reach “Blogging Success”:** Two years of concerted effort and regular publishing (200 articles over 2 years) is a reasonable minimum amount of time and effort to expect before achieving “success” in blogging.
 - **Bloggging is susceptible to the whims of Google and algorithms:** Until you build a significant audience and a strong email list, then your site will be at the whims of Google algorithms, Facebook algorithms, and Pinterest algorithms that use said algorithms to dictate whether or not they will send traffic to your site. Whenever Google or any of the other platform's algorithms update, you may see a boost or your traffic may plummet. It is a risk, it will happen at least once, and you still have to be ready to continue working, assessing why the algorithm updated affected you and then adapting, and ultimately focusing on the long term processes and goal through the down spell.
-

Understanding The Ups and Downs of Blogging

As a blogger, you will have extraordinary times, wherein your efforts, timing, connection with your audience, luck, and search engine performance add up to some impressive wins. These times will make you feel like a true digital rockstar.

However, there will also be times when things beyond your control (or missteps that you didn't realize until it was too late) will result in plummeting performance and profits. Inevitably, as some point you will feel powerless against stopping the seemingly infinite downward spiral. Don't fret as *these times* are just as much a part of blogging as the wins.

The best thing you can do in the face of blogging's down spells now is prepare by learning what the biggest pitfalls in blogging are, becoming familiar with them, and anticipating. By doing this, when your "down" comes, you will easily stay calm, motivated, and working through it toward your next win.

The biggest downs in blogging will fall in the following areas:

1. **Google and search engine algorithm changes**
2. **Burnout**
3. **Social media/marketing channel and algorithm changes**
4. **Hacks, site issues, and hosting issues**

General Tips for Handling Inevitable Blogging Challenges

1. **Diversify: Content topics, monetization strategies, and marketing channels**

The more you diversify everything about your blogging processes, the more resistant you will be to changes occurring within the blogging, SEO, social media and digital marketing industries. No matter how well any one element of your blog is performing (marketing channels, monetization, traffic) don't become *too* attached to or reliant on that success. Additionally, constantly research and incorporate backup options. Yes, you should still focus on works in your blog and double down to drive growth, but continually cultivate backups and redundancies for traffic and monetization that work too. Different groups to share content in, different topics for keywords, different affiliate programs and brands for affiliate links. Diversify *everything*.

2. **Assess and adapt your content continuously and frequently, focusing on delivering value to your readers above all else**

If you create things people want and love, you will never have a problem with readers gravitating toward your content, regardless of algorithm changes. Even if Google decides it doesn't like a piece of your content but people do, you maintain your relationship with readers, and your readers' desires to come back to *you* and *your content*.

3. **Stay plugged in with other *successful and grounded* bloggers**

Best practices, for an efficient path to success, can be found within the blogging community. However, if you're not connected, you'll only learn from *your own* mistakes...not everyone else's. Trust me, learning from the lessons of only one person and their mistakes (you)

compared to the lessons learned and corroborated by thousands (successful bloggers) is a much slower way to learn. Instead, stay connected with other bloggers for support, great ideas, and early warnings of changes to come. Continually search for, read, and test new information on blogging, marketing, and digital business.

Google and Search Engine Algorithm Changes: Your Best Teacher and Most Misunderstood Friend

HIGHLIGHTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOOGLE UPDATES

- Google constantly updates the algorithm that drives its search engine
- Occasionally, once to twice a year, Google releases major algorithm updates commonly referred to as “Google Updates” within the blogging, digital marketing, and SEO community
- The underlying trend of the Google updates is to encourage the creation of increasingly user-friendly content delivered in a secure and fast way
- The intention of the algorithm, that decides which posts appear on page one of Google, is to pair readers (searchers) with articles that respond to the *idea* behind their search, solve their problem, and solve the follow-on problems in a way that requires no further searching. Ultimately the major Google updates aim to do that more accurately and efficiently
- The Google Updates have moved search engine optimization away from “SEO keywords” and more towards search intent and the underlying idea behind a search, related searches, and follow on searches
- The best way to preempt and hedge against Google updates is to write high-quality, engaging content that responds to the search intent of a keyword, delivered via a quick-loading, secure website. This approach results in high-quality content by letting Google become your teacher

Google constantly updates its algorithm, which determines which pages rank for which phrases searched by readers, commonly referred to as SEO “keywords” or “keyphrases.”

Occasionally, Google pushes out massive updates, such as the Penguin Update, the Panda Update, and the Hummingbird update that target the foundation of content creators that Google believes are executing practices detrimental to user experience. These major updates

create ripple effects that cascade across the internet as sites ranking for thousands of top keywords can suddenly lose the Google rankings that their enterprises were built on.

How do you mitigate the potential effects of the inevitable next major Google algorithm update?

You can safeguard your site's performance against Google updates by writing high-quality content focused on the needs of your readers and making the primary aim of your blogging the goal of delivering value to readers. If you write content that focuses on reader needs and makes it your primary goal above all else then, yes, you will at times lose traffic due to Google algorithm updates, but in the larger scheme of Google updates your organic traffic from Google will increase.

Some Google algorithm updates will prioritize other content over yours that is objectively better. If you're smart, you'll go back to your content that was outranked to understand how *theirs* is better and how *you* can improve yours. You'll leave with a valuable lesson on how to write better content and a set of principles for improving your existing content.

In other updates, you will see a boost as Google recognizes how much better your content is than the competition at addressing the problems and presenting solutions for searchers.

Ultimately, produce good content and you will always fair out well. If you focus on creating good content relative to the needs of readers and their intentions in searching, it all balances out.

What is high-quality content?

High-quality content is writing that efficiently (concisely) solves a reader's problem along with their follow-on problems in an engaging and enjoyable to read way. High-quality content is informed, authoritative, and honest and is delivered via a fast-loading and secure website.

Whenever a large Google update comes out, research the update with the hopes of learning something new, learning a new tactic to bring value to your readers, or finding a way to genuinely improve the quality of your site. Ideas like addressing searcher intent foremost, utilizing latent semantic indexing (LSI) to thoroughly address a topic, and using the E-A-T framework (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) to analyze the efforts you put into your site and your appearance as an expert beyond your site. These tactics are all valuable lessons that have been pulled from analyzing major algorithm updates. There will be plenty more updates (and lessons to extract) in the years to come.

Burnout: Your Biggest Enemy in Blogging

On the road to success in blogging, at some point, you will burn out, or come extremely close. As success in blogging is a long game (2 years on average with ~200 posts) there is a chance along the way that all of the thankless efforts will leave you drained and questioning whether you should continue.

From personal experience, my first site wasn't "successful" until I had written over 200 pieces of content with most pieces being over 3,000 words. Along the way, I drew satisfaction from small wins such as ranking in Google, increasing affiliate sales, and accolades within my "tribes". However, there were times I became so burnt out I would take month long breaks to recharge and reset my mindset. To be fair, these times were usually after content spurts (producing ~30 pieces of content in a single month) so the momentum of huge efforts carried my site performance through the burnout phases.

Most bloggers don't make it past the first year due to burnout, which is barely halfway to the finish line.

So, how do you avoid burnout?

1. Work at a consistent and diligent pace that you can maintain for two years
2. Aim to work *sustainably* ensuring every action you take has enduring, cumulative effects that stack onto the results of previous actions
3. When working on "sprints" with heavy workloads, build-in recovery time and post completion incentives and rewards for yourself to help you recharge and stay motivated
4. Have defined goals and objectives with reasonable expectations (of time to completion and payoff) and stay focused on those goals and objectives. Anytime you reach one, regardless of how small, celebrate. I keep a stack of Reese's Peanut Butter cups and wine for this very reason.
5. Join tribes of bloggers like you for support through the rough times. *Free* Facebook groups and Reddit subs are excellent sources of this kind of pure and genuinely helpful motivation. Connecting one on one with other bloggers is exceptionally motivating too and is a perfect place to pose your troubles and expect a tested, corroborated solution.
6. Be forgiving of yourself and be careful of putting *too much* pressure on yourself for results. You'll have plenty of critics, so be your own biggest fan. When you make mistakes, learn quickly and brush them off as quickly as possible. When you miss targets and goals, forgive yourself and get back to work. Understand that if you're doing the best you capable of in the current conditions (or reasonably close) that's the best you can do and that's worth a pat on the back.

Social Media / Marketing Channel Changes

Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and every other social media platform are notorious for making algorithm changes that work in *their* favor. Most of these algorithm changes are fairly sudden and generally focus on keeping users (your potential readers) on the social media platform and avoiding having them leave (to your site) without some sort of monetary benefit for the company running the platform.

The algorithm changes generally result in making social media marketing more difficult for brands and businesses trying to connect with social media users without paying for ads.

Examples of this “restricting access to your audience” can be seen in how a Facebook page’s posts are generally seen by relatively few followers (between 1% and 10% of the group following the page). Another good example of Facebook’s aim to keep users *on* Facebook is how simple text posts with images or video perform far better than Facebook posts with a click-out video or call to action that draws them off Facebook.

Other examples of the pains that creators can experience at the whims of social media algorithms include the Instagram algorithm changes that resulted in influencers with hundreds of thousands or millions of followers having their engagement (and exposure to followers) cut in half with a simple algorithm change.

As these platforms grow, become more “corporate,” and try to drive more profit for shareholders, more changes will come in favor of the platform (and its ad sales) making your audience (followers) more difficult to reach.

So, how should you handle social media algorithm changes?

As a blogger, you should handle social media algorithm changes by intentionally *not* overinvesting in social media, and instead invest the time, money, and effort in the asset you own – your site, your blog, your email list.

Instead, make your social media engagement happen in “borrowed” groups – tribes owned by others that you are part of, that you contribute to, and that you add value to regularly, ultimately building rapport within that “borrowed community.”

This approach will allow you more time to produce content that you own, instead of spending it building a community that you never will, that will be welcomed into a group in which you have efficiently built a relationship and respect, instead of building and maintaining a group or page of your own. Maintaining relationships within 10 such “borrowed social media groups” is far easier than building and maintaining a group or page of your own. Additionally, the “borrowing over owning” in social requires less investment of time and effort and makes the existing group a better place for members, thanks to your genuine contributions. Additionally, when the next algorithm change comes and the group becomes worth less (as interaction with users is more restricted) you will have lost nothing, and you will still have 100% ownership of your blog and the content you invested in creating.

Security Issues in Blogging: Hacks, Site Issues, Hosting Issues

You *may* become a victim of hacking, general site bugs, or even hosting issues someday.

I have both had a site hacked and had a hosting company completely delete my site and all backups on their servers were deleted as well.

Though there are unique methods for preserving your site (security plugins, daily checks, etc.) the best way to prepare is to routinely (monthly to weekly) store backups of your site on a hard drive *you own* and on *your computer*. By keeping these backups, and backing up weekly or monthly (depending on your publishing schedule) you will have the easiest option available for undoing damage to your site by restoring your original site.

Assessing Yourself as Potential Blogger: Is Blogging For You?

Now that you understand the basics of blogging, why it matters, and what it takes to emerge from the rough spots, you need to assess yourself.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are your goals in blogging? Based on the information above, is that goal realistic?
- Are you ready to blog for two years in your niche without any *big* payoff in the meantime?
- If any of the pitfalls in blogging, listed above, occur to you, do you feel resilient enough to bounce back and continue blogging through them?

- What is your reason for blogging and what do you hope to achieve?

The Bottom Line: Select a single niche, validate that opportunity, validate your knowledge/passion within the topic, and assess whether you're ready to put in the effort. If you are, let's get started.

Action Items for This Section

1. **Decide your niche** based on your interests, skills, the effort you are willing to put in, and the payoff you require
2. **Decide what your blog will be – publication or storefront:** In support of your goals - a publication or a storefront
3. **Do one more gut check:** Are you ready to commit to 2 years and write 200 pieces of SEO researched, optimized, and well-written content, without immediate accolades and without an immediate payoff?

The Phases of Blogging

Blogging, and the process of building a single blog, is a fairly straightforward and standard process with common growth phases and sequential steps for all blogs. By understanding the phases of growth in blogging, and the necessary steps in each for building a reliable foundation, you arm yourself with the knowledge to plan – your efforts, investments, and pace – months and years out. Additionally, understanding what will happen, in terms of traffic and monetization, will help you manage your expectations in a way that will keep you motivated and stave off burnout.

In this chapter we'll walk you through creating and growing a blog with a keen eye on what will happen, and what you need to do, within each phase of blogging.

In This Section

- Review of the phases of blogging
 - Initial Phase: Beginning and startup
 - Growth Phase
 - Steady State (Mature Blogs)

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- **Beginner Phase of a Blog:** Build the blog with all essential pages (home, about, contact, essential pillar posts), rite your first 25 posts, focus on writing and refining blogging processes instead of monetization and link building
- **Growth Phase of a Blog:** Likely after 6 months old, begin content refreshes and deep analysis of analytics, start email marketing, begin link building, assess blog performance and post level performance quarterly at minimum
- **Steady State Blogging:** 1 to 2 years old with 50,000+ sessions per month, fully monetized and growing monetization strategically, delivering one owned product, aiming to create a full “content catalog” of their niche, building more marketing channels that cultivate a community (email marketing, groups on social media platforms with low algorithm dependence).

Initial Phase of Blogging (Beginner): Write and Publish the First 25 Pieces of Content

After your site and blog have been built, goals and objectives have been decided, and a plan has been developed for what content you will write initially and when, it's time to start "blogging", writing your content according to your content plan and marketing it accordingly

- a. Write and publish your first 25 pieces of content from your content plan informed by good SEO keyword research, monetized according to monetization strategy. Follow the blog post checklist included in this book for every post
- b. Follow up each of the initial 25 by marketing the post (sharing) in the two most successful marketing channels for your content

A NOTE ON MONETIZATION DURING THE INITIAL PHASES of BLOGGING

As you write and publish your first 25, the content should be written with your chosen monetization strategy in mind. In the beginning, your monetization strategy of choice will likely be affiliate marketing, but as your audience grows and your content and knowledge deepen, your monetization strategy should change accordingly.

1. The Primary Approaches to Monetization and the ones you should aim for
 - a. Affiliate marketing (include affiliate links on day 1)
 - b. Programmatic Ads (at 10,000 monthly sessions, begin with Ezoic)
 - c. Sponsored Content (Only if needed to generate income for reinvesting in the blog)
2. Secondary monetization approaches that should be incorporated as your blog grows
 - a. Your own products (self-published books, lightroom presets, video series)
 - b. Courses
 - c. Virtual Conferences

The Growth Phase of a Blog (Intermediate): Growing Sustainable Traffic By Creating Content, Pivoting, and Using Analytics Data

As your blog ages, and along the way Google recognizes authority for certain areas and your "tribes" appreciate your content, you will need to 1) Continue writing according to your content plan while incorporating new insights on how best to serve your audience and 2) begin

updating your older content for to maintain/improve performance of your blog and the preferences of Google/your audience

1. (After 6 Months) Refresh Content for SEO and user experience
2. (After 6 Months) Consider Guest Posting to improve site authority
3. Incorporate email marketing to strengthen relationships with readers by incorporating lead magnets and email subscription opt-ins into to site and following up with an email series
4. Consider sustainable link building to increase authority and network: Guest posting, HARO, statistics posts, and in-depth infographics
5. Routine Tasks
 - Weekly: Analyze the performance of top 20 posts in Google Analytics and refresh accordingly
 - Monthly: Analyze content for “low hanging fruit” opportunities for posts with low Google CTR (less than 3% CTR in Google search) or improvement opportunities in Google (average SERP position of 10 to 20)
 - Quarterly or at end of content plan: Perform in-depth SEO keyword research to add new SEO keywords to content plan, reprioritize content in the content plan, and expand in your blog’s authority areas (based on analytics), analyze site structure and flow for readers, analyze internal linking, analyze opportunities for monetization optimization

Steady State / Maturity Phase of Blog (Advanced): Reinforce Relationship with Reader and Identify More Needs To Fill

As your blog and site mature in the eyes of Google and your audience, gaining rapport and authority, you will need to assess how you can better monetize your content, structure your content and fill gaps, build authority, and adjust plans for growth based on your recognized authority and identified strengths.

A mature blog is likely 1 to 2 years old, has 50,000 readers per month, and is firmly monetized via affiliate marketing and a premium ad network.

At the beginning of the “mature phase” of a blog, bloggers should consider and incorporate all of the following into their plans:

1. Consider products that can be created and sold
2. Analyze your monetization performance and assess how to adapt it to your authority and audience, focusing on specific affiliate networks and affiliate products based on analytics
3. Optimize your blog's user experience (formatting, structure, internal linking, etc.) to improve engagement and increase ad revenue, SEO rankings
4. Perform deep analysis of your site's content and performance to see what is working, what is not, and adapt monetization and content strategies accordingly. Look at top posts, worst posts, user flow (through content), posts with the highest and lowest SERP CTR
5. Aim to create a "target content catalog" of evergreen content that is updated as a "one-stop-shop" for your niche an enduring resource that consistently performs with Google and your audience
6. Continue updating your content plan (and writing accordingly) to deliver useful, valuable, and shareable content

Action Items for This Section

- Internalize "the process" and understand that you will have to trust this process, and routine completion of the listed tasks, for success in the long term.
- Understand that this "process" will evolve as your blog grows, you discover what tactics work best for you, and as the world of blogging evolves. By performing the routine review and analysis tasks, you'll see changes coming (usually) and will be able to adapt, avoiding major losses

The Milestones to Aim for In Blogging

Roadmaps and milestones are the perfect way to stay on track, manage your expectations, and ensure you're shooting for the right objectives on any project. Understanding the miles specific to blogging will give you goals to shoot for and a short checklist of tasks to ensure are completed at each step.

In this section, we'll review the milestones you should aim for in blogging, the payoff that you'll likely net reaching each milestone, and the tasks you should complete at each milestone before focusing on the next.

In This Section

- The major milestones in blogging and what you should strive to achieve at each

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

The Milestones in Blogging:

- **2,500 monthly sessions:** Understanding blogging and affiliate marketing
- **5,000 monthly sessions:** Understanding building sustainable traffic (SEO + one marketing channel), optimizing UX (speed, design, and flow)
- **10,000 monthly sessions:** Eligibility for worthwhile programmatic Ads (Ezoic), introducing email marketing, focusing heavily on affiliate marketing starting an email marketing campaign, earning your first commissions
- **25,000 monthly sessions:** Defined niche, reputation, and authority (with audience and Google)
- **50,000 monthly sessions:** A viable audience for delivering own products, email marketing, eligibility for Premium Ad Networks (Mediavine)
- **100,000 monthly sessions:** Mature, robust content catalog, the audience to support the income of any channel

Traffic Oriented Milestones

The milestones in this section are all related to the amount of traffic your blog receives, measured in the number of monthly sessions. This metric only applies to *organic traffic* – search, social, and referrals – not paid traffic.

2,500 Monthly Sessions

At 2,500 monthly sessions, your blog is likely still fairly new and you are also likely still establishing the blog – building essential pages for your site (home, about, contact, micro-blog pages, etc.), refining designs, and refining your niche/sub-niche selection based on continuous feedback from your readers.

By the time you reach 2,500 monthly sessions, you should have the following

- High-Level Understanding of Blogging
- Understand the basics of SEO (SEO keyword research, search intent, on-page optimization, competitor benchmarking for outlines, and LSI keywords)
- Researched your first 25 low competition SEO keywords

Additionally, you should be doing the following:

- Currently creating content based on a content strategy and content plan rooted in low competition SEO keywords
- Incorporating affiliate marketing links in all posts (embedded as in-text links and hyperlinked images)
- Your site should have the following pages established at a minimum
 1. Homepage
 2. About Page
 3. Contact Us

Payoff: If you have made even a single dollar on the path to reaching this traffic level, rejoice! If not, hang in there, your focus at this point is growth and refinement of your blog, not profit

5,000 Monthly Sessions

At 5,000 monthly sessions, you should have a clear view of the value your blog delivers and who it serves

Checklist for 5,000 sessions

- Continue embedding relevant affiliate marketing links in your posts to monetize
- Understanding of the basics for building sustainable traffic (SEO + one marketing channel reliable for you)
- Identified two “tribes” or platforms that welcome sharing your content (e.g., Reddit subs, Quora, Forums, very active Facebook Groups)
- Reassess site to optimize for user experience (speed, design, reader flow through site structure, formatting)
- Begin structuring content into “silos” based on sub-niches, connected by “content hubs” or pillar posts
- Ensure your 2-4 most relevant and popular sub-niches are displayed in your menu (header and footer) for easy navigation
- Design your “target content catalog” on paper, listing out all of the content you will need to create a one-stop resource for your readers and your niche, and adjust your content plan going forward for that
- Analyze your affiliate marketing efforts brand by brand, product by product, and link by link to see what has worked (brands, products, platforms, link presentation) and what hasn’t. Optimize old posts and apply the lessons going forward

Payoff: A site that is well optimized for affiliate marketing *should* make ~\$250 as a low estimate, and potentially much higher at this traffic level depending on your niche

10,000 Monthly Sessions

At 10,000 monthly sessions, your blog should be out of the “Google sandbox” (which is more time based than traffic based) and receiving search traffic accordingly. Additionally, your site will have the minimum traffic to begin joining premium ad networks.

Checklist for 10,000 Sessions Per month:

- Apply to and integrate the Ezoic ad system into your site
- Analyze your SEO performance in Google Analytics and use the knowledge to refresh content and adjust your content plan/blogging process accordingly
- Identify the “authority areas” Google is recognizing your site for, and continue writing for more keywords building on the root keywords you have authority on and on closely related topics
- Look for “low-hanging fruit” opportunities to optimize your content – low CTR in SERP and average SERP position of 10-20

- Leverage your search engine performance analysis to research your next 100 low competition SEO keywords and rewrite your content plan accordingly
- Ensure you are capturing emails on your site, complete with a lead magnet and email opt-ins throughout the site
- Bonus: Create an email series, such as a boot camp, a “best of” content series, or similar to build rapport with customers
- Begin brainstorming your first 3 products based on popular content with your readers. Additionally, brainstorm how you can overlap your own product creation efforts with your content efforts, perhaps writing posts that will later in aggregate, become your book
- Analyze your site speed using Google Page Speed Insights and optimize plugins and images to achieve a minimum 50 on the Mobile Page Speed and Desktop Page Speed, but optimally aim for 75 in both.

Payoff: At 10,000 sessions per month, your payoff should be a minimum of ~\$600 (\$500 from affiliate marketing, \$100 from programmatic ads)

25,000 Monthly Sessions

At 25,000 sessions per month, your site has significant traffic and is eligible for a higher-paying ad network (Mediavine).

- Continue analyzing SEO performance to update old content, and continue writing in authority areas
- Update old content once per quarter
- Refresh content with low search CTR (less than 3%) or average search position of 10 to 20 in small clusters monthly or sitewide every 6 months
- Continue reassessing SEO analytics to determine your authority areas within Google and expand on areas that are performing well or new authority areas that you discover
- Review your list of content for your “target content catalog” and incorporate this into your newest SEO keyword research and content plan
- Ensure you have established email captures throughout your site (optimized email opt-ins and lead magnets) and an active, automated email series
- Begin creating at least 1 information product
- Continue testing and optimizing affiliate marketing techniques (links, copy, brands, products, and placement within articles)
- Consider contacting brands that you are affiliated with to write Guest Posts (only if the brands website has a Moz defined Domain Authority of 50+)
- Signup for HARO to serve as a source for reporters and build genuine, valuable backlinks to your site

Payoff: At 25,000 monthly sessions your blog should be receiving ~\$1,250 per month minimum, due to affiliate marketing and premium programmatic ads

50,000 Monthly Sessions

The 50,000 monthly sessions mark is a milestone for celebration, but the major reminder is to stay the course and begin redirecting effort to creating more opportunities for monetizing your blog and serving your readers.

Checklist for 50,000 monthly sessions:

- Apply to the Mediavine publisher network
- Completely refined email marketing with optimized opt-ins, separate lead magnets for each sub-niche on your site, and individual lead magnets for your top 5 to top 10 posts.
- Develop 3 of your own information products
- Continue content creation and content refresh efforts in line with your target content catalog and using low competition keywords

Payoff: At 50,000 sessions per month, the payoff should be a minimum of \$2,500 per month, but more likely in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range *if* you are selling your own products.

100,000 Monthly Sessions

At 100,000 monthly sessions, your site becomes eligible for the highest paying ad network in the industry – AdThrive - as long as your audience is primarily US-based. Additionally, as your audience growth will continue naturally and likely plateau near 500,000 monthly sessions, you should begin putting effort into higher dollar information products and course development

- Apply to the AdThrive ad network
- Continue regularly refreshing content for freshness and SEO
- Focus on developing *your own* products to sell via your site
- Aim to create a course

Payoff: At 100,000 monthly sessions, the payoff is heavily niche variant and dependent on how well you have developed your own products and courses for sale. \$9,000 per month for an average professional blogger at this level is not uncommon.

Monetization Milestones

1. **First \$1**
2. **Embedding affiliate links in first posts**
3. **Joining Ezoic**
4. **Joining Mediavine**
5. **Creating and selling your first product**
6. **Joining AdThrive**
7. **Developing a Course or Creating a Virtual Conference**

Action Items for This Section

- **If you are just starting blogging:** Make a plan to return back to this milestone sheet and update your long term “to-do” list with the tasks following each milestone and assess the tasks preceding your most recent milestone to ensure you’re focused on the right actions.
- **If you’ve been blogging for a bit:** Review the tasks for the milestones up until your most recently achieved milestone. Do a deep dive into milestone tasks and opportunities you’ve skipped. For the tasks under your most recent milestone, ensure you’re focusing on the mentioned tasks and taking advantage of the mentioned opportunities. For your next milestone, review the tasks and opportunities mentioned and begin researching them now, so you’ll sufficiently equipped (with knowledge) to tackle your next set of opportunities when they arrive.

Chapter 6 The Process of Blogging: Part 2 - Blog Startup Steps

The **Blog Startup Phase** consists of all tasks necessary to build your platform (your site, blog, and essential pages), define your niche and the direction you will go with your content, as well as define the objectives and goals you aim to achieve by writing your content.

Investing sufficient energy at the beginning of the process to understand your options and decide on a clear direction for your blog will ensure quicker success with less wasted effort.

The Essential Steps in Blog Startup and Topics Covered in this Section:

1. **Niche Selection:** An overview of the major niches in blogging, competition within each, monetization potential, and tips for selecting the niche for you, your interests, your skills, and your needs
2. **Creating Your Blog's Brand and Defining Its Purpose:** Steps for defining your brand, how your blog will serve your readers, and the consistent visual elements of your blog's brand
3. **Building your Blog with WordPress:** A step by step tutorial for creating a low cost, well designed, self-hosted blog (WordPress installation, theme selection and installation, building essential pages such as Home, About, and Contact pages)
4. **Starter SEO:** An introduction to the fundamentals of search engine optimization and planning your content to draw traffic from Google, the best source of long-term traffic for blogs
5. **Technical SEO for Beginners:** A step by step process for making your website fast and secure from day 1
6. **SEO Keyword Research:** Introduction to selecting low competition keywords and topics to write content on for your blog and researching the searcher intent behind these keywords
7. **SEO Writing and On-Page SEO:** An introduction to how to use low competition SEO keywords to research, outline, and write content that quickly and consistently ranks on page 1 of Google SERP
8. **Understanding Your Audience:** An introduction to researching your audience – who they are, where they live on the internet, what they need and problems you can solve, and how to connect with them, and how to use this information to continually draw readers, make money and improve your blog
9. **Writing Great, Engaging Content:** Tips and actionable steps for engaging, informative, and efficient writing that is designed for people and still performs well in Google
10. **Blog Monetization Strategy:** An introduction and actionable steps for planning how your blog will make money based on niche, target audience, and traffic volume
11. **Understanding your competition (Advanced Blogging Technique):** An introduction to researching your competitor blogs – who they are, what makes them successful, lessons you can learn from their site and content, and how to use this information to earn more backlinks, build more authority, identify high performing keywords (low competition high traffic), and identifying new best practices for marketing, monetization, and growth

Choosing Your Blogging Niche

Choosing and focusing on a niche in blogging is an essential first step and serves many valuable purposes, for you and your readers.

For your readers, understanding your niche communicates *exactly* what your blog is about and what they can expect you to deliver as they visit and read your articles.

For you, good niche selection sets you up for success by choosing a low competition, high paying niche, or helps you manage expectations by understanding the higher competition and lower payoff upfront for some niches if you're blogging for passion.

The most valuable element of choosing a niche is that defining your blogging topic and subtopics upfront keeps your content planning and writing focused on specific topics that will perform better in SEO, will respond better to the needs of your user base, and will contribute to a cohesive library of content.

In this section, we will help you understand the importance of niches and guide you through the selection of your niche.

In This Section

- Compare niches to identify which is best for you
- Define your site's niche by asking the right questions about your experience and expertise
- Validate the viability of your niche and sub-niche (audience, profitability, low competition) with a little research

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Well defined niches keep our content focused and help readers identify as our readers and predictably expect content we'll deliver.
- Specific niches (Finance, Food) have lower competition and higher profitability, setting us up for success from the start. Pick the right niche for your expectations, desired payoff, and the amount of effort you can reasonably invest.
- Niches guide us in creating somewhat predictable content within a topic that our audience (and search engines) can come to rely on
- Niche (and sub-niche) selection helps us focus on the needs of a small, specific (but economically viable) portion of the population, thoroughly addressing their needs. This approach builds rapport and a deep-seated relationship with a loyal following and is the most efficient path to success in blogging.

Why Do You Need a Well-Defined Niche in Blogging?

Writing within a well-defined niche and sub-niches helps audiences pre-identify themselves as your target readers, expect great things from your blog, and stick around through the “get to know you” phase.

For your reader, having a clearly defined niche and sub-niches for your blog helps them understand what to expect from your blog. Even further, well-defined sub-niches help readers pre-identify themselves as part of your audiences and tribe and start the rapport-building process, between you and them.

Just as understanding a blog is about travel may help us, understanding that the blog is more clearly about Vietnam, or solo female travel or surf travel helps readers connect with you and your content right from the jump because they *know* what to expect, what problems you aim to solve, and whether you will solve *their* problems.

Payoff and competition vary by niche, so choose accordingly while considering your tolerances and expectations

As we introduced in the chapter “How Blogs Make Money”, some niches are predisposed to higher earnings while others are tethered by higher competitiveness levels. Blogs in the food and person finance niches pay the most by far, averaging ~\$9,000 per month. This higher payout is due to the nature of the content, ad networks that cater to these niches, and commonly associated products for these niches. On the other hand, the travel blogging niche, one close to my own heart, unfortunately, pays far lower (~\$5,000 per month) and is *the* most competitive niche in blogging.

You can increase your probability of success and reduce your timeline to success from the start by choosing the right niche – or – you can manage your expectations by understanding the journey to “success” will require more passion, time, and effort than other niches.

Writing in well-defined niches keeps our content focused on the reader’s needs within our topic of expertise

Choosing a well-defined niche and sub-niches also serves to keep us on track with our content, staying on topics relevant to that niche and to the problems & interests of our readers and tribe as a whole.

Though we might love to write about every topic in the world at our whim, readers are most concerned with having their initial questions answered, and then follow-on questions answered relating to that same topic, ideally from the same reliable source they've built a relationship with. Those follow-on questions will undoubtedly be within the same sub-niche. By keeping our writing narrow and focused, we are more likely to answer the reader's initial question and the next question, ultimately fulfilling their needs as much as possible. After their questions have been answered, readers will keep your site in mind as a great resource for tangential questions on that same topic.

The Niches in Blogging, Choosing Your Niche, and Validating the Opportunity in Your Chosen Niche

The niche we select has a significant effect on how easily success will come, thanks to predictable levels of **competition** with other bloggers in the niche, the average **profitability** for bloggers in the niche, and the **common hurdles** new bloggers in the niche tend to encounter.

Now that we're familiar with *why* good niche selection matters, for building an audience and setting ourselves up for success from the start, let's take a moment to understand what a niche is, the major niches in blogging, and how these niches compare to each other.

What Is a Niche in Blogging? Why Is It Important?

A niche is an interest area or topic that appeals to a portion of the population. Examples of niches within the blogging space include travel, parenting, automotive, sports, and personal finance.

In addition to niches, **sub-niches are also valuable** as they help us hone in our writing and content to address very specific, unaddressed topics and associated problems and questions that are important to our readers. By using our chosen sub-niche as a guide for topics in writing

content that our readers *need* and can't get anywhere else, we solidify our brand, solidify the relationship with our readers, and set our blogs up for organic audience growth.

Whereas travel may be a niche, solo travel for women, single parents traveling with children, surf travel, and budget travel for college students are all very viable niches that can hone in on the needs of small segments of the population that are currently unmet in media and the blogosphere.

In the beginning, and throughout your blogging career, honing your sub-niche will be *very* important as it will help you stand out from the crowd, rank easier in Google, and more easily connect with your readers.

An Overview of The Major Blogging Niches

Though the number of niches you can choose is near infinite, over 80% of blogs fall into the following categories:

- Personal Finance
- Food
- Travel
- Marketing
- Lifestyle

If you are considering a niche outside of these 5 niches, don't be discouraged. If it passes the validation process (proving there is an opportunity, audience, and profit potential) then you've found a hidden gem, so you should still continue.

For the rest of us, still considering blogging on major topics, it is worthwhile to examine these 5 niches for profitability, competitiveness, and the unique trends of each to decide whether they're indeed suitable for us, our profit expectations, and the level of competition (and work) we're ready to handle.

Let's go through each niche, one by one

1. Personal Finance: Low competition, high payoff

The personal finance blogging niche is one of the easiest to get into with the highest payoff if you have the knowledge to write the content. The personal finance blogging space is much less cluttered than its counterparts, content length tends to be shorter by nature, and writing content tends to be formulaic (i.e., responding to a question, delivering a how-to article, delivering a list of options) making it easier to get started.

Popular topics include budgeting, saving, credit cards, banking account selection, personal financial planning, investing, taxes, minimalism, and more.

Viable monetization paths include ads but affiliate marketing (of financial products, information products, and services) is more efficient with smaller audiences and dominates monetization in this niche.

The average professional blogger within the personal finance niche earns approximately \$9,000 per month.

2. Food: Low competition, high payoff

The food blogging niche is an extremely wide niche with lots of payoff and potential. Though the food blogging niche may seem cluttered, it benefits from the fact everyone on the planet needs to eat and there are so many different approaches to how to make that happen(cuisines). This wide appeal and underrepresentation of cuisine/niche-specific blogs relative to the number of types of cuisine (e.g., Japanese, Italian, Mexican, Middle Eastern, vegan, etc.) leave plenty of opportunity for newcomers with the right sub-niche selection.

Most professional food bloggers monetize via AdThrive which pays such high rates to its publishers that bloggers can create a sustainable business through ads alone – but admission to the AdThrive ad network does require a minimum of 100,000 monthly sessions to a website.

Additionally, food bloggers can monetize via affiliate marketing by recommending products (e.g., cookware, ingredients), courses (masterclasses and cuisine-specific courses), and services (e.g., subscription box delivery services).

The average professional food blogger earns roughly \$9100 per month.

3. Travel: High competition, low payoff

The travel niche is arguably the most competitive niche in blogging and closest to the lowest-paying blogging niche. Due to the high number of travel bloggers, and the plethora of evergreen content, breaking into the niche can be difficult and generally takes two years minimum of concerted effort – though good sub-niche selection or significant existing social media assets (followers) can cut this timeline down.

From my experience in the travel blogging niche and a long time observing, few blogs that are “purely travel” succeed, and the ones that survive and see significant success combine with other niches. For instance, my blog combines travel with digital nomadism (arguably career and personal finance) and exercise (health, fitness, and lifestyle niches). Alternatively, a colleague’s blog took off when they began writing not only about travel, but career breaks and adding career advice as well as travel advice related to work and education. Last, a popular travel blogger and Instagrammer saw success when she transitioned from pure travel, to writing about professional travel opportunities related to education and work exchanges.

A lesson to learn is that pure travel, in the Nomadic Matt, Rick Steve’s, and Trip Advisor sense, is possible, but combining travel with a niche that has a faster trajectory to success will breed just that – quicker success, and eventually, the freedom to write about pure travel financed by “hybrid-niche” content.

For many travel blogs, monetization is a combination of advertising income and affiliate marketing, split roughly in half. Mediavine is the most common ad network for professional travel bloggers and (generally) pays the highest rates (though some travel bloggers see better success with Ad Thrive).

Affiliate marketing opportunities tend to be heavily dependent on the sub-niche of the travel blog (e.g., luxury travel, budget travel, travel preparation), most focusing on accommodation recommendations, tours, and products for packing lists.

The average professional travel blogger earns roughly \$5000 per month.

If you have a dream of starting a successful travel blog, I highly recommend reconsidering it as more of a hobby as this will be a long road that takes a lot of effort, and in tandem building a blog within a lower competition, higher profitability niche. However, if you’re already on the road and you have enough drive and passion, go for it.

4. Marketing – Moderate competition, low payoff

The marketing niche of blogging encompasses everything from small business marketing, to SEO, to social media marketing, to even blogging about blogging. Though the niche is less

competitive than travel to break into, the payoff is much lower as the market is cluttered and, if you are in the US, Europe, or Australia, you will still be competing against lower-cost players in India, the Philippines, and other strong outsourcing hubs.

Marketing blogs monetize heavily with affiliate marketing for partner courses and tools, which allows marketing blogs to monetize much smaller amounts of traffic.

The average professional marketing blog earns \$4000 per month

5. Lifestyle: Competition and payoff vary heavily based on sub-niche and monetization strategy

The lifestyle blogging niche captures a remaining smattering of sub-niches that vary just as widely in the topic as they do in monetization paths and competitiveness.

Examples of lifestyle blogs include mommy blogs and parenting blogs, fashion, automotive blogs, sports blogs, men's fashion and fitness blogs, and more.

Profitability for most lifestyle blogs falls within the range of the other niches (~\$4000 to \$9000 per month) and very few sub-niches tend to be more competitive than travel.

Lifestyle blogs tend to be well monetized by all methods – ads, affiliate marketing (products and services), lead generation, owned products and owned courses.

Lifestyle Blog Subniches

- Parenting
- Self-Improvement
- Fashion
- DIY

(Note: Income and blog distribution data sourced from the TBM blog composition and Income Study)

Overview of Average Income and Competition by Niche

1. **Personal Finance:** \$9,100 /mo. | Difficulty: 13
2. **Food:** \$9,100 / mo. | Difficulty: 38
3. **Travel:** \$5,000 / mo. | Difficulty: 78
4. **Marketing:** \$4,200 | Difficulty: 68
5. **Lifestyle:** \$5,200 | Difficulty: 69

Note: Lower difficulty number correlates to less competition and easiest entry

Selecting Your Niche

When picking niches, your goal should be to pick a niche that you can stay interested enough in to write for at least two years without *significant* compensation and that is profitable and viable in the long run as well – but, sets you up for success as quickly as possible.

To identify your niche, we'll take the approach of first brainstorming your possible niches, then validating them for opportunity and profitability.

The Niche Brainstorming Phase

In the first phase, brainstorm possible niches for you by sitting down and writing down every topic that interests you and that you are fairly knowledgeable on.

After you've listed your interests, read on to review our list of sub-niche ideas to see if there are any additional sub-niches/interests that you can add.

Additionally, ask the following questions to spark some ideas:

Identifying what you love, know, and are equipped to write about

- What do you love?
- What are you passionate about?
- What topics do you already know in-depth?
- What you would like to know in-depth?

- What would people follow you for?

Identify what information do you love to share so much that you could/would create and share it for free

- What topic could you speak on for hours (that people would find interesting)?
- What topic could you write, talk on a podcast about, or make videos on?

Identify the topics people would and do trust you for information on

- What would/do people follow you for and recommend you for?
- What are you good at and knowledgeable of that people seek your advice for?
- What do people ask you for help on?
- What are your interests and expertise? Professional and Personal...
- Follow-Up Question: Is there a problem you could solve by writing content?

Now, take your answers, notes, and sparked ideas from the questions above and list all of the potential niches that suit you based on skills, expertise, interests, knowledge, and reputation.

Prioritize them from the niche you would *most* like to write on then proceed down to the niche you would *least* like to write in.

In the next section, take this highest prioritized niche and we will walk through identifying your target sub-niches before validating your niche has a sufficient opportunity that is right for you.

Deciding Your Sub-Niches

Let's identify three to five potential sub-niches to validate.

Sub-niches will allow you to easily narrow your content into very specific silos that make your content (and the value you deliver) even more predictable for readers, letting them know exactly what they can come to you for. Additionally, writing on these sub-topics will keep your content organized and make flow through your content easier.

To brainstorm sub-niches, simply think of sub-topics within your primary niche that people *need* content for. Also, feel free to return to our list of sub-niches above.

If you need help brainstorming, I recommend doing a little "market research" to see what questions readers are asking. To do this, head to any forum, Q&A site (like Quora), or social

media platform that is heavily conversation-based (Reddit, Facebook). Then search for your niche (e.g., fitness, parenting, travel). Then, read through posts and comments to identify the unique questions people are asking and note the general sub-topics that the question falls into within your niche.

For example, my site ABrotherAbroad.com is all about travel, but within travel we cover the sub-niches of fitness while traveling, traveling for adventure sports, clothes, shoes, and gear recommendations for travel, and so on. Narrowing our content into these sub-niches has guided us in better responding to the biggest problems for our readers.

Now, for your chosen niche(s), list 3 to 5 sub-niches you can write about, that readers are already asking for content on – based on your market research using social media

- Note: If you come up with more than 3 to 5 sub-niches, fantastic! Choose the top 3 to 5 that show the most potential and you're most interested in. Save the remainder of sub-topics as starters/brainstormed notes for SEO keyword research

Second, write down what the content “end goal” would look like within the chosen sub-niches? What would a full catalog of content on that sub-niche / sub-topic look like? What general topics would you need to cover exhaustively?

- Do this by listing potential topics, and titles would be even better, for specific posts or articles you could write. The act of writing this list will get you familiar with how easy/painful the content creation process, and finding ideas for new content, will be in that niche.
- This list of topics is optional to create now but will serve you well during your SEO keyword research phase. Be sure to record any topics mentioned in questions you found during your niche/sub-niche market research

Sub-Niche Ideas

The major niches (listed above) are a solid place to start, but aiming for more defined sub-niches will help you better communicate your value and what topics you write on while catering to a narrower, connected audience.

There is nothing wrong with writing about multiple sub-niches within your primary niche and I recommend 3 to 5 sub-niches to start. From there, you'll naturally adapt your content (and sub-niches) based on feedback from your audience and how the content performs.

The list of sub-niches to follow is a great starting point for brainstorming and choosing your sub-niches.

An Extended List of Potential Niches and Sub Niches

FOOD

Healthy diets (ex., keto)
Desserts
Cocktails
Bread making
Baking
Coffee
Tea
Cheesemaking
Dutch Oven Cooking
Instantpot
Copycat recipes
Air fryer recipes
Barbecuing
Smoking meat
Wine
Alcohol making
Country cuisine
Regional cuisine
Vegetarian
Vegan
Health restricted
Paleo
Fitness
Wine
Brewing
Meal planning
Food Travel

NEWS & ENTERTAINMENT

Lucid dreaming
News
Movies
About celebrities

SPORTS

Bicycles
Dirt bikes
Extreme sports (base jumping, mountain biking, etc.)
Boxing
Baseball
Golf
Swimming
Jogging/running
Tennis/table tennis
Paintball
Combat sports
Kayaks
Jiu-jitsu
Judo
Juggling
Karate
Pool
Archery
Crossfit
3D archery & Archery
Acrobatics (Cheerleading, Parkour, etc.)

LIFESTYLE

Gifts ideas
Self-Improvement
Parenting
Men's issues
Women's issues
Relationship Health
Mental Health
Fashion

Powersports

Specific sports
Fitness (methodology or demographic-specific)
Hobby specific
Entertainment (TV, Movies, Netflix, Live Events)
Sustainability and green blogs

ART & HOBBIES

Painting (in general, and each medium separately, ex. watercolor painting)
Pottery
Comedy writing
DIY Home Repair
Singing
A cappella singing
Ukulele
Guitar
Piano
Music collections
Folk music and musical Instruments
Sewing
Fishing
Hunting
Gardening
Cosplay
Games
Farming
Dancing
Interior design
Photography

Videography
Books
Amateur radio
Storm chasing
Acting
Antique collecting
Anime

PETS

Products for dogs
Guinea pigs
Dog health
Dog food
Dog training
Fish care
Pitbull lovers (special blogs about a race)
Cats
Hamsters
Rodents in general
Birds as Pets
Breeding Dogs

TRAVEL

Regional travel (Region, Country, City)
Female Travel
Solo Travel
Family Travel
Single Parent Travel
Sport/Adventure Specific Travel
Traveling
Female traveling / Solo
Travel insurance
Expats in each country
About specific country

PARENTING

Parenting
Maternity
Working mom
Products for kids

Adoption
Baby Safety
Babysitting
Childproofing a home
Child Care
Child Development

BEAUTY

Hairstylist
Beauty products review
Jewelry
Acrylic nails
Apparel
Airbrush makeup

FINANCE

Personal finance
Crypto
Banking (Credit Cards and Accounts)
Budgeting
Debt reduction
Minimalism
Personal Financial Planning
Investing
Insurance
FIRE Methodology (Financial Independence and Retiring Early)

MILITARY

Military
Veteran programs
Military retirement

BUSINESS

Productivity
Office supplies
Employment
Legal aspects for a specific group of interests
Accounting for Small Businesses

Airbnb property investing for YouTube

CAREERS

Acting (Career)
Arborist (Career)
Becoming a real estate agent
CNA
Electricians (Career)
Vocational training
College, University, and Getting into College
Studying and learning
Self-Employment / Side Hustling

HEALTH

General health questions
Specific disease / condition
Losing weight
Supplements
Oral care
Yoga
Relationship: Dating (tips, cultural customs, etc.)
65 and up Health
ADD/ADHD (helping kids with ADD)
Addiction
Anxiety
Autism
Chiropractic

TECHNOLOGY

Android pro tips
Android app development, App development in general
Windows tips
iPhone tips
Reviews for specific products:

Vacuum cleaner
 Water boilers
 Sewing machines
 Best steamers etc.
 Drones
 Electronics
 Headphones
 3D Printing
 Audio engineering

HOME

Home security
 Smart home
 Cleaning (car, home, etc.)
 Fireplace
 Kitchen tools
 soundproofing
 Audio for home theater
 paint sprayer and painting
 accessories
 Air cooling, heating, and
 purifying
 Building in difficult areas,
 rice paddies
 Building a pool
 Building your own home
 Repair guides
 Solar energy
 Alternative housing
 options
 Apartment decorating
 Apartment Living
 Backyard projects

MARKETING

Marketing
 Blogging
 Marketing for a specific
 niche
 SEO
 Advertising
 Youtube, Youtube
 Creators, Youtubers
 SEO

Social Media
 Web Development
 (platform-specific)
 Email marketing
 Small Business marketing
 Content Marketing
 Blogging
 Conversion Optimization
 for youtube

OTHER

General knowledge
 Tobacco
 Survival/prepper guides
 Pest control
 Optics

 401ks
 4H
 Animation
 Aquariums
 Aqua scaping
 Attorney & Legal
 ATVs
 Auctions
 Audiobook creation
 Audio for large events
 Audio post-production
 Audiobook recording
 Audiophiles
 Authors
 Avalanche safety
 Bankruptcy
 Basements
 Bass fishing
 Beauty pageants
 Beekeeping
 Bicycle maintenance
 Bird hunting
 Bitcoin investing
 Blacksmithing
 BMX
 Board games
 Boat buying

Boat making
 Boat Safety
 Boating
 Bow making
 Bowling
 Boxing
 Brass instruments
 Brazilian Capoeira
 Business Marketing
 Business Startup
 Calligraphy
 Campaigning
 Cancun Travel Tips
 Candid photography
 Candle making
 Canoe making
 Canyoneering
 Car audio
 Car Buying
 Carnivorous plant growing
 Carpet
 Carving
 Catfish fishing
 Caving
 Cheerleading
 Chess
 Sports Coaching
 Coin Collecting
 Comedy (Marketing and
 How to)
 Computer basics
 Computer programing for
 kids
 Computer Programming
 Computer repair
 Copyright
 Costume making
 Coyote hunting
 Crabbing (Catching crabs,
 crayfish, and lobster)
 Craft ideas
 Home office
 Creative writing

Crocheting and cross-stitch	Fly tying	Muay Thai
Cross-country skiing	Sportscard collecting	Reviews
Crossbows	Food Storage	Night Photography
Crowdfunding	For sale by owner tips	Ninja warrior courses
Curling	Forex trading	Ping pong
Cutting hair at home	Fossil Hunting	Pizza making
Darts	French horn playing	Ponds (In a yard or garden)
Deaf Community	Freshwater fishing	Pool or Billiards
Disc Golf	Gardening	Poultry raising
DIY home repair	Garden Pest Control	Public speaking
DIY home security	GMAT	Quilting
DIY legal contract writing	Grant writing	Rappelling
DJing	GRE	Rare book collecting
Drag racing	Green living	Salmon fishing
Driving a car	Hawaiian cooking	Scrapbooking
Drone photography	High-intensity interval training	SCUBA diving
Drone photography for real estate	High-power rocketry	Senior Portrait Photography
Drone racing	Home music studio	Shotgun shooting
Drones	Home setup for elderly	Singing for kids
DUI (how to fight it yourself)	Home theater	Sketching
eBooks	Horsemanship	Sleeping tips
Electric bicycles	Horses	Small engine repair
Emergency Preparedness	Hunting	Solar power
Employee Rights	Hunting dogs	Stamp collecting
Entertaining Guests	Internet marketing	Stay at home mom
Equestrian	iPhone photography	Street photography
European Travel	Off-roading	Sturgeon fishing
Every Day Carry	Jewelry Making	Surfing
Exercise	Kayak fishing	Swing dancing
Farm Animals	Board games	Table tennis
Farm living	Kite surfing	Taekwondo
Fish and ski boats	Krav Maga	Tango dancing
Fishing	Landscape photography	Target archery
Fishing boats	Latin Dancing	TOEFL
Fishing for panfish	LSAT	Traditional archery
Flash Photography	Macro Photography	Training dogs for hunting
Flipping homes	Martial arts	Trampolines
Flower Arranging	MCAT Studying and Prep	Traveling with Kids
Flower collecting and pressing	Metalworking	Trekking
Fly fishing	Mineral collecting	Triathlons
	Miniature photography	Video commercial making
	Mobile photography	Video editing
	Model rocketry	

Video production	Wind Turbines	Writing a novel
Violin, fiddle, viola playing	Winter Sports	Yachts
Watercolor painting	Wolves	Yacht maintenance and tips
Waterfowl hunting	Wood carving	Yoga
Wedding Photography & Videography	Woodworking	Yorkies
Widow	Workplace	Youth hockey
	Writing	

Validate The Profitability and Viability of Potential Niches

Now that you have a list of potential niches, we'll do a quick exercise to check that your chosen niche passes the following criteria for you:

- Ensure there are good topics that are easy to write about with low competition on the specific topic/keyword
 - Ensure you're knowledgeable enough to write content on the niche
 - Ensure there is a viable audience
 - Ensure there is a path to monetizing your content within the niche.
-

1) Validate the possibility for good content topics with low competition SEO keywords and assess the overall competitiveness of the niche.

Your goal: Determine whether there are a sufficient number of topics to write about that are low competition and that you won't be competing with large, authoritative publications in the niche...at first.

First, brainstorm what problems or needs (especially information needs) do you see in your potential niches? List at least 10 topics or problems you could write about now within that niche.

Note: Before continuing with the validation, you'll need to install Moz's free extension for Google Chrome. This tool tells us the strength/competitiveness, via "PA" and "DA", of websites in the search results. With this tool, we can easily assess how competitive specific topics, keywords, and niches are using only this tool and Google search.

Now, let's proceed with assessing the competitiveness of your niche, potential sub-niches, and your initial content ideas.

1. ASSESS COMPETITIVENESS of THE NICHE

- Search “[your potential sub-niche] blog” in Google and scroll down and look through the first 20 pages of Google search results, only looking at the “PA” and “DA” provided under each search results (courtesy of the Moz Toolbar) to see how competitive your potential sub-niche is

Next we will take this data (page 1 ranking blogs for the sub-niche and their respective DA) to assess how authoritative the major players are and, by proxy, how competitive the niche is.

Looking at the Domain Authority of results on page 1, if there are a couple of blogs with DA under 20, the niche is extremely uncompetitive. If there are at least a couple of blogs with DA under 30, competition is low. If there are at a couple of blogs under 40, competition is moderate, and climbing the ranks will take work but is doable. If the lowest blogs on page 1 of Google have DA in their 40's competition will be stiff, so ensure the payoff will be worth the the work – because there will be lots of work. If the page 1 results for the sub-niche are all 50+ DA, the sub-niche undoubtedly too competitive and not suitable for blogging as ranking content will take massive amounts of work.

2. ASSESS THE COMPETITIVENESS of INDIVIDUAL TOPICS (KEYWORDS, CONTENT) WITHIN THE SUB-NICHE

For each of those 10 (at least) topics you've brainstormed, search Google to see if the content already exists.

If the content does exist, can you write it better? Are there more valuable solutions you can deliver related to those topics that aren't already being delivered? If you can do it better, there is an opportunity to simply produce content, better. This can be the case in seemingly crowded niches, but understand that your success will hinge on *consistently* delivering higher quality content than your competition and high-quality content in general.

If the content on your brainstormed topics doesn't exist, congratulations, you may be near gold! Proceed to the next step of validating that people are searching for that content.

You should have already installed the Moz Chrome toolbar plugin (don't worry, it's free) login, and set the bar to show the "PA" and "DA" ratings for the results of each search result in Google. Throughout your assessment of topics, pay attention to the authority ("DA" and "PA") of each site in the Google search results.

If the topics you search for in Google have a result on the search page with a DA of 25 or below, there is an opportunity there. If there are pages with a DA below 15 or multiple pages below 25, you've stumbled on a great, low-competition topic. We'll get more into finding low-competition SEO keywords in the SEO section of this book, but you've just used a quick SEO technique to begin validating the presence of competition (or lack of competition) in your niche.

Additionally, as you search your 10 potential topics and sub-niches in Google, ask yourself the following questions to validate your niche

- Is the content delivered for your search already delivered in an engaging, digestible, and cohesive manner? If not, there is an opportunity for you to differentiate yourself in the niche with quality content
- For the (Google) SERP results, is the competition (in SERP) crowded with large entities and publications (e.g., New York Times, Conde Nast, Washington Post) or generally filled with page 1 SERP results of 40+ DA? If so, the niche may be too crowded and competitive for another blog OR, if you continue, you will have to work *much* harder to find low competition keywords to write on.

3. CONFIRM THERE IS SEARCH DEMAND FOR THE SUB-NICHE BY CHECKING SEARCH VOLUME IN AN SEO TOOL

For your potential topics and sub-niches that pass the competitiveness test (few high authority sites, few results in search) we now want to confirm that there is actually demand for that type of content – or people searching for that content. Though your content will eventually be shared on social media, we'll focus on Google and search for our validation indicators by looking at the Google monthly search volume for your target topics.

Monthly search volume is the average number of times people have searched for a specific term in Google.

To check this, you will need to subscribe to an SEO tool. If you're just starting out, I highly recommend **Keysearch** as it is cheap, delivers the functionality you will need, and a free trial lasts two weeks. This gives plenty of time to get through the niche validation phase

Simply search each of your potential topics in Keysearch and check the monthly search volume. You want to see at least 500 searches per month for each keyword.

The important metrics you will want to pay attention to in Keysearch are "Volume" which details how many people search for that specific phrase per month and "Competition" presented as a score and rating (e.g., easy, moderate, difficult).

Additionally, click through any of the suggested keywords that align with your sub-niche to see if they meet our minimum monthly search. Save all of these "keywords" for later as we will use them during our SEO research phase.

If your niche has lots of "easy" keywords (coded as blue and light green) and higher search volume (500+) the niche is likely a solid opportunity.

After you've searched to confirm your search volume for your first 10 topics, if any of the topics don't have a monthly search volume of 500 minimum, brainstorm another keyword to search in its place and check volume. Continue this process until you accrue 10 topics/keywords with search volume of 500+. If you can't brainstorm 10 keywords with 500 minimum searches per month, this niche isn't right for you yet.

Also note that just because these keywords have sufficient monthly search volume doesn't mean their ripe for writing. We would still need to confirm that 1) the competition for the keyword, also referred to as difficulty, is low enough to be worth writing and that 2) we can sufficiently "one-up" the competition with better writing.

Now, if you are comfortable with the level of competition in the niche and sub-niches and were able to find 3 low-competition sub-niches with enough demand for the sample keywords we've searched (monthly search volume) to support the effort of writing, then you have successfully identified a potentially viable niche.

Now, let's take a look at the niche from *your perspective* and ensure it's a good fit for your capabilities by asking a few questions

4. VALIDATE MONETIZATION OPPORTUNITIES

Brainstorm three products you could recommend in a post for each of your 10 identified topics/keywords, honestly, and genuinely. Validating that all of the posts would be suitable for affiliate marketing gives us a monetization path from day one. When thinking of products, a higher dollar value is better for your profitability – as long as the products suit the content.

For example, the potential products to recommend on a blog post on “The Types of American Wines You Need to Know” could be wine glasses suited to the types of wines recommended, wine accessories (aerators and carafes), and even package tours to the vineyards and regions mentioned in the article.

But don’t just think about products to recommend via affiliates, think about information products you could write, and think about services you could provide about the content.

If you’re running slim on monetization ideas, visit a handful of the competitors within your niche, or review the competitor content on the same keywords, and note how they monetize to spark your ideas of how *you* can monetize that content. As you browse the site yourself, ask the following questions:

- What affiliate links and affiliate products are sold here?
- What courses and products are sold on this site?
- What services do they offer?

For every potential affiliate product, ideally identify products to recommend that are \$100+. The average affiliate commission for physical products is 3% to 15% and a post that gets 100 visitors per month will likely lead to 1 to 5 sales in the end. So, 1 x \$3 would be \$3 profit for a month, or 5 x \$3 would be \$15 profit per month on a single post.

Though this can add up, when you have 300+ posts on your site, don’t risk low earnings by planning your posts around products that sell for much less than \$100. Its ok (and highly recommended) to recommend cheaper products that benefit your audience, just don’t count on affiliate sales monetizing the efforts behind those posts if you purely plan to recommend \$15 products.

5. VALIDATE THE AUDIENCE AND TRIBE AND MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

Find 3 “places” on the internet where you could genuinely share your content wherein the tribe would be receptive and find value without the exchange feeling spammy. This could be in a Facebook group, a Reddit sub, or an interest-specific forum. These 3 “marketing channels” will be key to sparking traffic for your blog as you focus on writing great content.

Some of the existing marketing channels and audience forums that I love to share content, and it succeeds if the action of sharing is *genuinely* meant to create more value for the audience than it does for me are:

- Reddit (only specific sub-Reddits)
- Facebook Groups
- Quora (answers to specific questions)

These are my favorite, because there is a heavy information exchange, low dependency on algorithms, and post lifespan is either fairly long or can be “restarted.” However, any forum that operates on the premise of discussion and sharing ideas will work. Extra points if the platform isn’t overly subjected to the whims of algorithms.

Go through the checklist above for each potential niche to get a feel of the opportunity. Ultimately, go with the opportunity that you will be able to write the best content on, will be able to make good recommendations for products and services (to monetize), that has channels where you can easily share the content, and that has plenty of easy SEO keywords (found through Keysearch) and topics with high traffic and low competition.

6. VALIDATE THAT THE POTENTIAL PAYOFF (AVERAGE MONTHLY PROFIT) OF THE NICHE IS SUITABLE FOR YOU TO AVOID WASTING MONTHS OF WORK ON SOMETHING THAT WON’T DELIVER WHAT YOU EXPECT IT TO

Review the section above on the profitability and competitiveness of the average blog, divided by niche, to confirm that you are willing to put in the effort to overcome the competitiveness level, to reach the average monthly income listed.

Though our goal was to research niches, if you’ve followed along with the practical steps you have amassed *a ton* of valuable information about your potential niche and potential blog – SEO keywords, topics, competitors, best monetization strategies, and so on.

Be sure to save this information in an accessible place. In follow on chapters, we'll go more in-depth into each of these, and having those notes as a starting point will save you plenty of time, save your work, and shorten your path to success.

A Note on Niche Validation If You Have Already Decided Your Niche

Even if you've already decided your niche, you should still do niche validation to better understand the competition in your niche and potentially identify your sub-niches to set you up for success before starting the hard work of building a site, creating a content plan, and writing content.

Understand that going into blogging you may be making a hefty tradeoff (in potential profits and work required) if you are initially married to a specific niche and sub-niche. Going into the niche selection phase with a willingness to compromise will undoubtedly catapult you to success (sizable organic audience, profitability, etc.) sooner.

At the end of the day, do what serves your mission and objectives best, but understand the tradeoff we make by *not* selecting niches with low competition and high payoff.

Niche Selection Gut Check

Now that you've done the research, brainstormed and chose a niche and sub-niche, and validated that the opportunity is worth writing 200+ pieces of content on...it's time for a gut check.

Are you ready to put in the effort it takes to write in this niche? Just because there is an *amazing* opportunity to write within the Personal Finance niche, doesn't mean the opportunity is right for your interests and expectations.

To "gut check" and make sure you're ready to put in the work, ask yourself the following questions:

- Can you learn and write about this niche for 1-2 years without getting paid (yet)?

- Could you see yourself writing 200 pieces of content ranging between 1,500 to 3,000 words?
- Would you feel comfortable entering forums (Quora, Reddit, Facebook Groups) that you don't own and sharing knowledge / debating the merits of your ideas within this niche?
- Are you passionate enough to write about this topic for free?

If you answer a solid “yes” to 3 of the questions above, you have a niche that may work for you. If you answer yes to all 4 questions, you have found a near-perfect niche for you.

If you answered yes to two or fewer of these questions, return to the drawing board and find a niche you could create content in with little reward and for a long period.

When you've found that niche, come back and we will proceed on with designing your brand and building your site.

Action Items for This Section

- Decide and define your niche and three to five sub-niches
- Validate that each of the following is reasonable within your selected niche and sub-niches
 1. Competition: Enough to demonstrate there is an opportunity, but not too much that it will make growth difficult (2+ low competition SERP results per search is ideal)
 2. Audience: Does enough of an audience exist to make the effort, and payoff, worth it? (500 monthly searches minimum per top, ideally per keyword)
 3. Marketing Channels: Do effective ways exist of connecting with the potential audience? (Three “tribes” that can serve as marketing channels)
 4. Monetization: What is the clear path to monetizing your blog? (Minimum 3 affiliate products identified per topic/post)
- Record all of the answers, and any other information you stumble on, in your site's playbook

Define Your “Why”, Brand, Mission, and How You’ll Execute

Just like any great person, product, or organization, the “personality” of your blog will either help or hurt your success from the start. That personality is more commonly referred to as your blog’s “brand”.

In this section, we’ll take a structured approach to defining the brand of your blog and your blog’s purpose, mission, and objectives. We’ll end by rolling this into a concise idea of what your blog delivers and why.

By being able to clearly articulate this purpose your blog exists for, we’ll attract more readers that are in search of exactly what *you* are offering.

In This Section

- Define your brand and your “why” for doing this
- Choose the visual elements of your brand
- Define your blog’s mission and objectives
- Decide how you will execute your mission and objectives through your blog

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- The “why” of your blog is the most important component of your blog’s brand. Define it well and start with that why, and you will naturally attract “your” readers

Concerning your blog, what is a “brand” and how do you design the brand of your blog?

A blog’s brand is how it is perceived by those who experience it – the readers.

Though we could debate the essence of a brand for hours and how to design a high potential brand, in this section we will take a simple approach to design the image of your blog – the brand.

After you’ve given some thought to your blog’s brand (why it exists, what it aims to achieve, and how it achieves it) we’ll dig into the more tactical elements of your blog’s brand (colors, fonts, and imagery) and lastly redefine your blog’s mission and objectives in a way you can adhere to and communicate effectively to those wondering what your blog is about.

Defining Your Brand Using The “The Golden Circle”: Why, What, How

Countless exercises can be done to define a brand, but we will use the “Why? What? How?” approach broached by Simon Sinek.

In this approach, we will first ask you to think about the “why” of your blog, its purpose, and why it exists.

Second, we’ll think about what you aim to achieve via your blog.

Finally, we’ll think about how you aim to achieve it.

Whereas most brands and blogs explain “what” they do and “what” they offer, this can be informative but it tends to be very functional. Very logical. To drive action and interest, we need visceral emotional connection.

Our goal in starting with your purpose, your why, and your reason, and then explaining the value your blog delivers to the user based on that purpose is to strike an emotional chord with your readers. In approaching your readers this way, they not only feel a commonality with you and affinity for your brand but also *feel* connected to your brand and rapport (mutual respect, appreciation, and understanding) with your brand. We aim to activate their emotions first, not their brains, and ultimately connect on a visceral level.

Step 1: Define Your Blog’s “Why” and Your Blog’s Reason for Existing

Determine why you will create this blog and why you will do what you do for your reader’s by asking yourself the following questions:

- What is your purpose?
- What is the purpose of your blog?
- What is your driving cause?
- What are your driving beliefs?
- Why does your blog exist?

By defining and communicating the passion behind your “why” you can better connect with your readers on a deeper, emotional level.

For instance, on my travel site “A Brother Abroad”, the why is clearly stated as follows...

“[...because] we believe that traveling adventurously is an exciting, enriching experience that helps us grow and that everyone should experience...”

This why communicates the driving idea behind all of the content on the travel site, and the passion that drives us to produce it. This why hits on an emotional level, deeply, in a place difficult to express in words. *That* is what we aim for with our why.

Step 2: Define Your How, Your Assets, Your Strengths That Empower Your Blog’s Mission, and How You Will Deliver Value to Your Readers

Next, describe how your approach leads to the “what” and the value (which you will define in step 3) that you deliver to your readers. You can explain this “how” by describing your unique assets and strengths or simply stating your methods.

To arrive at your “how”, ask yourself the following questions:

- How does your blog or brand express its passion?
- What are the unique assets and strengths that your blog, writing, and information bring? (e.g., knowledge, an artistic approach, etc.)
- How does your blog deliver content differently than any other blog within your niche (e.g., humorous, informative, engaging, casual, etc.)?
- What unique skills do you bring to your blog that will be used to accomplish its mission?

Continuing with the example of A Brother Abroad...

Why: Because we believe that traveling adventurously is an exciting, enriching experience that helps us grow and that everyone should experience...

How: We aim to inspire and empower travelers to adventure further, to uncommon destinations for uncommon experiences, with small budgets and only two weeks a year.

In the example of A Brother Abroad, our “why” is because we believe everyone should experience travel, “how” we serve and express that passion is by writing to empower the experience of travel.

Step 3: Define What Value You Deliver (Products, Services, Etc.) That Serve Your “Why” By Accomplishing Your “How”

Now that you’ve defined your passion (your “why”) and described how you serve and express your passion (your “how”), it is time to share what you deliver, your products or services, that bring value to the customer (your “what”)

To define your what, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the major products and services you deliver?
- How are those major products and services delivered in a way unique from the competition’s approach?

Finishing with the example of A Brother Abroad.

Why: because we believe that traveling adventurously is an exciting, enriching experience that helps us grow and that everyone should experience...

How: We aim to inspire and empower travelers to adventure further, to uncommon destinations for uncommon experiences, with small budgets and only two weeks a year.

What: By writing stories and guides of far-off destinations that empower adventure travel, with any experience level and on any budget

An Example of The Golden Circle Approach to Defining a Brand: Apple

This approach to defining your brand was presented in Simon Sinek’s TED talk on “the Golden Circle” and how brands connect with potential customers on an emotional level. As a result of the “Why, What, How” approach, brands with the same talent, technology, organization, and resources as their competitors can outperform those same competitors in the market (think Apple vs. Dell).

A prime example of how the golden circle can be applied is with Apple. Simon Sinek gave this example onstage during the TED Talk. We have summarized it below to help as you brainstorm your own “Why, What, How.”

Simon Sinek’s Example of Apple’s “Why, How, What”

- **Why:** In everything we do, we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently
 - **How:** The Way we challenge the status quo is by making our products beautiful, easy to use, and user friendly
 - **What:** Which leads us to make great computers
-

Now, Use The “Why? What? How?” Approach To Begin Defining Your Blog’s Brand

Step 1: Define your blog’s “why” by asking the following questions:

- What is your purpose?
- What is the purpose of your blog?
- What is your cause?
- What do you believe about the world in relation to your blog?
- Why does your blog exist?

Step 2: Define your how, your assets, your strengths that empower your blog’s mission, and how you will deliver value to your readers by asking the following questions:

- How is your blog or brand used to express your passion?
- What are the unique assets and strengths that you, your blog, writing, and information bring? (e.g., knowledge, an artistic approach, etc.)
- How does your blog deliver content differently than any other blog within your niche (e.g., humorous, informative, engaging, casual, etc.)?
- What unique skills do you bring to your blog that will be used to accomplish its mission?

Step 3: Define what value you deliver (products, services, etc.) that serve your “why” by accomplishing your “how”. Ask yourself these questions to get there:

- What are the major products and services you deliver?
- How are those major products and services delivered in a way unique from the competition’s approach?

Piece the products of these three steps together and you know have a clear, verbal expression of your brand, your elevator pitch, and the basis of your blog's mission statement.

A Note on How Your “Brand” and Purpose Will Change As Your Blog Grows

As your blog matures, you connect more deeply with your audience, and you realize the unique *value* that you deliver relative to other blogs, magazines, and sources in your niche, your brand will adapt and change, coalescing into the best representation of your site, what you deliver, and what you do for your audience. This idea (Simon Sinek's Golden Circle) is a great tool for taking the first steps in defining your blog's brand. After this, use feedback from your core readers, intuition, and knowledge you gain as you blog to further refine your brand.

Define Your Mission with A Vision and Mission Statement

We've dug into your brand with the “why, what, how” approach to understanding your passion, what you want to achieve, and how you want to achieve it with the ultimate aim of shaping how your blog and brand are perceived by your readers.

Your mission, or mission statement, is a solid addition to the pieces of information you'll use to explain what you do (and why) and also check back on occasionally to ensure your actions (brand partnerships, writing, marketing activities) are in line with your initial vision.

Luckily for us, you already have most of the elements of a good mission statement from the exercise above.

The vision is the big picture of what you aim to achieve

The mission is how you will achieve and realize that vision

Piecing these two items into one statement will give you the perfect “mission statement” about your blog for everything from the about page to explaining what your blog is about in casual conversation.

Continuing with the example of a brother abroad, the “Why” and “How” were as follows:

How: We inspire and empower travelers to adventure further, to uncommon destinations for uncommon experiences, with small budgets and only two weeks a year.

What: By writing stories and guides of far-off destinations that empower adventure travel, with any experience level and on any budget

The Mission Statement of A Brother Abroad could be:

“At A Brother Abroad, we write stories and guides of far off destinations that empower adventure travel, with any experience level and on any budget”

and the continued Vision Statement of A Brother Abroad could be:

“...to inspire and empower travelers to adventure further, to uncommon destinations for uncommon experiences, with small budgets and only two weeks a year”

The end product is an all-purpose mission (and vision) statement of A Brother Abroad that describes what we do and why, telling readers why they should read our blog in a mere couple of sentences

“At A Brother Abroad, we aim to inspire and empower travelers to adventure further, to uncommon destinations for uncommon experiences, with small budgets and only two weeks a year. We empower these travelers by writing stories of travel and guides for far off destinations and exciting adventures possible with any travel experience level and on any budget”

Now, apply your learnings from the “Why? What? How?” exercise to create your vision + mission statement

Brands, mission statements, and visions can seem very “corporate” for such a free-wheeling craft such as blogging. So what value do these activities really bring to your blog?

- About Page
- Media Kits
- Communication with brands

- An all-purpose “elevator pitch”

Within each of these arenas, having a clear message about what your blog is about and what it achieves is essential. Because I maintain a well-defined, clearly communicated brand statement that I can write in less than a paragraph and tell in less than 30 seconds, countless opportunities have popped up.

About Page

The About page is one of the most essential pages on your site as this is one of the highest converting pages on *any* site and where readers and brands go if they want to get to know you. Having a clearly defined and easily communicated brand statement and ancillary information on this page will naturally grow readers, brand partnerships, and press exposure.

Media Kits

The media kit is a 1 to 3 page concise information sheet about your site that communicates your brand, readership (demographics, metrics, and qualitative data), explains how brands and potential collaborators can contact you, and explains what opportunities you are willing to collaborate on. A media kit is *essential* for any blog with more than 10,000 readers.

The media kit on my primary site has led to 10+ brand collaborations, contact from journalists at major publications (New York Times, San Diego Union Tribune, Business Insider, Trip Advisor editorials), and even speaking engagements. On more than a handful of occasions, journalists have mentioned that having a refined media kit and well defined brand – clearly expressing the ethos behind my site, what I do, and why – led to them choosing me and my site as an expert source.

Create a good media kit is essential, and having a well defined brand is essential to a good media kit.

Communication with brands

Whether pitching information as a source for HARO, responding a brand’s collaboration request, or reaching out to a tourism board, having a concise brand statement (who we are and what we do) is always beneficial. The brand statement tells my potential partners clearly what I am about, what I do, and why I (and my work) are different, naturally communicating the benefit of working with me and my site over other brands

An All-Purpose “elevator pitch”

Blogging is actually a *very* unique field that is quite misunderstood and at the same time, quite interesting. At the same time, it is useful in today’s society to be able to quickly explain what you do for a living (or as a hobby) to connect with others. Even further, if you ever speak on a panel or attend a blogging convention, being able to concisely share who you are and what you do is useful.

This brand statement serves that end as an “elevator pitch” or a quick, interesting, engaging, and informative statement of what you do while being concise enough to share fully on a short elevator ride.

Ultimately, clearly defining your blog’s brand makes clear business sense within your blog (for planning) and outside of your blog (sharing the news of what your blog does).

Next Steps:

- Be sure to **place your vision and mission statement towards the beginning of your About Page** so that curious readers, and brands, can find out what you’re about effortlessly.
- Use your mission statement and vision to **create a media kit for your site**, ideally 1 to 3 pages long with fewer being better. Make this kit freely available on your site, and keep it handy as an info sheet to send for brands for potential collaborations.

Defining The Visual Elements of Your Brand

Now that you’ve locked down the strategic intangible elements of your blog’s brand, you’ll want to decide on some visual elements of the brand, for consistency.

Visual elements of brands serve the purpose of quick recognition and inciting the emotions we hope to be associated with that brand.

As the readers become fonder of your content and brand, using the consistent visual elements of your brand will quickly rekindle that connection of “meeting with a familiar friend.”

Keep in mind that the visual branding for your blog doesn’t need to be perfect at the beginning, it is just a starting point. Brands rebrand often throughout their lifetimes, and yours likely will too. The important thing is to with a point of visual consistency with your blog.

The elements of your brand that you *need* to decide on are as follows:

- **Colors (Use a color palette matcher with colors that emotionally align to your brand)**
- **Logo (Don’t be scared to go informal creating your own on a platform like Canva, otherwise choose fiver)**
- **Fonts**

COLORS

Decide on 2 to 3 colors for your blog that will be used consistently throughout all of your content.

Ensure the 2 to 3 colors are “matched” and paired for compatibility. Using a color scheme auto-generator is the best way to find your colors as you can pick a single color you love and visually compatible colors will be suggested.

Finally, ensure the colors align with the emotions that you want for your blog. Generally, the following colors elicit the listed emotion.

1. Yellow:
 - a. Optimism, clarity, warmth
 - b. Grabs attention
2. Orange
 - a. Confidence, cheerful, friendly
 - b. Call to action, subscribe, buy, sell, but beware it can seem aggressive
3. Red
 - a. Bold, youthful, excitement
 - b. Creates a feeling of urgency, energy, increases heart rate,
4. Black
 - a. Credible, powerful, professional
 - b. Powerful and sleek, used in marketing luxury brands
 - c. Definite, strength, precise, direct
5. Purple
 - a. Wise, creative, imaginative
 - b. Used to calm, soothe, also used in beauty and anti-aging products
6. Blue
 - a. Trust, strength, dependable
 - b. Clean, calming, focused, professional
 - c. Creates a sense of trust and security
7. Green
 - a. Peace, growth, health
 - b. Good for science and government-related topics
8. Grey
 - a. Balance, calm
 - b. Practical, timeless, solid, conservative

9. For Men

- a. Yes: Blue, Green, Black
- b. No: Brown, Orange, Purple

10. For Women

- a. Yes: Blue, Purple, Green
- b. No: Brown, Orange, Grey

LOGO

A logo is an essential element for branding as it is a small, visual element that clearly identifies you and your blog and can be plastered anywhere without words while still achieving brand recognition.

Freelancing sites such as Fiver are a great place to have a starter logo drawn up for cheap.

If you're feeling artistic and want to DIY, hop on Canva for free and try making your own logo.

FONTS

Fonts can be an excellent branding element, increasing brand recognition within emails, content, and plenty of other places while improving the user's visual experience.

Picking a font for headers and a separate font for text is a common approach.

However, beware when choosing flowery fonts and going beyond basic as some "prettier" fonts are much more difficult to read and detract from the user experience. Additionally, non-standard fonts increase page and website load speed which not only detracts from user experience (when used as blog text) but can be a hit against you in the Google page experience assessment, ultimately affecting Google rankings and traffic.

I recommend limiting your font branding choice to logos and embedded within brand related images for site load speed efficiency reasons.

I recommend delaying font choices and doing plenty of your own research on choosing font styles suitable to your brand before choosing a nontraditional font for your brand.

Action Items

- Define your why, how, and what
- Decide on your vision and mission
- Piece together your vision, mission, why, what, and how to create a mission statement and elevator pitch for your blog
- Place your vision and mission statement within your About Page and Media Kit
- Decide on two to three matched colors for your brand
- Start the process of brainstorming inspiration for a logo, then outsource one or hop on Canva to create one

Build Your Blog on a WordPress Site

Though there are plenty of blogging platforms that allow you to simply hop on and start writing, such as Blogger, or easy “click and make” websites, like Wix, for aspiring bloggers, the only *real* option for bloggers in the long term is to host your own website using the WordPress content management system, uploaded to a domain you purchase monthly on hosting you purchase monthly.

In this section, we’ll discuss why a self-hosted WordPress site is *the* way to go, and how to choose a hosting provider and domain/URL (web address) and finally install your WordPress site.

In This Section:

- Choosing the best hosting for You
- Choosing a domain (web address)
- Choosing the right platform (WordPress, Wix, Shopify, Blogger)
- Installing WordPress
- Choosing and installing the right theme
- Choosing a page builder (Gutenberg, Elementor, Cornerstone)
- Building your first site using templates and a simple structure (home + menus + posts)
- Installing the right plugins for speed and function
- Plugins to remove and avoid
- Designing a site for success (structure, content flow, site essentials)
- Optimizing your site for speed
- Stage 2: Optimizing the other elements of your blog (sidebar, email captures, related & recommended content, writing your about page, creating a Mediakit for outreach, pillar posts, and "Start Here" pages)
- Advanced: Buying expired domains for existing domain authority

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- A self-hosted WordPress site is the best, most efficient option for blogging as it is cost-efficient and allows ample control over design and SEO. *Use this section for a step-by-step tutorial for building your WordPress site as the basis of your blog.*

Why self-hosted blogging?

Though there are many options for bloggers to create their first site – from Blogger, to Wix, to WordPress.com – I hands down recommend a self-hosted WordPress site as the *best* option.

By “self-hosting” we mean purchasing a hosting plan with a hosting company (like GoDaddy, Namecheap, Bluehost, etc.) that allows you to “store” your website on their servers, the website you design. In this scenario, the website is built using the WordPress software which is uploaded to the server and installed. This comes in contrast to platforms like Wix and Blogger in which you simply use their platform and design your website using their tools.

Self-hosting is the cheapest option, running as cheap as \$30 per year, and allows the most freedom to customize your site without having to pay for anything besides plugins and themes. Ultimately, the reason we want to choose self-hosting is so we can install WordPress which is arguably *the* best platform for blogging no matter how big or small your blog is thanks to the cheap price (free) and the freedom it offers in customization.

We’ll review the best options for hosting shortly but first, let’s look at why the WordPress platform is the best platform for blogging.

Why WordPress for Blogging?

WordPress was *literally* made for self-hosted blogging back in 2003 but has evolved so that 35% of websites on the internet use WordPress, and with good reason. WordPress is a large bit of software that is a “Content Management System”, which is essentially a readymade website designed to contain a stack of blog posts in a single spot. On top of holding all of the blog posts in a single spot, WordPress allows us to easily customize the look of a site by uploading a “theme” which changes the design, colors, fonts, and structure of the site with a single upload and click of a button.

These are the top reasons I recommend using WordPress:

- WordPress is completely free (you just pay ~\$3 per month for the hosting)
- WordPress is simple enough for starter and basic bloggers to begin using
- WordPress is flexible enough to allow for advanced designs, functions, and alteration of the code
- A plugin exists for nearly every function one could want to do in WordPress, from SEO to social media sharing, to eCommerce shopping carts, and more
- You don’t need a designer or developer to start using WordPress

At the end of the day, WordPress is a cost-efficient way to build a website and simple enough that anyone can use.

Everything from content management (organizing and presenting your blog posts), to SEO, to social media marketing, to online sales and e-commerce can be achieved in WordPress.

If you are serious about blogging, do yourself a favor and stick with/change to WordPress.

How To Start A Self-Hosted WordPress Site

1. Purchase a “hosting package” that lets you install WordPress and build your site on a company’s servers (like GoDaddy, Namecheap, or Bluehost)
 2. Purchase a URL or “domain name” (e.g., www.abrotherabroad.com) with your host package, which is how readers will find your site
 3. Install the free WordPress software
 4. Choose and install a WordPress “theme”, which will change the design and look of your WordPress site to something you like
 5. (Optional) Install a “page builder”, like Elementor, Thrive Architect, that will allow you to design pages on your site (home page, about page, contact page) visually, by dragging and dropping, instead of using code
 6. Start posting blog posts
-

Choosing Hosting for Your WordPress Site

These are the elements you should assess when comparing your hosting options for your WordPress site.

- Price vs. blog maturity and traffic:
- Speed
- Uptime
- Customer service reliability
- Perks: Free SSL (HTTPS/encrypted website connection), free CDN (content delivery network that speeds up your site), free migration, automated backups

BEST HOSTING COMPANY OPTIONS FOR BLOGS

- Bigscoots: bigscoots.com (Premium)
- Hostgator: hostgator.com (User friendly)
- Namecheap: namecheap.com (Cheap)
- Bluehost: bluehost.com (Targets beginner bloggers)
- GoDaddy: godaddy.com (All in one starter solution)
- Siteground: siteground.com (Cheap, beginner friendly)

Overview of Hosting Options

Hosting Popular with Bloggers

- Hostgator
- Bluehost
- GoDaddy
- Siteground

All four of these sites, Host Gator, BlueHost, GoDaddy, and Siteground are *very* popular with bloggers as they are simple to use, easy to set up WordPress sites with, and have the features that bloggers commonly need in the early stages of blogging to keep things simple. There are nuanced differences between these hosting providers, but the differences are negligible. If your budget isn't huge but you don't want to get *too* involved in the technical elements of your site, any of these four providers will be very suitable for your website hosting needs.

Budget Hosting

- **Namecheap**

Namecheap has been my hosting provider of choice on my smaller sites that aren't generating much traffic/profit yet as their hosting prices are extremely cheap. I started out with a \$10 per year package and now I pay ~\$30 per year to host 10 sites. If you are still in the exploration phase, I highly recommend considering Namecheap for hosting.

However, I will warn that Namecheap's customer service is not the best, so you will need to learn how to manage and troubleshoot your own site without much help

How To Purchase Your Hosting

To purchase hosting, I highly recommend purchasing hosting *with* your domain by purchasing a domain through your preferred hosting site (one of the ones listed above) and adding hosting during the checkout process. By doing this, your domain (the web address) will be owned by the same company that handles your hosting, which means the same support and tech team manage both elements and save a headache later on.

However, if you have already purchased a domain on a different platform, simply go to the homepage for the hosting provider that fits your needs and follow the prompts to purchase the appropriate hosting package. Once you're set up, you will be able to update the DNS settings (domain name systems settings) with the company you've purchased your domain name through, to connect your website hosting with the server that hosts your domain name (URL/web address). You also have the option of transferring your domain from the site you originally purchased it at to your new hosting provider. If you're unsure how to change DNS settings appropriately, don't worry about changing settings, just hop on with customer support and let them handle the issues.

But I don't recommend purchasing your hosting without your domain. Read on in the next section for everything you need to know about purchasing a domain.

Then, we'll cover how to install WordPress on your hosting package.

Choosing and Purchasing Domain (Web Address) For Your Blog

The “domain name” or URL (Uniform Resource Locator) is the address your readers will type into the browser to be directed to your site. For example, www.ABrotherAbroad.com

Choosing a URL that is easy to remember and easy to tell someone (without confusion or explanation) is the ideal to aim for. Additionally, if you can land a domain name/URL that has your target SEO brand keywords in the title, this is a great plus for SEO purposes but isn't important. If your SEO brand keywords aren't available then getting your blog's actual name as the URL is a good second-best option.

...however,

Keep in mind that some of the biggest and most popular websites of our time – Google, Yahoo, Pinterest – are all fairly odd words that *no one* uses in daily language, or at least didn't use before their inception.

You should aim for a user-friendly and SEO-friendly URL, but if it's not perfect, don't fret. Simply aim to hit as many of the following criteria in your URL as possible:

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A DOMAIN

- Aim for a domain that has your topic keyword in if possible
- Limit to 50 characters maximum, aim to stay under 20
- Avoid dots, dashes, and anything other than letters and numbers in the URL
- Choose only .com or .org
- It is ok to “make” a name, as long as it is easy to say (without explanation), easy to spell without explanation, and easy to remember

Your ultimate goal is to land a catchy URL that is easy to communicate correctly without spelling out. Getting a URL with strategic keywords or niche related keywords is great, but not necessary

Where To Purchase Domain Names

If you are purchasing a domain to start blogging soon, I highly recommend purchasing the domain through the company you will get your hosting package with and ideally purchasing the domain with the hosting package.

If you are still undecided on hosting but want to purchase your domain before the domain disappears then I highly recommend these two options for purchasing *just* the domain.

- Namecheap (Bundles with cheap hosting)
- Go Daddy

Both options are quick, easy, cheap, and straightforward, and make redirecting to your hosting (when you purchase it later on) very easy.

Choosing the Right Platform for Your Blog (WordPress, Wix, Shopify, Blogger)

Though there are several options for blogging, I'll keep this short and sweet...

Install WordPress.

Don't consider any other options.

The low cost, versatility, and customization allowed in WordPress give the opportunity to easily improve your technical SEO, on-page SEO, social media presence, marketplaces, user forums, and countless other elements of the site, with free (or cheap) plugins.

In terms of design, the wide array of themes makes it possible to create *any* site you could imagine without a designer.

Do yourself a favor, and stick with WordPress.

How To Install WordPress with Your Hosting Provider

All of the hosting providers recommended in the hosting section of this book offer “one-click WordPress Installation” with their hosting.

Simply follow the instructions in the links listed below for the respective hosting.

- Hostgator: <https://www.hostgator.com/help/article/how-to-install-WordPress>
- Bluehost: https://my.bluehost.com/hosting/help/wp_install
- GoDaddy: <https://www.godaddy.com/help/install-WordPress-26994>
- Siteground: <https://www.siteground.com/tutorials/WordPress/siteground-wizard-install/>
- Namecheap: <https://www.namecheap.com/WordPress/how-to-install-WordPress/>

As **BigScoots** is a premium, managed host, you won't need to install WordPress as they will install it for you.

Choosing a WordPress Theme for Your Blog

WordPress themes essentially apply a pre-made design and style scheme to your entire site, pages and posts, in a single click. This functionality essentially eliminates the need to hire a designer or fiddle with designing for most bloggers. Additionally, with one click you can change your theme, quickly and efficiently changing the design, speed, and function of your site

WordPress Themes are part of what makes WordPress such a powerful option for bloggers, allowing the ability to “design” an amazing website with amazing functionality using templates. All you'll have to do is download your chosen theme, upload it to your WordPress site, and turn it on to activate. From there, you'll customize colors, fonts, and designs to suit your tastes and use the in-theme page builder to design the site you need.

From here, we can continue to customize each page or upload “template pages” to adapt to our liking.

Most of our content will be in *posts*, so not much customization will be required. However, menus, sidebars, and general styling for our posts will be dictated by the theme we choose – so choose accordingly.

Our *pages* on the other hand are heavily dictated by the theme we choose. Pages, such as the home page, about page, contact page, and sub-niche pages will be built from scratch using our page builder or within the native Gutenberg editor in Wordpress and will pull styling from our chosen theme.

There are literally thousands of good themes out there, but in this section, we'll simplify your search by giving you some points to assess your potential themes on and then recommending my 10 favorites, that I use and would use on new blogs.

What To Look for In a WordPress Theme?

- Speed (doesn't slow how fast our site pages and posts load)
 - Designs
 - User Experience
 - Page builder
 - Responsiveness (Mobile Friendly)
-
- **Speed:** A fast webpage, regardless of what it looks like, is more likely to succeed than a slow one. The average website visitor will only wait 3 seconds as a page loads before they leave the site. Beautiful design with lots of animation is great, but ensure your theme doesn't slow down your site or your users won't wait to see that beauty. To ensure your theme is fast, search for reviews of the theme (specifically focusing on how fast the page loads) and test your site with the Google Page Speed Insights tool for free once the theme is installed and before the trial period for the theme ends.
 - **Design:** Clean aesthetics that fit your brand should be foremost in your mind when choosing a theme.
 - **User Experience:** If your blog is mostly imagery, the theme (and your site) should enhance that experience. If your site has a lot of text (as our blogs will) then your theme should make the experience of reading that text easy a painless, with no squinting required and no straining of the eyes. The theme should be "responsive", which means that it adapts the content and text size and spacing for the size of the device, making the reading experience enjoyable on smaller, mobile devices.
 - **Page builder:** A good page builder allows us to build our pages in drag and drop style, with no coding required and without excessive "code bloat" in our site.

- **Responsiveness (Mobile Friendly):** As 50% or more of your blog traffic will come from Mobile and more as time goes on, and Google uses the mobile experience to assess your website for its rankings, ensure your chosen theme is “responsive”, changing for different types of devices and optimizing itself for the experiences of smaller screens.
-

The WordPress Themes I Recommend

Now that you know the essential criteria to judge a good theme on, I'll save you some time on your search. These 10 themes fit all of the criteria mentioned above and would make excellent themes. If you *don't* opt for one of these themes, then at least view them and explore the mockups as well to understand the design, features, and templates a good theme should have

- X Theme
 - Divi
 - Thrive Theme
 - Astra
 - StudioPress
 - Avada
 - GeneratePress
 - Authority Pro
 - Newspaper Theme (Fast)
-

How To Install A WordPress Theme

Once you've purchased and downloaded your chosen theme, go into your WordPress dashboard (go to [Yoursite.com]/wp-admin to log in). In the left bar look for **Appearance > Themes**. At the top of the page click “**Add New**” and follow the directions to upload your theme file.

Choosing a WordPress Page Builder

As of 2022, the Best Page Builder Is No Page Builder as “Speed Is King” In Getting and Maintaining Google Rankings

Once upon a time, WordPress “page builders” were a fantastic tool, allowing site owners to build beautiful, impressive sites with drag and drop functionality and no coding experience. Unfortunately, all page builders come with their own “code bloat” – tons of scripts that a computer and internet browser must process to “translate” the code into a webpage. Before Google’s focus on page speed, this was perfectly fine, but as of late 2021, for bloggers aiming to rank in Google it is better to have a fast site than a pretty site,

In 2022 and beyond, the best page builder is *no* page builder. Previously, Elementor, Cornerstone, and several other “page builders” delivered the wonderful functionality of allowing you to build robust, beautiful pages. However, the 2021 Google Page Experience update ruined all of that. With the Page Experience update, Google now prioritizes page load speed over beauty. Unfortunately, page builders are one of the primary culprits of injecting websites with heavy code that adds seconds onto a load speed that would ideally be 1 second or less.

The current solution – ditch the page builder. Instead of page builders, to maintain a fast page loading speed use the design functionality of the Gutenberg editor, which is native to WordPress, to create a simple layout for your blog that reads more like a newspaper or magazine than an interactively dazzling showcase.

The beauty of this approach is that page builders are only intended to redesign *pages*. However, your users will likely spend the major portion of their time reading posts, which are standardly formatted to read as newspapers or magazines.

To replace the functionality on your pages of putting snippets to your newest posts on display, by using lightweight, simple plugins such as WP Show Posts you can create category-specific displays of your relevant posts in a simple, easy way that keeps your site fast.

However, if you *insist* on having a page builder to create visually stunning websites without the headache of a developer, read on to learn all you need to know to get started.

My Favorite WordPress Page Builders

Some bloggers *insist* on creating something beautiful at the start, even if eventually costs them page speed and Google rankings and traffic.

For those design and aesthetics focused bloggers, I recommend the following page builders:

1. **Thrive Architect:** Tons of functionality and versatility
 2. **Elementor:** Most popular, 80 design elements, beginner-friendly, fully responsive, and mobile-friendly
 3. **Visual Composer:** Real-time live editor allows you to see changes instantly, done via drag and drop design, allows control of menus, sidebars, and more
 4. **Divi Builder:** An annual purchase also gets you full access to the Elegant Themes library
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Installing The Right WordPress Plugins for Speed, Function, and Efficiency

One of the most powerful elements of WordPress is its “plugins” feature. Plugins are simple elements of software/code that we can just upload, one click to install and run to add functionality and features to our site. Everything from social sharing buttons to image slideshows, to SEO tools, plugins help us do it all in WordPress is possible via WordPress plugins.

Unfortunately, each plugin we install makes our site more bloated, slowing or posts load time on users’ devices.

We need to constantly be mindful of the balance between plugin addiction and site speed, prioritizing site speed as much as possible.

As a general rule, limit the number of plugins on your site to 15 and optimally aim for 10 or less.

Additionally, always keep your plugins updated as out-of-date plugins present security threats and an opportunity for hackers to gain access to and control of your site.

To make life easier, follow this list of plugins to add and plugins to remove for a site with maximum functionality and speed

Plugins To Install

5. GA Analytics (by Jeff Starr) to load Google Analytics tracking codes
 6. Rank Math
 7. EWWW Image Optimizer
 8. Lazy Load by WP Rocket (Paid plugin) (functionality can replace Autooptimize, BWP Minify, WP Disable, WP Super Cache)
 9. Autooptimize
 10. BWP Minify
 11. WP Disable
 12. WP Super Cache
-

Popular Plugins to Avoid

The following plugins slow how quickly your site loads, immensely. Remove these upon installing WordPress *or* refrain from adding them

13. Jetpack
14. Akismet
15. Contact Form 7
16. Yoast

Optional Plugins To Consider

17. WP Touch: for an optimized mobile experience
18. ConvertKit: Used in conjunction with ConvertKit email marketing service
19. WP Schema: Used to create schema data for reviews that will show up in Google search results
20. Redirection: Used to redirect dead or error URLs with 301 redirects
21. Contextual Related Plugin: Used to automatically recommend related content at the end of each post (note, this plugin drastically increases load time, and manually inserting related posts as a conclusion is preferred)
22. Ad Inserter: Used to insert specific content (ads, opt-ins, email subscriptions, product advertisements) in strategic places throughout your site

How To Install a Plugin In WordPress

When logged into the WordPress dashboard for your site, in the toolbar on the left go to **Plugins → Add New** then click **Upload Plugin**. In the window that appears click **Choose File** then navigate to the folder with your plugin and install.

To see which plugins are installed and access their settings, return to the left toolbar and click **Plugins → Installed Plugins** and scroll to the desired plugin.

Stage 2 of Building Your Blog: Optimizing the Other Elements of Your Blog

(Sidebar, Email Captures, About Page, Pillar Posts, Etc.)

Once the base of your blog is established, there are a handful of other elements we'll need to optimize to maximize the user experience on your blog and optimize your blog for reader flow.

The following elements are essential to any blog. Following the tips provided to optimize for each function and user experience.

- 23. Sidebar
- 24. Email Captures
- 25. Related & Recommended Content
- 26. Writing Your About Page
- 27. Creating a Media Kit for Outreach
- 28. Pillar Posts and "Start Here" Pages
- 29. About Me Page
- 30. Opt-ins (Best Options)

Sidebar

The sidebar is a valuable piece of real estate on your blog that should be used to communicate the most important messages of your blog or drive your readers to your desired goal or call to action. For best results, structure your sidebar as follows:

Above the Fold on the Sidebar: Two specific types of "calls to action" work best, so pick one

- 31. Link to "About Me" page
- 32. Email Opt-ins

Below the Fold on the Sidebar: The bottom of the sidebar has the highest conversion so use accordingly by including a call to action for your highest converting product or book

Other Good Sidebar contents:

- Links to pillar content for the same category at the post the reader is currently reading
- A large email capture opt-in *if* one wasn't used in the top portion of the sidebar

How to Execute this Sidebar Strategy

1. Structure sidebars differently according to the category, with separate opt-ins, products advertised, and pillar post links

2. Create custom sidebars for your top 10 posts by landing page and top 10 posts by all traffic (found under “All Pages” in Google Analytics)
The “Custom Sidebar Plugin” by WPMU Dev. can be used to apply this strategy
(<https://WordPress.org/plugins/custom-sidebars>)
3. Use the Ad Inserter plugin to insert specifically links, opt-ins, and ads in your sidebar

About Page

Every legend has an origin story that we simultaneously identify with and admire. Use the about page to tell your blog’s origin story, build rapport with the reader, and build an emotional connection between the writer and the reader.

Essential Components of Your About Page

A compelling title

1. Creates Intrigue by playing on emotions, curiosity, and surprise
2. Connects with a need that the reader feels and the writing will respond to
3. Makes a promise to fulfill that need

A good introduction that hooks the reader

4. Use creative foreshadowing to hint at the most interesting part of your story

Engaging body content keeps the reader and connects with the reader *emotionally*

5. Tell the *entire* story, including the ups and downs that lead to accomplishment allowing the reader to share in the journey
6. Add pictures and visuals that enhance the emotions of the story

The About Page should share your best products, services, and activities with the reader

7. Strategically place links to *your* books, products, services, most popular posts, and pillar posts.
8. Add a link to your contact page so that interested parties can reach out to you easily
9. The about me page has the highest conversion rate for sales, subscriptions, and opt-ins, so use accordingly

Promoting the About Page

10. Place a link to your about page on other pages and in bio

11. Add links to the About Page on the following other pages

- Homepage
- Top of Sidebar
- Signature in Email
- The main navigation of the blog

Pillar Posts and "Start Here" Pages

A good blog can have hundreds of pages of content, much of which is likely to be relevant to the reader's needs. Organizing that content to be accessible through menus, internal linking throughout articles, and "related posts" sections is a good approach to guiding your reader through relevant content, but Pillar Posts and "Start Here" pages are much more useful for sharing the best content on a specific topic.

Pillar posts are in-depth posts on a specific topic or sub-niche to touch on all topics lightly and then link out to the related content on your blog. These pillar posts act as somewhat of a roadmap through your site for the given topic, guiding the reader to all of your best content.

"Start here" pages rely on the same concept, aiming to guide the reader to all of the relevant content on a particular topic. However, Start Here pages are aimed at readers that are new to the concept or to your content. Organize your internal links within the Start Here page to be presented in the order one would need to start with as a newbie and then work their way through the content in a logical way. You can make multiple "Start Here" pages, one for each topic, or you can make a single Start Here page for your site that introduces the reader to all topics you cover, introducing the important content of each, and sharing how the topics intertwine to bring more value to the reader.

Both Pillar posts and start here pages serve the significant need of guiding readers through your content.

Here are some useful points for writing those pillar posts and start here pages for your blog:

1. Create a "Pillar Post" or start here page for every major category of your blog
2. Include links to your most popular posts within the category throughout the content and list at the end
3. Include email opt-ins in the appropriate places and use niche specific lead magnets for the opt-ins

Promote your pillar posts on your site in the following areas:

4. Add a "Start Here" menu item in the top left of the menu including 2-5 pillar pages within the drop-down/hierarchy
5. Place individual category start here pages under the category's menu item within the site navigation bar
6. Add a large call to action on the homepage for your general start here page and pillar posts
7. Include the general Start Here page and category-specific Pillar Posts within the welcome email to new subscribers

Action Items for This Section

- Pick a hosting provider.
- Pick a domain name and purchase it. Ideally, purchase your domain name and hosting from the same provider
- Install the WordPress CMS on your hosting provider
- Pick a WordPress theme and install it on your site
- Install the recommended plugins, and delete the ones advised against limiting to 15 plugins maximum and ideally 10 plugins
- Build and optimize the remaining elements of your blog - sidebar, email captures, related & recommended content links, writing your about page, creating a media kit for outreach, pillar posts, and "start here" pages

SEO Fundamentals: The Essentials for Blog Startup

Search engine optimization or “SEO” is the process of structuring your content and your site in a way that search engines understand and in a way that aligns with the best user experience as judged by search engines.

Though many new bloggers shun SEO in the beginning stages of blogging, SEO and SEO keyword research are exactly what we *should* start our blogs with from day one. 40% of all traffic on the internet goes through Google and Google chooses which site to guide users to for specific searches based on the site’s and post’s SEO.

If appealing to 40% of the traffic on the internet isn’t enough to spark your interest, then understanding the long-lasting effects of SEO should.

An Instagram post has an average “lifespan”, or period of maximum visibility for ~21 hours. A Facebook post shows up for roughly 5 hours before the original post ceases to be seen in most cases. A tweet on Twitter remains popular for about 18 minutes. On the other hand, a ranking result in Google can literally last for years thanks to SEO, and the same post can be “refreshed” several times for improved rankings.

This comparison between “digital marketing channels” clearly illustrates how the effort of understanding SEO is well worth the payoff and the best place to invest your digital marketing time, money, and energy.

In this section, we’ll get you started understanding the basics and essentials of SEO and SEO keyword research to get your posts ranking highly in Google and generating search engine traffic as the primary source of visitors to your site.

In This Section

- **Introduction to SEO:** What it is, why it is the most important tool for your site
- **The Elements of SEO:** SEO Keywords, On-Page SEO, SERP CTR, Internal Links, and External Links
- **Understanding SEO Keywords:** What makes a good, low competition SEO keyword, and why they’re important
- **Understanding User Intent:** What it is, and how to research it for an SEO Keyword

- **The Essential Tools for SEO:** Keysearch/SEMRush/Ahrefs, Google Analytics, and Google Search

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) should be your #1 focus for driving traffic as 40% of internet traffic passes through Google
- Understanding SEO keywords is imperative to successful, sustainable blogging
- Research your SEO keywords before writing *any* content

Search Engine Optimization, or “SEO” for short, is the process of *optimizing* your content with the right structure and appropriate words so that search engines (Google, Bing, etc.) easily understand what your content is about, categorize it accordingly, and present your posts and content as results in the search.

Good SEO consists of keyword research, on-page optimization with the target keyword and the searcher’s intent, technical SEO (for fast page load speed and making the posting easily scannable by search engines), and off-page SEO (link building and search engine signaling).

The ultimate goal of SEO is to land on the first page of Google, as high up in the search rankings as possible which results in higher visibility and more traffic to your site.

Introduction To SEO: Why Does SEO Matter?

1. **40% of all internet traffic goes through Google**
2. **Ranking higher translates to significantly more traffic**
3. **Google is where users go to solve problems**
4. **SEO provides the ability to target intent (e.g., purchase intent) based on keywords**
5. **SEO delivers longer traffic life compared to other social media channels**

-
1. **40% of all internet traffic goes through Google**

Google is a powerhouse on the internet thanks to how it has indexed nearly every website on the internet according to topic, usefulness, and the problems those individual pieces of content solve. Because of this, a massive amount of traffic on the internet passes through Google in search of solutions, 40% of traffic on the internet to be exact.

Because of this massive chunk of internet traffic and users, it makes sense to prioritize SEO as your #1 channel for gaining readers.

2. Ranking higher translates to significantly more traffic

Though we could simply write freely and *hope* to rank in Google, SEO is a tool that enables us to approach Google with a proven, strategic process to rank as highly as possible.

But does ranking higher matter that much?

Yes. Yes, it does.

Most users follow the similar patterns and habits on the internet. One important pattern among Google searchers is to choose rather quickly between the first few choices presented in any situation. In the case of search engine results, this translates to the result presented in the #1 position being clicked over the other options over 30% of the time and page 1 of the search results receiving 75% of the clicks for the keyword. So, even though there may be hundreds of thousands or *millions* of results in a given search, the first 10 of those million receive 75% of all clicks.

According to a study by SEO powerhouse Backlinko indicated the following average click through rates of page clicks distributed across the 10 results on page 1

Position 1. 32%

Position 2. 25%

Position 3. 19%

Position 4. 14%

Position 5. 10%

Position 6. 6%

Position 7. 4%

Position 8. 3%

Position 9. 3%

Position 10. 3%

Source: (Dean)

The takeaway is SEO is worth executing to rise to the top of that pile because of how many clicks the top rankings take.

3. Google is where users go to solve problems making content creation *much* easier

Most users go to social media with no idea of what they want besides a general desire for entertainment and something flashy serving a short attention span.

With search engines, searchers are aiming for something very specific, usually, a topic to be educated on, a very specific problem to be solved. Additionally, searchers have the commitment upfront to read through an entire article, as long as it is engaging and informative. This *intention* of the user, to identify specific information or solve a problem, makes it much easier for us to write content responding to that well defined need.

Creating content that responds directly to that search intent and searcher need is much easier than it would be to create perfectly fitting content on social media thus making it easier to intentionally rank in Google and search results than it would be to go “viral” on social media.

4. SEO provides the ability to target intent (e.g., purchase intent) based on keywords

Because users go to Google and other search engines with very specific intentions (e.g., have a question answered, research a potential purchase, learn on a specific topic) it becomes much easier to write focused articles that target a single need specifically. This ability to reverse engineer intent (based on SEO keywords) makes it much easier to align our content to the needs of the user.

What is the value of targeting intent? If we wish to market a new product or service, we can identify specific keywords to gain the attention of readers that are likely to be interested in our product or service. For instance, if we are selling laptops, “best laptops for...”, “laptop comparisons for...”, and “what to look for in a laptop” are all key phrases that will put our content directly in front of our target market.

5. Longtail SEO keywords allow us to rank easily and drive traffic with minimal

70% of search engine searches and traffic are driven by “longtail keywords” that are low competition and easy to rank for. Though these keywords don’t generally drive as much traffic a shorter keywords with the higher traffic volume, writing several pieces of content targeting longtail keywords can quickly, steadily, and reliably drive traffic to your site quicker than writing for higher volume, high competition keywords, and more efficiently than writing to target social media.

6. We can go back and clean up our content based on “SEO feedback”

The biggest benefit of SEO is the feedback loop and the ability to “try again.” Thanks to SEO metrics like Click Through Rate (CTR) recorded and provided in Google Analytics and Google Search Console, time on page, impressions, clicks, average position, and the ability to see all of the keywords a piece of content ranks for, we can constantly tweak content to improve each metric and overall performance to experiment to see what works and what doesn’t. However, our true goal is to perfectly align our content with the needs of users in a way that Google sees. The analytics we receive from SEO allow us to do this. With this secret weapon, using Google’s search data, even content that flops at the start can be polished and pivoted to become high-performing content that drives traffic.

An Aside: Why SEO, and Google Is The Best Source of Traffic For Blogs and Businesses Long Term

For blogs and websites that want maximum traffic per blog post, Google is your best source of traffic. Here's why:

1. Blog posts ranking on page 1 in Google SERP and drawing traffic from Google have the longest "traffic lifespans" of all media/social media channels
2. Google algorithm updates drive publishers to produce higher quality content and reward higher-quality publishers, while social media algorithm changes tend to target platform profits and restrict page/group owners from earned audiences unless the owners pay for audience access
3. Assessing potential reward (number of page views) for effort (writing an article) is far easier to calculate and assess targeting SEO than any social media channel
4. Search engine traffic tends to have the intent aligned with purchase opportunities and has higher monetization value for ads, affiliate marketing, selling owned products than social media traffic
5. Blog posts can be refreshed or updated to target more appropriate keywords then re-reviewed by Google, thus bringing the same traffic as a new post if not more. This isn't possible on any social platform

Blog Posts Drawing Traffic from Google Have The Longest "Traffic Lifespans" of All Media/Social Media Channels

Traffic from Google to a post, once the post is ranking on page 1 of Google, has a much longer lifespan relative to social media channels (i.e., Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter)

The primary reason to focus on SEO and search engine traffic first and extensively over social media (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, etc.) is due to the "lifespan of traffic" for each type of post. Within every channel, a new post or published/indexed piece of content has a period in which the traffic and exposure (reach) peaks then drops back to near zero – we refer to this as "post lifespan."

Though Pinterest has been reported to have a lifespan of 4 months and Youtube a lifespan of 20 days, most social media channels tend to receive impressions and drive users to target content for less than 48 hours.

By contrast, blog posts indexed on Google tend to stay indexed and ranking for over a year and are only pushed off the top page if another article is produced with better content that better addresses the searcher's intentions and needs. However, due to the nature of Google, we can "refresh" content to improve it over new competitors and request reindexing by Google to ultimately extend the lifespan of the post on its ranking Google page and drive traffic for years or an indefinite period.

I personally have posts that I do not maintain or refresh that have maintained their page 1 Google ranking and have driven traffic to my main site for over 3 years.

Here are the average “post lifespans” by channel:

1. **Twitter:** 15 minutes
2. **TikTok & Snapchat:** Starts decaying immediately unless viral
3. **Facebook:** 6 hours
4. **Instagram:** 48 hours
5. **LinkedIn:** 24 hours
6. **YouTube:** 20 days on average, potentially more
7. **Pinterest:** 4 months
8. **Blog Post:** Over a year after the initial post, indefinitely with refreshes and keyword retargeting

Google Algorithm Updates Drive Publishers to Produce Higher Quality Content and Reward Higher Quality Publishers. By Contrast, Social Media Algorithm Changes Primarily Tend To Target Platform Profits and Increasingly Restrict Page/Group Owners From Earned Audiences Unless The Owners Pay For Audience Access

Regardless of which platform you aim to share your content on as the primary channel to draw in readers, every platform uses algorithms to determine which posts it shows viewers. These algorithms ultimately determine how many readers your posts attract. Unfortunately, due to the algorithm's nature the algorithm determines which readers see what content, which don't, and why. Content creators consistently attempt to reverse engineer the algorithm of each platform to understand what kind of content the algorithm rewards and then produce *that type* of content. These algorithms are constantly changing and adapting and in turn changing the type of content that creators aspire to create.

The algorithm shifts of social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, have shifted more towards forcing page and group owners to pay for traffic and preventing users from clicking off out of the platform.

Contrastingly, Google's algorithm updates have driven towards rewarding “better” content that solves problems better (relative to the query and eliminates the need for additional Google searches), is more engaging (inspiring more time spent on the page), is delivered better relative to the changing habits of readers (mobile optimization vs. desktop optimization), is delivered in an honest way with honest intentions (not spammy, salesy, or using black hat tactics), and is delivered via fast loading and secure website.

Whereas most social media algorithms are becoming more unpredictable and changed to trap readers on the platform and drive profits up for the platform owner, Google's algorithm changes have trended towards filtering and presenting the best content-based on reader and user trends. This process, identifying the content that is most reliable from an authority, security, and trustworthiness standpoint, and then identifying which content users interact the best signaling a solved problem ultimately makes the reader experience better. These standards, enforced by the Google algorithm, drive you and I (as bloggers and publishers) to create better content accordingly.

SEO is no longer about granular “keywords,” to optimize for. SEO is now about understanding the searcher’s intentions, needs, and follow-on problems and questions. Thus, learning SEO and aiming for SEO-sourced content, over social media traffic, will drive the creation of more engaging content that is better for the readers' overall experience and problem-solving journey.

Assessing Potential Reward (Number of Pageviews) For Effort (Writing an Article) Is Far Easier To Calculate and Assess with SEO Than Any Social Media Channel

The potential returns (number of readers) for a single post or article relative to effort (hours of research and number of words written into a post) can be predicted fairly easily with Google and SEO, as keyword volumes, ranking difficulty score, and keyword competitors are openly available and can be used to calculate the “payoff” of readers.

However, the payoff for writing a post for any social media channel and posting on that channel is much less predictable as what makes something “go viral” on social media impossible to predict, and even within our own audiences of groups, pages, and followers, impressions are restricted and governed by the algorithm. This leaves a huge question market about how many page views can we expect from a blog post if posted on a social media channel.

Ultimately, SEO and search engines are *the* most predictable channel. By understanding the volume of traffic for a specific keyword, the existing competitors (clearly visible on page 1 of Google SERP), and our own domain authority as well as the domain authority of our competitors, we can easily determine the amount of traffic that writing a specific post will generate for us. Additionally, several great tools can generate this information for us reliably if we don’t wish to do the calculation.

Such opportunities are very possible in SEO and absolutely not reliably possible in social media.

Search Engine Traffic Tends to Have the Intent Aligned with Purchase Opportunities and Has Higher Monetization Value for Ads, Affiliate Marketing, and Selling Owned Products Than Social Media Traffic

For monetization, traffic from search engines has the highest potential value, due to searcher intent and the possibility of targeting buyer keywords. Google search engine users are generally seeking to answer a question (research), solve a problem, or make a purchase. The second two actions, solving a problem and making a purchase are intentions that we bloggers and publishers can identify (via buyer keywords) and respond to and solve/facilitate for the exchange of making a profit for the referral (affiliate marketing) or brand/product exposure (ads).

In the case of solving a problem, we can recommend the solution or process necessary to solve and recommend the tools necessary to apply the solution, earning an honest and transparent commission on the recommendation.

In the case of searchers' intent to make a purchase, if the searcher is still in the research phase, we can educate the reader and make honest recommendations on what (in our experience) is the best product, and earn a commission.

35% of all product purchases start with a search in Google, and the content that guides the reader from Google to purchase stands an opportunity to earn a marketing and advertising commission for that assistance – whether via the \$356 billion digital advertising industry (in the US) or the \$12 billion affiliate marketing niche

By contrast, users on Facebook rarely have intentions, or clearly identified, solvable problems to address will perusing through content, and will only be captured by entertaining content that presents little to no monetization opportunity beyond the platform's (Facebook's) native ads.

From a blog revenue and business standpoint, search engine users present a more directly monetizable opportunity than social media users, based on intention alone.

[Blog Posts Can Be Refreshed or Updated to Target More Appropriate Keywords Then Re-Reviewed By Google, Thus Bringing The Same Traffic As A New Post If Not More. This Isn't Possible on Any Social Platform](#)

Blog posts can be refreshed to re-rank (rank higher) in Google and generate more traffic at any time – unlike a social media post or picture which once posted and “used” can *very rarely* be reused and must often just live in the profile as past content, generating little if any traffic to your site.

Additionally, blog posts can later be updated to “retarget” new keywords that you may be partially ranking for a keyword (in SERP positions 11 to 30) simply because you are missing essential phrases and portions of the content.

To “retarget keywords,” after a blog post has been up 6+ months you can simply check Google Search Console or Google Analytics to understand what Google “thinks” your post is about, adapt the post to target the topic, and request that Google re-index (re-review) your post.

Usually, this fine-tuning results in a ranking and traffic jump months or years after publishing that isn't possible with any social media channel and generates traffic for years.

Essential SEO Terms and Concepts

SEO is a seemingly complex topic *but* it is actually fairly simple once you understand the major underlying concepts and terms. Before we get into how to rock your blog via SEO, let's go through some essential terms and concepts that you need to know.

Though the following section will suffice as an introduction and we will delve further into each of these throughout the rest of the book, I highly recommend researching each term thoroughly on its own (outside of this book) to gain an in-depth understanding of each concept. For the process of researching each term in external sources, Google will be your best friend, as you will find thorough articles (screened by Google) delivering the latest information on each concept, explained within the context of the latest Google update ensuring you're receiving the latest information.

The Essential Concepts in SEO

- **SEO Keywords / Keyphrases (identifying them, assessing monthly search volume, and difficulty to rank)**
- **On-page optimization**
- **Technical SEO (UX, page load speed, and site security)**
- **Off-Page SEO**
- **Backlinks**
- **Search CTR**
- **Time on Page**
- **Bounce Rate / Pages Per Session**
- **Sessions**
- **Pageviews**
- **Searcher intent & Relevance (to search)**
- **Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI)**
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**
- **EAT (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness)**
- **The Quality Rater Guide (from Google)**
- **Google search CTR**
- **The Google Algorithm and Updates**
- **"The Google Sandbox"**
- **Stepped rankings (Patent on Google Rankings)**
- **Search snippets + snippet worthy optimization**
- **Keyword Research**
- **Longtail keywords**

- **Internal Linking**
 - **External Linking + Do-Follow + No Follow**
 - **Google Updates + the major Google updates**
-

SEO Keywords

SEO keywords, or more commonly referred to as just “keywords” and even “keyphrases” are the basis of SEO and essential to any good SEO strategy. SEO keywords are the words that users search in search engines (most commonly Google) in hopes of finding specific information to answer a question or fill a need.

Our goal with SEO is to tune our content such that we can signal to search engines what keywords and topics our content best responds to with the ultimate goal of ranking as high as possible in the search results for a specific, targeted SEO keyword. We signal to search engines what our content is about by performing “on-page optimization” of posts and pages using our selected SEO keywords (which we’ll explain below). Keep in mind that in order to signal that our content thoroughly responds to a specific keyword and searcher need, our content *actually* needs to respond to that keyword and searcher need.

For our pages to rank as highly as possible in the Google search results, we aim to target low **competition keywords**, based on the authority of posts/pages we’ll compete against, and **longtail keywords** that we identify with good, in-depth **keyword research** *before writing any content*. Additionally, we screen out keywords based on a minimum acceptable monthly volume of searches for that specific keyword.

On-page optimization

On-page optimization is the process of placing a target keyword in specific elements of our content (e.g., headers, paragraphs, image attribute tags, etc.) to signal to search engines what our content is about, what search terms our content responds to, what “search intents” our content responds to, and ultimately what our content should be ranked highly for.

Additionally, in the past couple years, on-page optimization has evolved to extend beyond simply adding a specific keyword to our content and instead ensuring that the specific keyword, its topic, and the questions and needs surrounding that keyword are sufficiently addressed. So, in on page optimization, we’re not just adding keywords, we are crafting content on our page to solve the root issue.

Secondarily, on-page optimization now includes adding and addressing “Latent Semantic Indexing” keywords (LSI) which we will review later in depth but will introduce now. LSI keywords are essentially keywords and topics that Google has deemed to be closely associated enough with the original keyword that they should be addressed in our current writing for our content to be considered by Google to be comprehensive on the topic and our target keyword. LSI keywords are identified, tracked, and assessed by the artificial intelligence applications within Google’s processes that shape the Google search algorithm.

Though the Google algorithm and the advancing machine learning and artificial intelligence behind it are usually capable of identifying the topic of our content and appropriate terms eventually, we do not want to rely on this as the process of not using on-page optimization will lead to longer waits before our posts rank, ranking for fewer search terms overall, and ultimately less traffic overall.

(We provide a full-on page SEO checklist below)

Technical SEO

Technical SEO is the process of optimizing the technical elements of your site to make the site is easy to use, loads fast, and is secure to access with a good user experience along the way.

The primary elements of technical SEO include setting the site up so it can easily be crawled and indexed by search engines thanks to the sitemap and registering the sitemap, securing the site with SSL encryption (HTTPS vice HTTP), improving how quickly pages load (page speed), optimizing the onsite experience for variously sized mobile devices (commonly referred to as responsive design), adding “Schema.org structured data” (for reviews and snippets in Google to be quickly and easily interpreted by Google), and fixing duplicate content and broken link issues.

Google tracks a handful of metrics that monitor user experience (page speed, time on page, back clicks, etc.) and weighs these metrics and user actions into how highly Google ranks your content within its search results. Because of this, technical SEO is important because the elements are directly weighed into the Google algorithm (e.g., “Mobile First”, Page Speed, etc.) and indirectly (user experience and engagement judged by click through and time on page).

To maximize how highly your content ranks in Google, don’t forget the technical SEO on your site.

Off-Page SEO

Off-page SEO consists of the activities we can perform beyond our site that signal the authority of our site on a topic and in general as well as keywords best associated with our content.

Backlink building, or the act of getting an external site to link back to our site, thus identifying our site as an authority on a topic, is the most common off-page SEO tactic.

Off-page SEO mostly targets improving a site's perception as the expert, authoritative, and trustworthy in the eyes of readers and Google thus hopefully improving how high the site's content ranks in search results.

Backlinks

Backlinks are links from external sites back to your site and Google sees these as one site recognizing your site as an "authority" on a specific topic. This process is called passing "link juice", or one site recognizing the authority of another via outbound links. These links can be "No Follow" or "Do Follow" with "Do Follow" links passing the most benefit of recognizing an "authority" site.

Note that the higher a site's "Domain Authority" (DA) score is, a measure of a sites authority based on backlinks pioneered and executed by Moz, the more link juice and authority recognition you receive in Google's eyes.

Beware that the activity of "backlink building" can be viewed as a "black hat" SEO tactic (frowned upon) by Google if performed in a disingenuous way and can potentially have negative effects on your SEO. Beware of artificial link-building tactics and where they are on the "white hat to black hat" spectrum in SEO. Never pay for links and generally avoid reciprocal linking to stay on the safe side.

When it comes to gaining backlinks, natural links are the most effective and safe and come from a handful of white hat SEO tools and tactics – Help A Reporter Out (HARO), statistics posts, infographics, and writing exemplary, shareable content are all ways to naturally get backlinks that acknowledge you and your site's expertise and authority. These sources should be your primary backlink-building approaches.

Search "Click Through Rate" (CTR) in Google

Search Click Through Rate is the percentage of users that *actually* click your result that shows up in Google search compared to the number of users that view that result (impressions). This rate can be calculated as:

Clicks/Impressions = CTR

The CTR in search is important because it is an excellent metric for gauging how well our content is performing in search, testing how we can optimize the elements that show up in search results (Meta description, title, structured data for review stars), and figuring out what we're doing well.

You can find the search CTR for your site overall or for any specific post in Google Analytics.

Later, we will use the CTR metric to find content that can be quickly and easily updated to drive more traffic via search by improving CTR.

Note that CTR varies depending on the position (1 through 10) that your site shows up at in Google, however 4% is a good CTR to aim for with any content, with 3% being the lower acceptable threshold and a sign to improve your content.

Google CTR is one of the easiest performance metrics to improve as it only requires optimizing the elements of your post that show up in Google – Title, meta, and schema.

Time on Page

Time on-page is the average amount of time any user spends on a specific post. The time on page metric is a great means of understanding how engaging a post is and judging whether the user experience needs to be improved on that specific post.

Searcher intent & relevance (to search)

The searcher intent is the driving reason for a user's search in Google or another search engine. Usually, the mass of users searching a single term are hoping to find the same type of answer/result/solution. Searcher intentions tend to fall in the following categories

- **Informational Intent:** Searching for a solution to a specific problem or answering a specific question
- **Purchase Intent:** Either researching for a purchase or aiming to purchase at that moment
- **Navigational Intent:** Aiming to arrive at a specific site

Searcher intent matters to us because if we respond correctly to the intent behind a search, the user will spend more time on our site consuming our content, which is a positive sign for Google and helps us rank higher. If our content does not respond to the purpose the user had in mind then the user will leave more quickly, returning to Google to ask the same question again. Google tracks this action as well and sees this action (back clicking) as negative which causes us to fall lower in the rankings, losing traffic.

Ultimately, responding to searcher intent within our content leads to a better user experience, better performing content, and better rankings within Google. So, always ensure your content is planned according to the searcher intent behind the keyword.

In our keyword research process (which we review in depth below) we will help you understand how to identify what the intention behind a keyword is *before* writing your content and how to plan that intention into your content.

Latent Semantic Indexing (in search)

Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) is a practice that search engines like Google use to identify what keywords, phrases, and expressions used within content correlate with specific SEO keywords and the search intent behind them.

The goal with latent semantic indexing is for search engines to identify content that responds full to the intention behind a search keyword even if the content doesn't use that specific keyword within the content. Google performs latent semantic indexing by comparing multiple documents on a single topic and assessing the other keywords, besides the target keyword, that pop up constantly. The result is Google has an understanding of what additional topics and ideas must be covered for a piece of content to fully address a topic.

LSI keywords can be identified for a specific keyword search by looking at the “related searches” section as well as the “people also ask” section and looking at what words pop up in the autocomplete section.

Bloggers can use LSI keywords by adding them, and sufficiently covering their topic, within their content to ensure they are fully covering the original topic and also answering the reader's follow on questions.

LSI is an important development to pay attention to as it is in its infancy and will continue to alter how SEO is tactically executed in the future.

E-A-T (Expertise-Authoritativeness-Trustworthiness)

In recent Google algorithm updates, Google has expressed more of a concern about not just presenting the most relevant results, but also presenting the most *accurate* results especially in categories that it deemed important to “Your Money or Your Life” (e.g., health, financial issues, and safety). To screen for correctness and accuracy, Google now measures sites on E-A-T – expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness – as sites that are recognized as exuding these three traits are expected to provide more correct, accurate, and expert information. This is Google's way of protecting users from low-quality content.

For more information read the Google Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines

<https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/guidelines.raterhub.com/en//searchqualityevaluatorguidelines.pdf>

The Google Algorithm and Updates

The Google Algorithm is the algorithm that powers Google's search, dictating how sites across the internet are ranked. No single engineer knows the entire Google algorithm and most of how the algorithm works are kept secret by Google.

What you *should* be aware of are the Google algorithm updates. Though the Google algorithm is constantly updated, once or twice a year a major update is made to the algorithm which dramatically shifts how sites are ranked and which sites maintain or lose their positions. Notable updates have been the Medic update, the Penguin update, the Hummingbird update, the BERT update and the Mobile update. I highly recommend reading up on those five Google updates to get a vague idea of what major Google updates are (and the chaos they can cause if you don't play by the rules).

With any Google update, regardless of how your site fairs out, you should continue writing good, engaging content that responds to your user's intentions and stays aware of the updates and the changes in prioritizes that Google signals are valuable.

For instance, past updates have targeted PBNs (private blogging networks) and de-ranked sites that use them for blackhat SEO tactics, prioritized the mobile user experience as a factor in ranking, prioritized SSL as a factor in ranking, prioritized site speed as a factor in ranking, and countless other major changes that bloggers had to respond to or risk losing their Google Traffic. To be fair, all of these mentioned updates prioritized factors that made for a better user experience and were well worth responding to.

What is the takeaway on Google Algorithm Updates?

You will never understand the entire Google algorithm, but paying attention to Google Algorithm updates will help you adapt, evolve, and survive in the blogging industry. Ultimately, focus on delivering a good user experience, deliver higher quality than competitors, and continue writing content and you will perform well in the long run.

"The Google Sandbox"

To ensure that *only* expert, authoritative, and trustworthy sites (E-A-T) are ranked in Google, Google (unofficially) applies a "sandbox period" to all new websites. The "Google Sandbox" is a period that all sites must pass through in which, it has been observed, no matter what the site writes or does it cannot rank within Google, while it is allowed to test itself and play – similar to a sandbox a child would play in, or a development sandbox in the coding and tech world.

Not much is "officially" known about this sandbox period except that it usually lasts for roughly 8 months and during that period it is extremely difficult for a new site to rank in Google search. After this period, with good SEO, the traffic should pour in.

Though the first 8 months of your blog's existence may not see the traffic you should still apply good SEO practices (SEO keyword research and optimization) from Day 1.

Stepped rankings (Patent on Google Rankings)

“Stepped rankings” is an unofficial concept that has frequently been observed in SEO wherein Google gradually ranks a specific post for keywords, testing them against search results positions and adapting the searches that the content shows up in gradually. As a result, it can take 9 months or more to achieve peak traffic for most posts. This patent and the idea behind it are the main arguments behind the idea that the Google Sandbox *does* in fact exist.

You can read more about this in US Patent: US6285999B1 (<https://patents.google.com/patent/US6285999B1/en>)

Search snippets + snippet worthy optimization

A search snippet is a short excerpt of content that sometimes appears as a preview at the top of Google SERP results. These search snippets generally contain eye-catching imagery or formatting which makes the click-through rates *much* higher than normal results.

To rank for search snippets, content requires structured formatting, both technical (schema data formatting) and general formatting (short answers that are structured for brief or bulleted answers).

Common Google snippets are FAQs, product previews, and answer excerpts to question queries in searches.

SEO Keyword Research

SEO Keyword research is the process of identifying and vetting low competition keywords with high volume that can be used for writing content that meets your site's purpose *or* researching to identify SEO keywords of strategic importance.

Additionally, full SEO keyword research can include identifying the search intent behind a search term, identifying latent semantic indexing phrases and opportunities, benchmarking against competitor content, and framing content for a specific SEO keyword based on searcher intent and competition.

Longtail keywords

Longtail keywords are keywords that fall in the “long tail” of the graphed search demand curve and generally receive fewer searchers but benefit from being much lower competition than higher volume keywords and having much clearer search intent at first glance compare to

broad keywords. For example, “Wines” vs. “Red California wines” with “Red California Wines” being the longtail keyword.

Longtail keywords also tend to be longer in length, generally, 4 words or longer, making them more niche-specific and allowing us to better understand searcher intent.

In the end, Longtail Keywords make much better targets for writing content that performs well as there is a clearer intention that we can respond to and generally lower competition, making them a mutually beneficial option to write on (for our site and our readers).

Internal Linking

Internal linking is the process of linking from a specific blog post *on your site* to another blog post or page that is *still* on your site. Internal linking is a great tool for keeping readers on your site longer by guiding them to a post responding to their next likely question.

External Linking + Do-Follow + No Follow

External linking is the act of linking from a post on your site to anywhere else on the internet. These links can be marked as rel= “nofollow.”

If a link is marked with the rel= “nofollow”, the tag signals to Google and other search engines not to crawl the link or associate the site with your site. As a result, “nofollow” links pass little or no “link juice” and do not recognize the linked site as an authority page.

If there is no rel=“nofollow” tag, the link is likely “Do Follow” passing link juice and recognizing the external site as an authority.

Domain Authority and Page Authority

“Domain Authority” is a metric provided by the SEO company Moz in an attempt to quantify how much authority a specific site or page has as perceived by Google and, all other elements being equal, how likely one page is to rank against another page, with higher DA or PA representing higher authority.

How Writing Exhaustive and Engaging Articles Helps SEO

Writing exhaustive and engaging content keeps users on your site longer and is more likely to answer all of the searcher's questions (or as many as possible) in one visit. Both of these actions add up to improved SEO performance, higher rankings in Google, and more traffic from Google.

Exhaustive content not only answers the user's first question but also answers logical follow-on questions and guides the reader to the next logical piece of content, whether on your website or elsewhere. Whenever a user clicks a Google search result, Google tracks how long users stay on the clicked website and how long until the user returns to Google for the same query or a different query. If a user takes longer to return to Google and ask another question or doesn't return to Google because their question was full answered along with the logical follow-on questions, Google recognizes your site as an authority on the keyword (and topic) that responds appropriately to searcher intent and pushes you higher in the rankings.

Ultimately, writing exhaustive content better serves the user and improves your content's performance in Google search results.

Engaging content serves the same purpose, keeping the user on your site longer, sending positive signals to Google (that users find your content useful), and improving your post's performance in the Google rankings. Making content engaging serves to improve exhaustive content by not only making the content informative but also structuring it such that it keeps the user's attention.

You can make your content engaging by making the formatting user friendly (short paragraphs broken up by headers and graphics), balancing text with media (adding images and video), using emotion-inducing and engaging language (i.e., emotion-inducing keywords), and structuring the flow of your content in a way that is conducive to digesting easily and keeping the reader's attention (captivating introduction, body, conclusion, hooking the reader's attention, foreshadowing, etc.).

Good content should be both exhaustive and engaging because keeping the reader entertained and, on your site, serves your audience, improves the engagement metrics that matter to Google, and builds rapport with your readers in the long term.

SEO Keywords and Low Competition Keywords: What They Are and Why They Matter

“SEO keywords” or “SEO keyphrases” are the heart of SEO. As we reviewed earlier, keywords are those words or phrases that users search for in Google or any other search engine in hopes of finding a post or article that responds to their needs.

Because users aim to find content based on their keywords, as bloggers aiming to have our content found through Google, we must design our content to respond to these keywords and the intentions, questions, and problems behind the searches for these keywords.

Now, just writing about an SEO keyword alone isn't enough to rank in Google. Many keywords, that get tons of searches and drive mounds of traffic, are known and targeted by many websites aiming to garner that traffic. As a result, there are too many good content options available for those keywords making the keywords “high competition.” When the ranking websites for a keyword on page 1 of Google have a high “Domain Authority,” (DA) essentially signaling the site as a whole has lots of backlinks and respect from Google, we deem that as a “high competition keyword.”

Because bloggers generally work with minimal resources and limited time and energy it is more worth our time to target lower competition SEO keywords that aren't targeted by many writers, that aren't written on well enough for the content authoritative, and don't have existing articles on the keyword from sites with high DA. By aiming for low competition keywords, our content ranks more easily in Google (with less marketing and fewer backlinks) and quickly.

With good keyword research, we find these low competition keywords and gain SEO traffic in the easiest way possible.

Low competition keywords.

These will be the bread and butter of our SEO success.

Understanding What Makes a *Good*, Low Competition SEO Keywords

Targeting low competition SEO keywords is the quickest way to blogging success no matter how big, how small, or how established your blog is. Strategically picking low competition keywords – keywords that are either not well addressed in existing content or are only written on by sites with less authority than our sites have – is the path to having your content rank higher and more quickly.

Additionally, low competition SEO keywords require significantly less effort to rank highly for them in Google SERP.

High competition keywords generally require a very well-optimized post that responds thoroughly to the searcher intent with 2500+ words and several backlinks. Beyond the resources, time, and energy it takes to produce competitive content, it can take up to 8 months for your content to move up the ranks in Google and receive the maximum monthly traffic it will receive.

Low competition keywords that I frequently write on generally require no backlinks and my site can rank highly (on page one of Google) for them in less than a day, which is common if your site is recognized as an authority site on the topic.

In the end, identifying low competition keywords to drive your content is the quickest, lowest effort option for significant SEO traffic.

So, let's review the criteria for a good, low-competition keyword.

What Makes an SEO Keyword Low Competition?

- **Few high authority sites ranking on page 1 of the search results (minimum 2 sites with lower "DA" than yours, with unoptimized content (on-page optimization) and you can out "skyscraper"**
- **No external links to the content on SERP for the target keywords**
- **Page 1 results in Google lack on-page optimization for the keyword**
 - a. Other – Geography of your content and your audience
 - b. Your relative authority with Google, and across the internet

Few high authority sites ranking on page 1 of the search results – based on Moz’s “DA” and “PA”

A site’s “authority” is commonly measured by Moz’s “Domain Authority” (DA) and “Page Authority” (PA) and is how recognized the site is as a solid source of information by other websites, recognized by the number of backlinks it has, and the number of backlinks it has from high authority sites.

If the “DA” of a site on page 1 of the Google search results is lower than your site’s DA, it will be easier to overtake that search result’s position. If the DA is higher, it will be more difficult, requiring more backlinks to your specific post and lots of time before overtaking the result in the rankings, if at all possible.

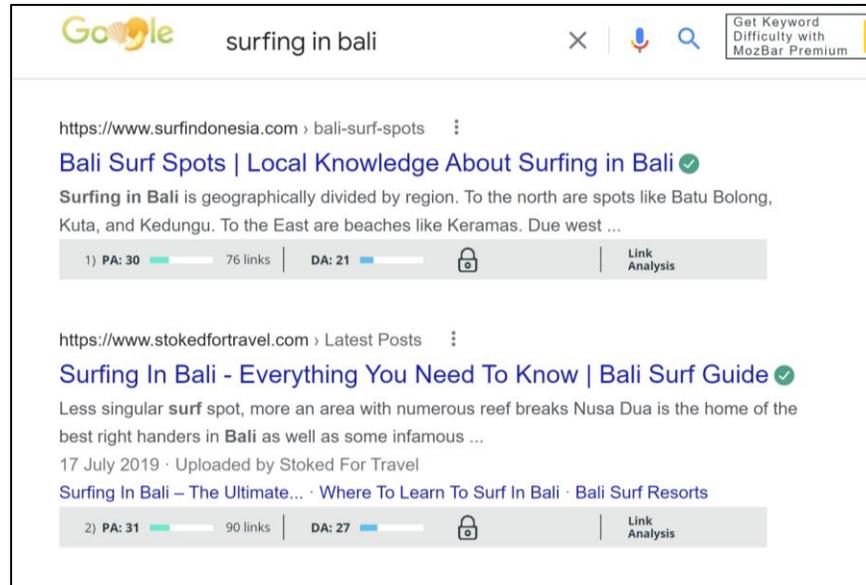
Keysearch offers a fantastic view of Google Page 1 stats, highlighting the DA for each page along with the other on page optimization metrics

The screenshot shows the Keysearch interface for the search term "surf blog". The main table displays SERP analysis results with columns for URL, PA, DA, Doms, DomsD, Auth, Links, and URL. The right sidebar shows a list of keywords with their respective Volume, CPC, PPC, and Score.

URL	PA	DA	Doms	DomsD	Auth	Links	URL
https://www.surfer.com/blogs/...	36	67	10	6245	73	48834	No
https://lushpalm.com/surf-travel-blog...	29	37	4	1002	2	19	No
https://blog.feedspot.com/surf_blogs/...	46	65	17	46076	14	53	Yes
https://www.sea-lifts.com/blog/top-50...	22	22	2	248	NA	23	Yes
https://surfexpedition.com/surf-trave...	23	27	8	116	2	122	No
https://catchsurf.com/blogs/catch-sur...	35	38	23	1563	2136	36295	Yes
https://sonofabea.ch/...	28	14	42	95	185	309	No
https://www.theadventurejunkies.com/b...	33	52	5	4728	2	934	No
https://www.surfholidays.com/blog/top...	28	45	1	2092	NA	20	No
https://www.beginnersurfgear.com/top...	22	22	1	373	NA	12	Yes

Keywords 699	Volume	CPC	PPC	Score
surf blog	720	3.28	0.03	26
indoek surf shacks	170	1.11	0.72	Check
surf lifestyle blog	50	0	0.03	20
best surf blogs	40	0	0.01	Check
surf travel blog	30	0	0.02	Check
surf bloggers	720	3.28	0.03	25
surf blogs australia	20	0	0.08	Check
surfer magazine	14800	1.26	0.87	53
surfing blogs australia	20	0	0.08	Check
maui surf blog	480	2.09	0	21

Additionally, using the Moz toolbar plugin to interlay DA/PA data into the Google SERP results of page 1 and beyond is another solid approach to assessing keyword competition.



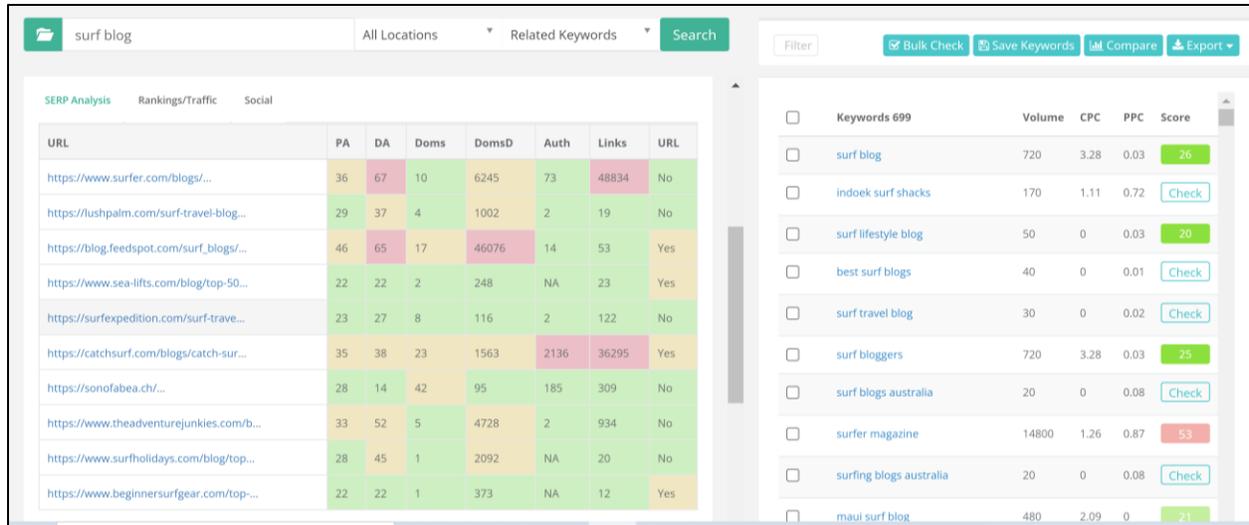
To ensure that you are not aiming for a keyword whose search results are already dominated by high authority players, ensure that there are at least two results in the SERP results with lower DA than yours and few (less than five) links to the articles. If your blog is new with a low DA, aim for having two results on page 1 with DA numbers under 20.

To find out the DA of results in SERP, download the free Moz toolbar plugin for chrome and follow the instructions to enable the Moz data that shows DA, PA, and number of links under each SERP result

Page 1 results in Google's lack on-page optimization for the keyword: The posts/pages in Google results lack the keywords in the URL, headers, paragraphs, meta description, or title.

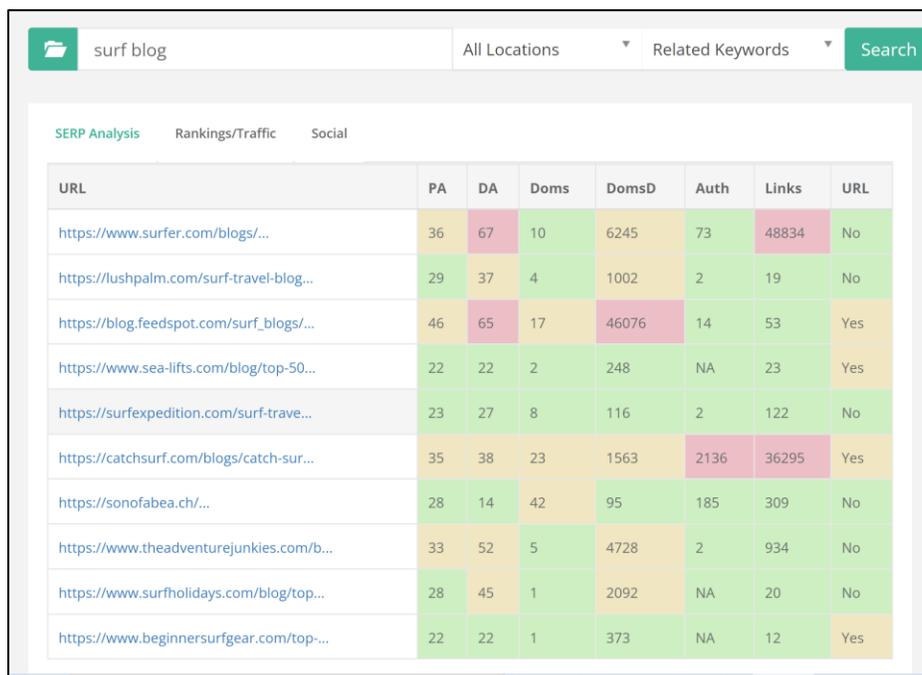
Finally, check that the current page 1 SERP results are under-optimized for the targeted keyword. A piece of content with good on-page optimization will have the keyword in all of the following sections.

- URL
- Title
- Meta description
- H2 or H3 header
- Once in the paragraph text of the first 100 words, and 2 other times in the remainder of the text



If a result is missing optimization for the keyword in two or more of those areas, it stands a good chance of being overtaken by a well-written, well-optimized post that appropriately addresses searcher intent.

To check for on-page optimization, you can review each page 1 SERP result manually but, this is time-consuming. Instead, I recommend using an SEO tool that displays a keyword’s competition difficulty rating and displays how well the page 1 results are optimized on-page. For this, I highly recommend Keysearch as it is the easiest to use, user-friendly, and is inexpensive enough for new bloggers to afford. As your blog matures and income increases, consider SEMRush for its keyword search volume filtering features.



Criteria For a Low Competition, Viable SEO Keyword

- Search Volume is ideally 500 searches per month minimum or 100 searches per month minimum for an extremely low competition keyword or a high-value keyword (ad optimized, buyer intent, etc.)
- The page 1 results in Google have at least two results with a lower domain authority (DA) number than yours and few/no backlinks to the article – signifying they will be easily overtaken. If you have a new site, aim for two results to have a DA under 20
- The results in Google search are poorly optimized for the keyword, checked via SEO research tool or manually as follows:
 - a. Lacks keyword in URL
 - b. Lacks keyword in the title
 - c. Lacks keyword in the meta description
 - d. The keyword is not in any headers
 - e. The keyword does not appear in the first 100 words of the post or does not appear three times in the text
 - f. Some of the content in the Google page 1 results are misaligned with the searcher intent
 - g. Note: Use the Google searches “Allintitle” and “AllinURL” to assess on-page optimization without any SEO tools

If you're checking manually, save yourself some trouble and use the “ctrl+F” on the page search function

Understanding Searcher Intent: What It Is, and How to Research It for An SEO Keyword

What is Searcher Intent

Searcher intent is one of *the* most important and trending elements in SEO today, and it shows no chance of going away.

For every single search made via Google, initiated by searching a key phrase the users entering that search has an intention; generally, to answer a question, to solve a problem, or to find information on a specific topic. That intention behind the search tends to be similar and shared between most searchers of that specific search.

These days, Google heavily weighs searcher intent, and how well a piece of content responds to it, in which piece of content is ranked highest in the Google search results.

For instance, if we did not look at the Google results, the searched key phrase “sushi rice” could have several possible searcher intents behind it. The searcher could be looking for a history of sushi rice, a definition of sushi rice, a place to purchase sushi rice online, pictures of sushi rice, or an explanation of what sushi rice is among hundreds of other potential options.

However, Google makes it a point to analyze the behavior of users as they click through search results and either return to Google or stay on the post for the SERP result longer, to identify the most common searcher intent and align *most of* the search results in Google to that keyword.

As a result of this, if we search “sushi rice” in Google, all 10 of the page 1 results are recipes on how to make sushi rice.

This reveals that the intention of most users searching the term “sushi rice” is to find a recipe so that they can make sushi rice.

This also reveals the easiest way to identify searcher intent for a target keyword – searching the keyword in Google and analyzing results.

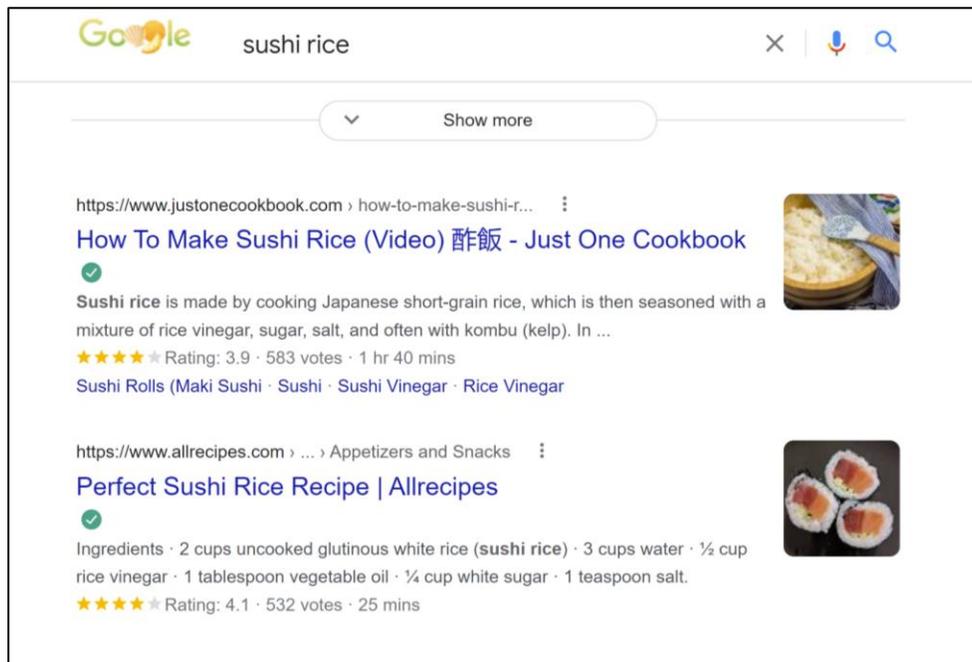
Step 1: Identify an SEO keyword’s searcher intent by searching the keyword in Google and analyzing the results, but answer the next question too.

When we are in the process of planning and framing our content and posts, we should always determine the searcher intent, as well as the content components (sub-topics, headlines, FAQs), that we will need to fully address search intent for a keyword.

To identify the search intent behind a keyword, simply go to Google, search the keyword, and read through the titles and meta descriptions of the page one results as we did with our sushi

rice example. Then, ask yourself, “what do all of these results have in common?”, and then analyze the commonalities to discover the searcher’s intent.

In the case of searching for “sushi rice”, all of the results on page one are clearly recipes so the most common searcher’s intention was to *learn how to cook sushi rice*.



Responding appropriately to the intention to learn how to cook sushi rice, a good article would not only teach the user how to make sushi rice (via a recipe) but anticipate the needs that follow knowing a recipe and guide the user through whatever is necessary to make the best sushi rice possible.

By adding this extra information, aligned with the searcher intent but going beyond it, we deliver more value than the reader needs, keeping the reader on our page longer, which is a signal to Google that our content is authoritative and what the reader needs – leading to higher rankings in Google.

Once You’ve analyzed the intent behind a keyword, use the intention of the understanding to make the content a step further to *fully* respond to the intention.

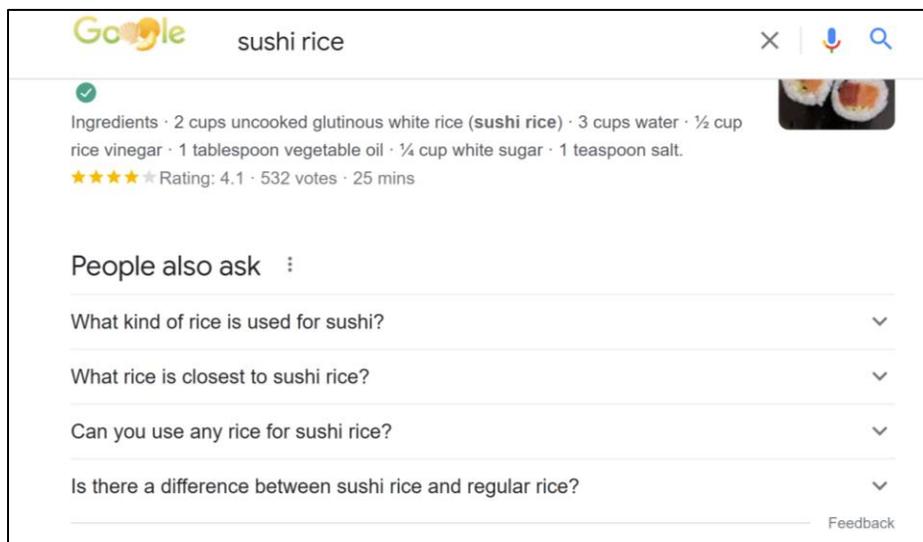
Continuing with our “sushi rice” search example, at minimum we will need to deliver a well-optimized sushi rice recipe to appropriately satisfy user intent.

But we can ask ourselves, what else will our reader need?

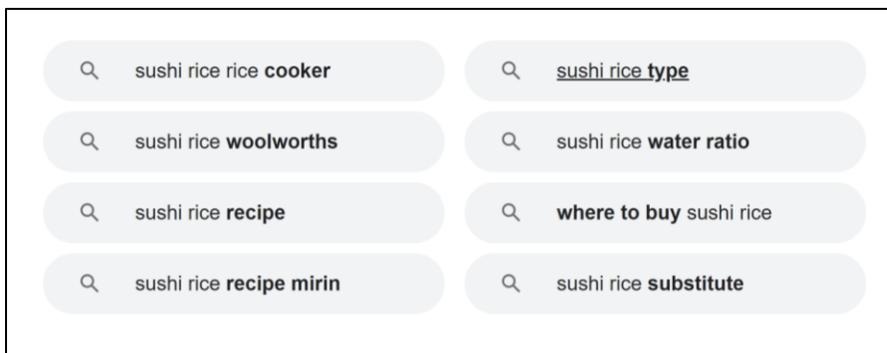
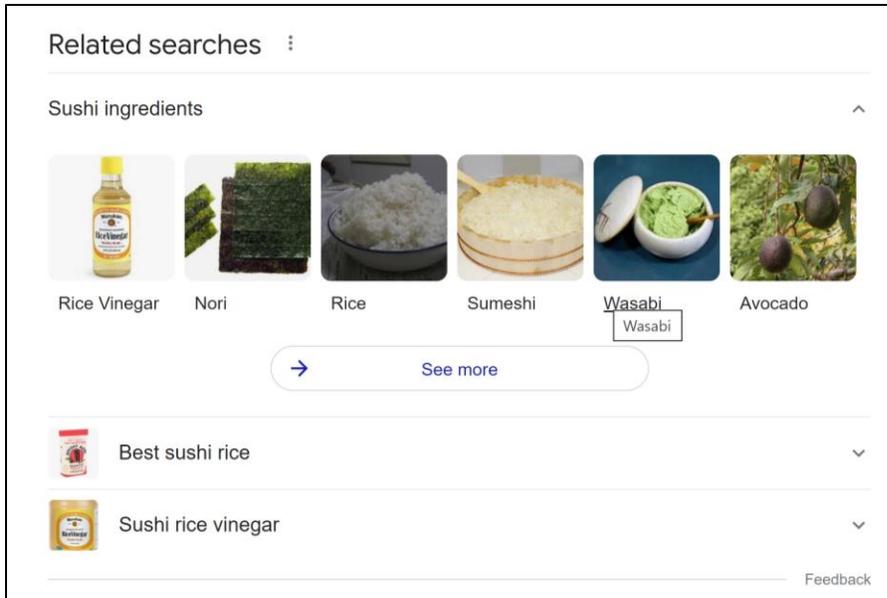
The reader may need to know how to prep her tools, how to choose a rice cooker, what rice is the best to use and where to buy it, tips for beginners making rice, and perhaps ideas of what to do with leftover rice.

To respond to the follow on questions, we can leverage LSI to better respond to search intent by using the LSI keywords in the “people also ask” and “related search” sections to find closely related keywords for subtopics, thus comprehensively covering the topic and search intent behind the keyphrase “sushi rice.”

In the Google results, we can use the “People also ask” section as a source of FAQs and additional topics to write about in the post that align with the searcher's intent.



We can also look at the page one search results section “Searches related to sushi rice” (at the bottom of the page) to see the other topics that people commonly search before or after searching “sushi rice”. This helps us identify other potential sections of the content we can include in our article to make it more robust and respond fully to the searcher’s intent.



Now that we’ve taken plenty of information from page one of Google results to analyze the intent behind a search, we can click into each of the page one results to get an idea of the content sections that we’ll need to cover to fully address the searcher intent above and beyond the existing search results.

Step 2: Frame Your Articles Based on the Top 10 SERPs to address the basics of search intent for the keyword (aka Content Benchmarking)

Addressing searcher intent in our content goes beyond simply writing on the same general topic as the other results or creating the same type of post (e.g., recipe, listicle, how to, informative article, etc.). We must also ensure the sub-topics within the overall topic driving the searcher intent are addressed.

In the case of the “sushi rice” example, each of the page one results is sushi rice recipes, but clicking through the top 10 results shows sections on ingredients, tips for varying the outcome of the rice, explanations of what sushi rice is, recommendations for the best types of sushi rice, step by step tutorials, videos, nutrition breakdowns, and more. All of these elements are potentially required to answer *all* of the user’s questions driving the search about “sushi rice.”



By clicking through and reviewing the section headers of the sushi rice recipes we learn that the best performing results (that we assume address search intent well because the result *is* on page 1 of the Google SERPs) explain what sushi rice is, the best ingredients to use, straight forward recipes in different formats (text and video), health information, and more. We should take away from this that any good post responding to this keyword should have most of these sections to be competitive and have all to be over the top.

What does this look like in action?

First, after lightly reviewing searcher intent by scanning page one of the Google results, write out an outline of your potential article on the keyword including all sections and topics to cover based on your own knowledge and experience.

Then, click through all of the results on page one of that Google search scanning the headlines of each section. Write down any topics or subtopics that you may have missed and add them to your outline.

Done. You now have an outline for an article that fully addresses searcher intent and is setting you up to rank easily and quickly for low competition keywords.

This practice is called “content benchmarking”, specifically for search intent – as you benchmark your content against the existing, ranking content and improve it accordingly

An important note on “content benchmarking”, maintaining your integrity as a writer, and avoiding plagiarism:

I recommend writing outlines for posts, including content sections and FAQs, before benchmarking content against existing posts.

First, this helps maintain a unique own style of writing and flow throughout the content before adulterating our own ideas with the ideas from other content.

Second, this helps maintain our own integrity in writing – we should use existing content as a guide to understanding searcher intent, but under no conditions should we copy or plagiarize, out of respect for our fellow bloggers and out of respect for our own content.

By putting our ideas on paper first and then making them more robust by comparing them to the thoughts of others, we improve our own ideas (and content) instead of stealing and copying the efforts of others.

Tips For Going Over the Top With “Searcher Intent” In SEO

Be honest with yourself about whether you can write good content for the target keyword based on searcher intent

Before you even start writing the article, be honest with yourself and ask “can I write an article that is significantly better than the existing content?”

At times, we may record a keyword thinking the content will address one topic, but the searcher intent is actually something very different than what we had in mind.

For instance, with the search phrase “sushi rice” that we discussed, if we were ready to write a dissertation on the evolution of sushi rice, but all users want is a simple recipe, we would need to stop and ask ourselves, “am I capable of writing for the *actual* searcher intent?” If the answer is no, it’s ok, just push the keyword aside and move on to a keyword that you can write stellar content on, in line with the searcher’s intent.

How to Go Further with Searcher Intent: Answer the next question and related questions.

As you write your article based on the outline you created from brainstorming and benchmarking, ask yourself, “what questions will the reader have next?” and aim to respond to them in your article. Good content answers the user’s question. Great content answers *all* of the user’s questions. This is where the LSI keywords and FAQs in the “people also ask” section of Google comes in extremely handily.

You may add this extra information in the article you’re writing, or you may make a follow-on article that you funnel the reader to. In any case, answering the next question creates a better user experience which leads to higher rankings in Google.

The Essential Tools For SEO: Keysearch/SEMRush, Google Analytics, and Google Search

Good SEO is based on solid data that allows us to analyze what topics are the best to write on (based on competition and search volume), analyze how we can improve our existing content (such as CTR and impressions by making content more robust and well formatted), and analyze the competition (by clicking through to see who is on top and what value they're delivering).

To get this data and plan/adjust accordingly there are three essential tools you will need.

- **A good SEO keyword tool:** I recommend Keysearch to start and SEMRush or Ahrefs to step things up
- **Google Analytics and Google Search Console:** Free and the most powerful analytics data tool available
- **Google Search + Free Moz Toolbar Chrome Plugin:** The most transparent view into the competition for any keyword

A Closer Look at The Tools You Need to Succeed At SEO In Blogging

In blogging, good tools help us accelerate our progress by presenting the data we need in a more digestible way, helping us work more efficiently and more quickly. The tools that follow are *the* essential tools for blogging success.

A good SEO keyword tool: Keysearch or SEMRush

Though you could perform the same analysis manually, a good SEO keyword research tool will save you *hours* of analysis by presenting easy to read difficulty ratings for a keyword, suggesting related keywords, providing monthly search volumes, presenting the number of results in a search for a target keyword, and even showing how well the top 10 have optimized on-page SEO for your target keyword. If you aim to make your blog a business, you *need* to purchase an SEO keyword research tool to save time and accelerate your content creation process and the growth of your blog.

I highly recommend Keysearch (the cheap one) and SEMRush or Ahrefs (the expensive ones), depending on where you are at in the blog maturity cycle.

Keysearch: A Fantastic Budget Option and Beginner Friendly SEO Keyword Research Tool

Keysearch is a fantastic tool that is insanely cheap as far as SEO keyword research tools go – only ~\$13 a month. Outside of a good theme for your site, this should be your first investment if you intend to run lean.

For beginners, Keysearch is perfect as its keyword data presentation is great for getting you acclimated to understanding SEO. The color-coded presentation of the top 10 results for your target keyword and how well each is optimized is 50% of what you need to assess a keyword's suitability as a low competition keyword and makes the selection process easy.

The screenshot shows the Keysearch interface for the search term 'surf blog'. The interface includes a search bar, filters for 'All Locations' and 'Related Keywords', and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, there are tabs for 'SERP Analysis', 'Rankings/Traffic', and 'Social'. The main content area is divided into two sections: a table of top 10 results and a list of related keywords.

URL	PA	DA	Doms	DomsD	Auth	Links	URL
https://www.surfer.com/blogs/...	36	67	10	6245	73	48834	No
https://lushpalm.com/surf-travel-blog...	29	37	4	1002	2	19	No
https://blog.feedspot.com/surf_blogs/...	46	65	17	46076	14	53	Yes
https://www.sea-lifts.com/blog/top-50...	22	22	2	248	NA	23	Yes
https://surfexpedition.com/surf-trave...	23	27	8	116	2	122	No
https://catchsurf.com/blogs/catch-sur...	35	38	23	1563	2136	36295	Yes
https://sonofabea.ch/...	28	14	42	95	185	309	No
https://www.theadventurejunkies.com/b...	33	52	5	4728	2	934	No
https://www.surfholidays.com/blog/top...	28	45	1	2092	NA	20	No
https://www.beginnersurfgear.com/top...	22	22	1	373	NA	12	Yes

The right-hand side of the interface shows a list of related keywords with columns for 'Keywords 699', 'Volume', 'CPC', 'PPC', and 'Score'. The list includes keywords like 'surf blog', 'indoek surf shacks', 'surf lifestyle blog', 'best surf blogs', 'surf travel blog', 'surf bloggers', 'surf blogs australia', 'surfer magazine', 'surfing blogs australia', and 'maui surf blog'. Each keyword has a 'Check' button next to it.

SEMRush and Ahrefs: Perfect Tools for Identifying Low Competition Keywords and Great “Advanced Blogger” Tools

Once you have a handle on SEO, I highly recommend stepping up from Keysearch to SEMRush or Ahrefs to make it even easier to find ultra-low competition keywords.

Warning: DO NOT use Google AdWords as your SEO keyword tool. If you do, you are impinging your performance from the beginning using this tool because of the following reasons.

- Search volumes aren't accurate enough to plan on any single keyword
- There are no difficulty levels provided for keywords

- This tool was designed for ad buyers, not content creators, and the data is structured/edited accordingly

The *worst* mistake I made as a beginner blogger was attempting to use Google AdWords as my SEO keyword research tool. Once I purchased a true SEO keyword research tool (Keysearch at \$13 per month) I immediately saw my content perform better in search engines as the data I was using for decisions was far better in Keysearch. **DO NOT USE GOOGLE ADWORDS AS AN SEO KEYWORD RESEARCH TOOL!!!**

Google Analytics and Google Search Console

Free and the most powerful analytics data tools available for blogging and SEO

Google Analytics is one of the most powerful tools for SEO. This data analytics tool is completely free and provided by Google. To use Google Analytics, all you have to do is set up your Google Analytics account, and embed a short script into the header (or footer) of your website and Google Analytics begins tracking data from your site (pages visited, time on page, entry and exit pages, etc.).

The Google Search Console platform exports key data from Google's search activities related to your site (e.g., associated keywords, impressions, clicks, etc.).

After setting up and connecting both your Google Analytics you will have a powerful set of data from within your and from outside of your site to analyze.

Whereas a good keyword research tool (like Keysearch or SEMRush or Ahrefs) can help you analyze keywords and design good content going in, Google Analytics and Google Search Console are excellent tools for analyzing in hindsight. This data about how *your* content is performing helps you figure out what is going right, what is going wrong, and how to adapt your content for the best possible path forward.

For most successful blogs and niches, it is very much possible to write 300 pieces of content and use the Google Analytics/Search Console data to console refresh content and grow traffic and audiences to a single, very successful, high-paying blog.

Google Search + the Moz Toolbar Plugin for Chrome Browser

The most transparent view into the competition for any keyword

Plain old Google search. The Google search engine sees 40% of the internet's traffic and is a powerful tool on its own for keyword brainstorming and research, competitor analysis for specific keywords, and understanding searcher intent. Though there are some powerful tools out there for SEO research, simply using Google is my favorite for all three of these.

My favorite uses of Google for SEO:

- Using Google autosuggest and the “alphabet soup method” to brainstorm keywords during keyword research while identifying what users are *actually* searching in Google
- Using related searches to brainstorm keywords
- Identifying FAQs for a keyword search
- Analyzing Google snippets and using structured data for specific queries
- Understanding searcher intent based on the titles and meta descriptions of competitors
- Clicking through page one competitor content to benchmark my own content outlines against what works
- Using the “Searches related to...” feature to identify closely related topics and LSI keywords
- Using the Moz toolbar results data (added to Google searches) to assess the authoritativeness of the top 10 search results for a keyword and assess the competitiveness
- Analyzing competitor Meta Descriptions and Titles to improve Click Through Rate of my own pages

Action Items for This Section

- Understand the Elements of SEO: SEO Keywords, On-Page SEO, SERP CTR, Internal Links, and External Links
- Understand the criteria for a good, low competition SEO keyword

Technical SEO For Beginners: Optimizing Your Site for Speed, Search Indexing, and User Experience

Everything up until now in this book regarding SEO has aimed at the elements of your content that people can read – headlines, content, keywords, search results, etc.

Now we'll focus on technical SEO. Technical SEO aims to optimize all of the “non-text” elements of your blog making it easier to interact with (e.g., fast, mobile device friendly) and convenient for machines to interact with (e.g., search engine crawling) as well as being secure (SSL)

In this section, we'll review the major elements of technical SEO that you need to optimize for your blog are as follows:

- Site Speed
- Establishing a sitemap for easy search engine indexing by crawling via “spiders”
- Applying Schema.org structured data (schema markup language) to appropriate elements of your site
- Securing your site with SSL
- Optimizing design for mobile experience on various sized devices (responsive design)
- Handling duplicate content and URL redirects with 301 and 307 URL redirects and fixing broken links (404 errors)

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Site speed or a site's load time is a huge component of user experience on your site and an important factor in Google for ranking. Optimize your plugins, WordPress theme, and hosting for the fastest page possible and more traffic from Google.
 - SSL (HTTPS) is a must for your site and can be arranged by contacting your hosting provider
 - Regularly clean up broken links and use a plugin to track inbound links (to your site) that don't exist
-

Site Speed

Though all elements of technical SEO are equally important for your site to be found and recognized by search engine crawlers and for users to have a good experience on your site, site speed is the most variable element of technical SEO and bears significantly on how your posts and site overall do in the Google rankings.

Why site speed matters

- Google heavily weights site speed on mobile and desktop as a factor in Google rankings
- 40% of users will click off of a page that takes more than 2 seconds to load

How to Check the Page speed on Your site with the Google Page Speed Insights Tool and GTMetrix

Go to the Google Page Speed Insights tool

(<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>) and run a test on the page speed insights score of the mobile and desktop versions of your home page and several of the posts.

In the results, note your page speed insights score. There is a lot more data available than just the Page Speed Insights score, but we'll start by sticking to that score as an assessment to keep it simple.

What to Aim for with Site Speed: 50+ on Mobile and Desktop minimum, 80+ optimally

A page speed load time of less than 1 second is *the* gold standard within the blogging and SEO industries.

For the Google Page Speed Insights (PSI) score, a minimum score of 50+ on mobile and on the desktop is necessary to avoid being outranked in Google solely due to site speed.

Though a 50+ page speed insights score on mobile and desktop should keep you safe, aim for a score of 80+ as an 80 PSI score is in the top 5% of sites for performance.

Note that it is *much* easier to achieve a high Page Speed score on desktop than on mobile. As such, Google weights the mobile page speed insights score more into rankings than it does the desktop score, partly due to Google's newer "mobile-first" focus, so focus your efforts accordingly.

What can be optimized on your site?

The elements of a site that contribute to bloat and slow performance are easily identifiable and usually fall into one of four categories

- Images
 - Plugins (switching to “lighter-weight” plugins)
 - Plugins (adding plugins that optimize site performance)
 - Theme (bloated code)
 - Hosting
-

Optimizing Images for Site Speed

For new bloggers, optimizing images (shrinking their file size) before uploading them to the site is one of the main contributors to bloat and slow page speed.

It is highly recommended to optimize images before uploading to your site. Aim for a file size of fewer than 100kb per image.

For image optimization online I recommend the free bulk photo optimizer and Web Resizer

(<https://bulk.webresizer.com/>)

Offline, the Irfanview open-sourced image tool is an excellent way to optimize photos, individually or in bulk. Download Irfanview for free to get started today.

For images already on your site, the EWWW Image Optimizer plugin is an excellent way to bulk optimize images already on your site. If you have never run the image optimizer then install and activate the plugin and run an optimization process twice, one hour between instances, and then remove the plugin. Reinstall and run the EWWW Image Optimizer plugin occasionally to optimize images and remove image bloat

Switch to “lighter-weight” plugins and Remove Bloated Plugins

As new bloggers, or bloggers anxious for more functionality in our sites, it is often difficult to know specifically which plugins are best, and some plugins may carry more bloat than others.

Beware of social media plugins, image animation plugins (e.g., sliders), anti-spam plugins, and generally bloated plugins (e.g., Akismet, Jetpack) that consume lots of processing resources with little gain. In our checklist below, we'll recommend all of the plugins you need for peak performance and optimization

Add plugins that optimize site performance

Caching plugins, minification plugins, and auto-optimization all make our site faster by making the script shorter, static, and more accessible.

Below, we'll recommend all of the plugins you need to help increase how quickly your site loads

Hosting

The final element, and potentially the most damaging is hosting. If the servers at your hosting provider are slow, no matter what you do the ceiling for how fast your site can be will only be so high.

Once you've optimized your site's speed in the other three ways, if your traffic and income warrant it, your only hope for a faster site is to move to better hosting.

On my websites, I intentionally start on cheaper web hosting (that is naturally slower) and as my sites turn a profit, I migrate them to my favorite premium hosting for a speed boost.

BigScoots, which provides premium managed hosting, is my provider of choice at the moment for the fast server response and optimizing the page speed for my site.

My Experience with The Page Speed Optimization Process To Follow

The process of manually optimizing my site for speed by adding and deleting plugins made an immense difference in load times and Google Page Speed Insights scores, and the entire process took less than 30 minutes of active work. The following are the results of optimizing my first site for speed, with no adverse/other effects on the site (besides removing comments).

1. Before manual optimization: Google Page speed 8 on Mobile, 18 on Desktop ((before Bigscoots move)

2. After manual optimization: Google Page speed 53 on Mobile, 94 on Desktop (before Bigscoots move)
3. After manual optimization: Google Page speed 79 on Mobile, 97 on Desktop (after Bigscoots move)
4. After turning on Ezoic Site Speed Accelerator 95 on Mobile, 97+ on Desktop (same after removing sitespeed accelerator and purchasing + enabling the WP Rocket plugin)

Given how much site speed affects user experience and Google search rankings compared to how quickly, cheaply, and easily we can optimize, it is well worth the 30 minutes of effort to optimize our site for speed.

How To Manually Optimize Your Site for Speed: A Full Process

Step 1: Delete the heavy, unnecessary plugins, aiming to limit your site to a maximum of 10 plugins

Step 2: Add plugins that optimize and speed up your site's load time/speed

Step 3: Run an image optimization process via the EWWW WordPress plugin

Step 4: Consider upgrading to a faster theme

Step 5: Consider upgrading hosting

Step 1: Delete the heavy, unnecessary plugins, aiming to limit your site to a maximum of 10 plugins

- Delete Jetpack Plugin
 - a. Replace with Google Analytics by Jeff to enable Google Analytics script (required to generate your site's data in Google Analytics)
- or*
 - b. Manually place the Google Analytics code in the footer, vice the header for more speed, though you may miss pageviews for those who bounce before full page loads
- Delete Akismet Plugin (and turn off comments to prevent comments spamming)

- Delete Contact Form 7 Plugin (replace with a “Contact Us” page with an email address and contact info)
 - Replace your current social media share plugin with one of the following lightweight plugins:
 - a. Social Pug
 - b. Social Warfare
 - c. Monarch
-

Step 2: Add plugins that optimize and speed up your site

Install, activate, and set up the following WordPress plugins:

- Install EWWW Image Optimizer plugin, and bulk optimize all photos twice, one hour apart, then uninstall
- Install the BWP Minify plugin to minify the script
- Install Cache Enabler plugin to enable site caching
- Install Lazy Load by WP Rocket or A3 Lazy Load to lazy load images and video
- Install Autoptimize: Enable optimization of HTML, JavaScript, and CSS
- Install WP Disable:
 - a. Disable Google Maps
 - b. Remove jQuery Migrate
 - c. Minimize requests
 - d. Load Google Fonts as “Font Awesome”
- Install WPTouch Mobile Plugin to create add a separate mobile-friendly/mobile-optimized theme (Optional)

Alternatively, just purchase and install the WP Rocket plugin as it performs all of the functions we need from the plugins listed above and is the most easy to install and setup.

Step 3: Run an image optimization process

- Install EWWW image optimization plugin, run bulk optimization twice (one hour apart) then delete the plugin

Step 4: Consider upgrading to a faster theme

Some themes and the code bloat within them consume *a lot* of processing power and extend your site's load time. Consider starting with one of these lightweight themes from start to keep your blog running fast

The fastest themes for WordPress are:

- Generate Press
- Astra
- Newspaper Theme
- X Theme

Additionally, consider removing all pagebuilders from your site and instead using the Gutenberg editor (native to Wordpress) for the page building functionality. To create the gallery of recent posts without a page builder I recommend the WP Show Posts plugin.

Step 5: Consider upgrading hosting

Server response time is a significant factor in how fast your page loads. Within the Google Page Speed Insights test results for your webpage, look under the "Opportunities" section for "Reduce Server Response Time (TTFB)" as a point for improvement. If you see this notation with a red or yellow warning, your server speed is holding back your site's speed and how quickly it loads.

Don't immediately switch hosting as faster, premium hosting naturally costs more. Instead, focus on optimizing all of the other elements of your site first (plugins, images, theme, etc.) and driving traffic. Once traffic is significant (5,000 to 10,000 sessions per month) and blogging is becoming more than a hobby, consider switching to faster hosting. I moved from my former, "cheaper" hosting to Bigscots and saw a Page Speed Insights score jump of 26 points on my mobile PSI scores.

If you're having trouble improving your Mobile PSI score, look into better hosting.

The following hosting options are popular with pro bloggers and hands down the fastest on the market:

The Fastest Hosting Providers Are:

- WP Opt

- Agathon
- Big Scoots

[A Note on Programmatic Ads, Site Speed, and Effects On SEO](#)

My favorite programmatic ad networks (Ezoic, Mediavine, and AdThrive) are excellent ways to monetize your site in a passive income-producing way. These ad networks work by adding the script to your site that dynamically changes ads to adapt to different users, test layouts, test different ads, and more to optimize for higher ad revenue and user experience using automated analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. It's quite impressive.

Unfortunately, these impressive processes increase load time immensely. On the base settings with Ezoic (with no optimization and in the ad network dashboards), my Google Page speed mobile score decreased from 75 to 25, putting us far below the threshold at which we're likely to lose traffic from our site being too slow.

Fortunately, there are a handful of ways to run Ezoic or Mediavine ads *and* maintain a site speed score above 50.

[Site Speed on Mediavine: Optimize for Mobile Speed In Your Dashboard](#)

Within Mediavine, to keep your Google Page Speed Insights score above 50, simply follow the step-by-step guide above for manually optimizing your site to make sure you've done everything *on your site* that you can do.

Then, sign into the Mediavine Dashboard, go to "Settings", Click the "Ad Settings" tab, and click the box next to "Optimize Ads for Mobile Page Speed (Recommended)" to optimize your mobile ads.

Enabling optimization for mobile on the Mediavine side, and optimizing the components of your own site (as we walked through above) should push your mobile Page Speed Insights score above 50 on mobile and above 75 on desktop.

[Site Speed on Ezoic: Signup for Site Speed Accelerator](#)

On Ezoic, the process of speeding up your site is much simpler and much more effective but there is a fee for the monthly service, which I think is worthwhile.

The Ezoic Site Speed Accelerator is an *impressive* tool that does exactly what it says, and you don't even have to be part of the Ezoic Ad Network to use it.

The Site Speed Accelerator guarantees Page Speed Insights scores of 80+, and I actually saw a PSI score of 90+ consistently on my site.

The cost of using the site speed accelerator is as follows:

- 50,000 Pageviews: \$30/mo.
- 100,000 Pageviews: \$40/mo.
- 250,000 Pageviews: \$60/mo.
- 500,000 Pageviews: \$80/mo.
- 1 Million Pageviews: \$100/mo.

Note: Pricing decreases with an annual subscription

If your site is running slower than a 50 PSI score on mobile and you don't feel like optimizing for speed on your own, then this monthly subscription is well worth the money. I saw my keyword rankings and traffic from Google increase within a week of starting on Ezoic's site speed accelerator.

To use the tool, simply head over to Ezoic and signup. It will require a DNS integration (fairly quick and simple and takes less than 5 minutes to do and 24 hours to take effect). The Ezoic team will walk you through the process as well.

If you do not have the traffic numbers for Mediavine yet then I highly recommend Ezoic, even if only for this site speed tool.

Setup a Sitemap for Easy Search Engine Indexing Via “Spiders”

Sitemaps are important technical elements of a site for SEO as they literally guide search engine “spiders” (scanning software) in scanning and indexing your site, to eventually associate each post with keywords and display your site in search results. Without a sitemap, search engine crawling would rely on the hope that you have interlinked all content via internal links within your posts. Though comprehensive internal linking is a best practice that we should apply, we should still set up a sitemap for every single site we own and inform search engines of where to find that sitemap.

Sitemaps quite literally tell search engines all of the content that we have on our sites (and want to be scanned) and where it is located (by sharing the URL) to ensure each post/page is indexed and included in the search.

How to Create a Sitemap

The quickest and easiest way to create a sitemap for your site is by installing an SEO plugin that does this for you, and it is generally free. At the moment, the Rankmath SEO plugin is the plugin I recommend for generating a sitemap and for your general SEO needs. This plugin is free and I don't recommend upgrading to premium, just stick with the free version.

Rankmath will automatically generate a sitemap.

Now, you need to inform Google that your sitemap is available.

How to Have the Sitemap Indexed by Google

To register your sitemap with Google you will first need to sign up for Google Search Console and register your website as a property you own.

Once you've proven ownership of the property and had it added to your account, go to the search console sitemap page at <https://search.google.com/search-console/sitemaps> and enter the sitemap to add the new sitemap.

After you've added the sitemap, Google will routinely crawl your site at varying intervals depending on how often Google detects that you update your content.

What to Do When Your Sitemap Has Changed (When You've Added New Posts)

If you have added new posts or updated old posts and want those specific posts re-indexed quickly (crawled by search engine spiders to detect updates) then go to Google Search Console for the specific property and enter the URL in the “Inspect Any URL” box at the top of the screen.

On the following screen that displays the URL’s indexing status, click “REQUEST INDEXING” and Google will begin the process of scanning and re-indexing the new URL.

Note that if you do not request this process, Google will still *eventually* crawl your newest posts, and long as there is a link into the post from a different URL that is already in Google’s index.

Securing Your Site with SSL (HTTPS): An Absolute Requirement

In this day and age of the internet, cybersecurity threats are everywhere. Enabling a base level of security with an SSL encryption certificate is requisite – so much so that sites without SSL certificates (HTTP instead of HTTPS) are penalized in Google rankings.

In short, not having an SSL encryption certificate means that information transmitted between your site and your reader's computer is unencrypted and easily stolen by potential hackers. Installing an SSL certificate (indicated by the HTTPS in front of your URL in the browser) enables an encrypted connection between your website and your reader's device as one more layer of security.

Immediately upon setting up your hosting package and installing your site, contact customer service at your hosting company to have them help you install an SSL certificate on your site and enable HTTPS browsing.

Optimizing Design for Mobile Experience on Various Sized Devices (Responsive Design)

As of the beginning of 2020, over half of all internet traffic (53%) occurs on a mobile device, and this trend of mobile internet browsing over desktop browsing is predicted to continue growing.

For bloggers that are concerned with creating the best user experience possible, this means we should concern ourselves with ensuring users have the best experience reading and experiencing our content on any device.

Additionally, with Google's new "mobile-first" approach, ensuring your site is mobile friendly ensures you'll keep that mobile traffic (gained via Google) coming and growing.

Luckily for us, thanks to WordPress and a plethora of great themes, incorporating "responsive design" – or a website design that adjusts to the size of the device being used – is as simple as picking the right theme.

Simply ensure your theme of choice is responsive, meaning it adapts the content presentation for the device and screen size ensuring.

Additionally, follow the best practices of writing good content for mobile devices (covered in the "Writing Good Content" section of this book) that include larger text, shorter paragraphs, compressed/optimized images, and ensuring your site is "lightweight" and loads fast.

Handling Duplicate Content and URL Redirects With 301 and 307 Redirects and Fixing Broken Links (404 Errors)

Last but not least, we'll finish off this technical SEO review by maintaining the health of URLs and hyperlinks on your site by monitoring and managing broken URL errors (404 errors) with permanent URL redirects (301 redirects) and temporary URL redirects (307 redirects).

404 errors are what occurs when a user arrives at a site with a URL that has the domain of the site (example.com), but the specific post or page URL does not exist (example.com/this-page-doesn't-exist). By looking at our Google Analytics traffic or using a good redirect plugin, we can monitor for which 404 error URLs happen routinely (roughly 3 or more times in a month). If a 404 error for a single, nonexistent URL happens repeatedly it likely means that someone attempted to share a post from your site or link to your site using an incorrect link. To make use of this, and maintain a good user experience for anyone who lands on your site, simply create a 301 redirect from the incorrect URL to any piece of content that seems appropriate.

Though you could go into the code of your site and enter 301 redirects, I highly recommend using a plugin instead, as this makes the process easier to execute and manage, and most good redirect plugins monitor 404 errors for you.

I use the Redirection plugin for this task and highly recommend it.

Action Items for This Section

- Understand the key concepts and terms in SEO
 1. SEO Keywords
 2. Search CTR
 3. Time on Page
 4. Click-through rate
 5. Searcher intent
 6. Latent Semantic Indexing
 7. EAT
 8. On-page optimization
 9. The importance of time on page, related links
 10. How writing exhaustive and engaging articles helps SEO
 11. The Google Algorithm and AI
 12. Google Updates and writing for everchanging SEO

- Become familiar with the On-Page SEO Checklist
- Understand Searcher Intent, and how to discover it for a specific keyword
- Understand how to frame an article and benchmark it against the top 10 results in Google
- Understand the criteria for a good, low competition keyword
- Pick a keyword research tool / SEO research tool (Keysearch or SEMRush)
- Install the Moz toolbar for Chrome
- Manually optimize your site for site speed by deleting bloated WordPress plugins, adding WordPress plugins that optimize your site, and compressing images
- Consider upgrading to a faster theme
- Consider upgrading to premium hosting if your current service response time is too high
- Set up your site's sitemap and register it in Google Search Console
- Setup SSL encryption (HTTPS) with your hosting provider
- Ensure your theme (and site design) is responsive and optimized for mobile devices
- Scan your site for broken links and identify 404 errors on your site and fix them with 301 redirects accomplished via a URL redirection plugin

SEO Keyword Research Process

Good blogging starts with good SEO keyword research. With SEO being the best source for the long term, sustainable traffic, and success leading from small results accumulated over time, we *must* start with the natural first step of identifying low competition, longtail keywords to structure our content around.

We aim for SEO keywords to be low competition, both aiming for an SEO keyword with fewer sites writing on the keyword *and* fewer posts optimized for the keyword, as writing well-optimized content that fully addresses searcher intent ranks easily in Google and ranks quickly if the competition is low.

We also aim for SEO keywords that are longtail keywords, from the long tail of the distribution of keywords based on the number of times it is searched. We do this because these key phrases (being 3-4+ words long) help us better understand the searcher intent, and are generally lower competition by nature.

All of this talk about low competition SEO keywords *sounds* like the perfect ingredient to boost our blogs to success, however, the process of keyword research can feel daunting at first. I remember during the initial stages of writing my blog that searching for a single, low competition keyword among the billions of searches was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

Now, I have a keyword research process in which I find hundreds of low competition SEO keywords within a day, and I can easily vet the “low competition” nature of keywords within minutes.

In this section, we’ll review the SEO keyword research process that works for me, has helped identify the keywords that led to my content that has performed the best, and is the basis of my blogging success today.

Let’s talk about SEO keyword research.

In This Section

- **Low Competition SEO Keyword Criteria:** A checklist for what makes a good, low competition SEO Keyword?

- **The SEO Keyword Research Process**

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Identifying low competition SEO keywords *first* and then writing content around it is a key to SEO
- Longtail keywords (3-4+ words) provide clearer searcher intent

Why Is Keyword Research So Important, and Why Should You Do It First?

Identifying low competition and long-tail SEO keywords *before* writing our content is the key to simplifying SEO and creating large amounts of SEO traffic quickly. Good, efficient keyword research is the only way to identify those low competition keywords that we need.

But, why do we need low-competition SEO keywords so much?

- **Low competition keywords are easier to rank for without backlinks and extra work:** A new site with low domain authority can easily rank for a well-chosen, low competition keyword, without backlinks. For more common and competitive SEO keywords, smaller sites will require *lots* of backlinks and extremely well-written content, and the process of ranking will still take months.

In the first 2 years building my first blog to success, I never focused on building any kind of backlinks. I simply focused on writing content on the low competition keywords and letting the Google processes work to push my content up in the rankings.

- **For established sites (older than one year) ranking highly in Google for low competition keywords happen *extremely* quickly if they're optimized for them:** For ultra-low competition keywords we can rank for keywords within days or even hours. For more common, higher competition keywords it can take weeks or months before a piece of content reaches the first page of Google.
- **Long-tail keywords tend to have more specific searcher intent that is easier to understand and write for:** Because long-tail keywords tend to be longer in length (3-4+ words) the searcher intent across all searches tends to be more uniform and easier to decipher. This allows us to write content that responds extremely well to searcher intent and fulfills the need of the user. *This* is ultimately how good content ranks in Google, by appropriately addressing searcher intent and needs.

- **Low competition SEO keywords represent unmet user needs:** If an SEO keyword or general topic is low competition, by nature this means that fewer writers are writing on that topic addressing the searcher's needs. These unmet needs (of the searcher) are a goldmine of opportunity for us to write as the responses to unmet needs will naturally draw users in without sales pitches or heavy marketing. Additionally, unmet needs translate into potential business opportunities in the latter stages of blogging.

Ultimately, low competition, long-tail keywords allow us to easily possibility to rank on Page 1 of Google with minimal marketing and effort beyond writing the initial post.

The Criteria for Low Competition SEO Keywords: What Makes A Good, Low Competition SEO Keyword?

Before we get into how we find low competition SEO keywords (via good keyword research) let's define what we're looking for by defining the criteria of a good low competition keyword

Quick Criteria for a low competition SEO keyword:

- **"Room for ranking" on page 1 of Google due to improper on-page SEO optimization of page 1 competitor results: Determined by keyword difficulty ratings in SEO tools or manual assessment**
- **On-Page 1 of Google for the search, a minimum of two SERP results with lower domain authority than your site ideally under-optimized on page**
- **Monthly search volume of minimum 200, ideally minimum 500**

Throughout my time blogging and testing out thousands of keywords, I've found these criteria to be the most important factors and thresholds for selecting low competition keywords that lead to content which ranks in Google quickly, without backlinks.

In order of priority, let's look at these criteria a bit more in-depth.

Results on Page 1 of Google that aren't fully optimized on-page for our target keyword – judged based on the keyword difficulty score

Check that the page 1 results aren't fully optimized to ensure we can easily overtake them in the rankings.

Manually, we can assess how well optimized the top 10 results are by inspecting the title, URL, and meta description for our target keyword and then searching each post (via ctrl +F) to see if the keyword is in one header and three times in the paragraphs of the content. However, this is a fairly time-intensive and cumbersome way of analyzing rankings.

The easier approach to assessing the competitiveness of an SEO keyword (based on how well competitors optimize on-page) is to use an SEO keyword research tool.

There are literally hundreds of options for keyword research tools, but the two I recommend are Keysearch (for beginners and small budgets) and SEMRush (once you get the hang of things). Within SEO keyword research tools there will usually be a "keyword difficulty rating" or something similar. This rating measures how well optimized the page 1 results are for our target keyword and acts as an initial screening tool.

I recommend that all bloggers start out with Keysearch, so we'll use Keysearch as an example.

The screenshot displays the Keysearch interface for the keyword 'surf blog'. The left panel, titled 'SERP Analysis', shows a table of the top 10 search results with columns for URL, PA, DA, Doms, DomsD, Auth, Links, and URL. The right panel shows a list of 699 keywords with columns for Volume, CPC, PPC, and Score. The score column is color-coded: green for scores 20-25, yellow for 26-30, and red for 31-53.

URL	PA	DA	Doms	DomsD	Auth	Links	URL
https://www.surfer.com/blogs/...	36	67	10	6245	73	48834	No
https://lushpalm.com/surf-travel-blog...	29	37	4	1002	2	19	No
https://blog.feedspot.com/surf_blogs/...	46	65	17	46076	14	53	Yes
https://www.sea-lifts.com/blog/top-50...	22	22	2	248	NA	23	Yes
https://surfexpedition.com/surf-trave...	23	27	8	116	2	122	No
https://catchsurf.com/blogs/catch-sur...	35	38	23	1563	2136	36295	Yes
https://sonofabea.ch/...	28	14	42	95	185	309	No
https://www.theadventurejunkies.com/b...	33	52	5	4728	2	934	No
https://www.surfholidays.com/blog/top...	28	45	1	2092	NA	20	No
https://www.beginnersurfgear.com/top...	22	22	1	373	NA	12	Yes

Keywords 699	Volume	CPC	PPC	Score
surf blog	720	3.28	0.03	26
indoek surf shacks	170	1.11	0.72	Check
surf lifestyle blog	50	0	0.03	20
best surf blogs	40	0	0.01	Check
surf travel blog	30	0	0.02	Check
surf bloggers	720	3.28	0.03	25
surf blogs australia	20	0	0.08	Check
surfer magazine	14800	1.26	0.87	53
surfing blogs australia	20	0	0.08	Check
maui surf blog	480	2.09	0	11

A screenshot of a Keysearch keyword search with on-page optimization on the left and keyword difficulty scores on the right

Within Keysearch, when we search a keyword the "score" presented represents keyword difficulty. For low competition keywords in Keysearch, aim for 25 as an upper threshold for low competition keywords. If you choose to use another SEO tool, you'll have to experiment via trial and error to find the best max threshold for good, low-competition keywords.

Within Keysearch, after you've screened out keywords based simply on the score, go a step further and use the color-coded chart of the top 10 results in SERP and how well they're optimized for the target SEO keyword. With this, we'll see if there is room for you to improve on the existing SERP results and how well they're optimized. If you see two results in SERP that are poorly optimized, consider the keyword to have good potential.

Aim for a minimum of two SERP results with lower domain authority than your site on Page 1 results

If you have found two results on page 1 with poor on-page optimization for the target keyword and search intent, then this criterion – two results on page 1 with a domain authority rating less than yours – isn't required.

However, if the page 1 results are well optimized for the most part, but the DA of most of the results is fairly low then you still have a chance of ranking for the keyword.

To easily assess the domain authority page 1 results for free you'll need to install the Moz Toolbar in Chrome, sign in, and click the plugin to enable in search data results. Enabling this tool (and feature) will display the "domain authority" and "page authority" below all of the results in Google. With this feature enabled, you'll be able to assess whether your site has a chance of outranking the existing results, by comparing your domain authority to their domain authority.

If your site is new, and the likelihood of finding a site with lower DA than yours is low, aim for finding a keyword with two page 1 results with DA below 20

Monthly search volume of minimum 200, ideally minimum 500

Just because a keyword is easy to rank for doesn't mean it is worth the effort, we still need to generate enough traffic to make the work worth the effort.

So how much traffic is enough?

For an average keyword, set your traffic minimum to 200 monthly searches, but aim for 500+ monthly searches as your ideal.

To find the monthly volume of searches you will need to use an SEO Keyword research tool.

Again, I recommend starting out with Keysearch as the interface is straightforward to use.

You may be asking, why are we comfortable with such a low threshold (200) if we're putting in so much effort into writing a good post and we will only receive a fraction of that traffic (~30% if we reach the #1 position). The reason is that we will very rarely rank for a *single* keyword.

When we rank on page 1 of Google for a single keyword, we will also rank on page one for tens if not hundreds of other keywords that will also generate traffic, but at lower volumes. So, we're comfortable targeting longtail keywords with smaller volumes of monthly searches because we will inadvertently rank for lots of other keywords by writing great content for underserved keywords and audiences.

Now that you understand the criteria for a good, low competition keyword, let's review the process of finding those keywords – the keyword research process

SEO Keyword Research Process Overview

We've gone over why keyword research and finding low competition SEO keywords is incredibly value for sustained traffic to your site and ranking in Google as quickly as possible. Now, we'll review my standardized, easily executable process for finding low-competition SEO keywords to write.

First a brief overview of the keyword research process, then we'll go in-depth and give you the step-by-step keyword research process you need to follow.

My Bulletproof Keyword Research Process

1. Brainstorm as many keywords and 1-2 word root words as possible related to target topics for your blog
 - a) First, sit down and write every potential keyword you can write on the topics your writing will focus on
 - b) Second, expand the list of keywords using a handful of useful techniques and tools (the Google Autosuggest "Alphabet Soup" method, Keyword Research tools, competitor research, etc.)
2. Filter out keywords by monthly search volume (using Keysearch or SEMRush) keeping only results with 200+ monthly searches
3. Filter out by keyword difficulty rating (via Keysearch or SEMRush) (varies by blog domain authority)
4. Confirm that the page 1 results for the keyword have either 2 results with lower DA than yours or lack sufficient on-page keyword optimization
5. Compile all of the relevant words in a spreadsheet and prioritize based on an "SEO value score" the equation of a $(\text{monthly volume}/\text{results in SERP} = \text{value score})$

The first step in keyword research is to build a massive list of topics and keywords that you could *potentially* write about. In this phase, our goal is simply to list as many potential keywords as possible, regardless of the metrics. We'll do this by first brainstorming and listing words from our own knowledge and experience first. Then in the following step, we'll use our "brainstormed words" list and expand it using a handful of methods (Google autosuggest "alphabet soup" method, Google related searches recommendations, SEO keyword tool

suggested keywords and competitor research) that will generate and recommend even more related keywords more common in search.

After we have an extremely robust list of potential keywords and writing topics, we'll pull the essential SEO keyword metrics (number of results in SERP, monthly search volume, keyword difficulty) for each keyword to filter out the words that match our criteria for extremely low competition keywords.

Finally, we will take our finalized list of SEO keywords and prioritize them by weighing competitiveness against value using the equation "Monthly Search Volume/Number of Results in SERP = SEO Keyword Value Score".

Then, we will have a prioritized list of low competition SEO keywords

You will then have a prioritized list of ultra-low competition SEO keywords to build a content plan on.

Now, let's dig a little deeper and walk through each step in this process.

Full Review of the SEO Keyword Research Process

I highly recommend keeping a running list of potential keywords and essential SEO metrics (number of results in SERP, keyword difficulty score, and monthly search volume) throughout your keyword research process and during the life of your site. I still have SEO keyword notebooks from 2 years ago that I revisit to pull potential keywords that I never addressed or revisit keywords that my site *now* has the authority to compete for.

Save your notes from keyword research. You will thank yourself later.

Step 1: Brainstorm as Many Keywords and 1-3 Word Root Words As Possible Related To Target Topics For Your Blog

Simply write down as many words or phrases as you can that describe the content you could potentially write for your site. Don't omit any ideas at this point as our goal is to include everything now and screen out what we don't need later. I highly recommend keeping a notes app continuously on your phone in which you jot down potential keywords or topics anytime you come across them throughout the day.

For instance, if my blog is about solo travel, I may start out my list with:

- Backpacking Asia Solo
- Backpacking in the '30s
- Solo travel in Europe
- ...

and continue on until you run out of ideas.

Idea for brainstorming: Read forums and groups that your readers frequent to get ideas of keywords, topics, and problems to solve

No one person knows what content your readers want/need more than your readers, so reading their own thoughts and ideas is an excellent place to explore potential topics to add to your brainstormed list.

Places such as Reddit, Facebook Groups, Quora, and forums all offer potential readers to share their voice, so read through their thoughts and jot down any keywords that pop up.

Additionally, if you write content *directly* responding to their question or need, you can always go back and share it in reply later.

Step 2: Take Your List of Brainstormed Words and Words from Your “Market Research” and Expand It Using the Following Tools

Take your list of words from step 1 and put each word through each one of the steps below.

Google Autosuggest (“Google Alphabet Soup Method”) Keyword Brainstorming

The Google Autosuggest feature is a powerful SEO tool because it actually recommends what users are searching for related to what has been entered into the toolbar based on *actual* Google data. Additionally, it’s a free tool that’s close to the source (Google).

To use the Google Autosuggest “Alphabet Soup” keyword brainstorming method, simply type one of your keywords into Google and follow it with “a”, noting the keywords that are suggested and writing down any potential value. Then delete the “a” and follow the potential keyword up with a “b”. Repeat this process all of the ways through the alphabet for each potential keyword, adding suggestions of potential value to your keyword list.

Using the “Searches related to...” section at bottom of Google search results to brainstorm words

Additionally, within Google, scrolling to the bottom of the search results and viewing the “Searches Related to...” section offers keyword suggestions relevant to Google and searched by users.

You can either note down those on the first page, or click keywords suggested, continue to the next results page, and scroll down to the “Searches related to...” section, and click again until you are content

Using Keyword Research Tools’ (Keysearch, SEMRush) Suggested Keywords

All good SEO keyword research tools have a “suggested keywords” function that we can use to expand your list. This tool is even better than the other options because we can view the keyword difficulty, number of results in SERP, and monthly volume as we brainstorm – as you become more efficient at keyword research, you can screen keywords out during the portion of your brainstorming phase that occurs in SEO Keyword tools.

The screenshot shows a keyword research tool interface. The search term is 'surf blog'. The SERP Analysis table on the left lists various URLs with their respective metrics. The table on the right shows a list of 699 keywords with their Volume, CPC, PPC, and Score.

URL	PA	DA	Doms	DomsD	Auth	Links	URL
https://www.surfer.com/blogs/...	36	67	10	6245	73	48834	No
https://lushpalm.com/surf-travel-blog...	29	37	4	1002	2	19	No
https://blog.feedspot.com/surf_blogs/...	46	65	17	46076	14	53	Yes
https://www.sea-lifts.com/blog/top-50...	22	22	2	248	NA	23	Yes
https://surfexpedition.com/surf-trave...	23	27	8	116	2	122	No
https://catchsurf.com/blogs/catch-sur...	35	38	23	1563	2136	36295	Yes
https://sonofabea.ch/...	28	14	42	95	185	309	No
https://www.theadventurejunkies.com/b...	33	52	5	4728	2	934	No
https://www.surfholidays.com/blog/top...	28	45	1	2092	NA	20	No
https://www.beginnersurfgear.com/top...	22	22	1	373	NA	12	Yes

Keywords 699	Volume	CPC	PPC	Score
surf blog	720	3.28	0.03	26
indoek surf shacks	170	1.11	0.72	Check
surf lifestyle blog	50	0	0.03	20
best surf blogs	40	0	0.01	Check
surf travel blog	30	0	0.02	Check
surf bloggers	720	3.28	0.03	25
surf blogs australia	20	0	0.08	Check
surfer magazine	14800	1.26	0.87	53
surfing blogs australia	20	0	0.08	Check
maui surf blog	480	2.09	0	21

Competitor research

Competitor content is an excellent place to learn new approaches, content ideas, and topics, so we will use competitor content to continue brainstorming keywords.

First, how do you find competitors? The easiest way – just Google keywords from your list, then scroll through the Google SERP results to find sites offering the same content you do, in the same niche, with roughly the same DA as yours (or lower). These are the competitors you want to concern yourself with because if they are ranking for it, you can rank for it.

How do we get topic and keyword ideas from our competition?

My two favorite ways to get keyword ideas from the competition are by reviewing their sitemap or using a keyword research tool like Ubersuggest.

Examining Competitor content via a sitemap

A sitemap is essentially a list of the URLs for all posts, intended to keep search engines informed of the content on any given site. The beauty of this is the sitemap is completely open for all to see.

As any good post has the target SEO keywords in the URL, we can easily read through the sitemap and pick up ideas of keyword topics that our competition is writing about. Take note of any “clusters” of content within a topic that the author has written multiple posts about because if they are likely having success from a topic or keyword and following the opportunity – so you should too.

Usually, to find a competitor’s sitemap simply add “/sitemap.xml” to the end of their URL and you will be taken to their sitemap. For instance www.IWishIWasTraveling.com/sitemap.xml

The Question: Is it ethical to “borrow” keywords from other bloggers?

In my opinion, yes, it is ethical to blog on the same keywords and topics as other bloggers – the process of creating content on the same topic makes the keyword more competitive, increasing the content standard for that content and (ideally) improving the reader’s experience along the way as bloggers borrow best practices from each other.

However, plagiarism and copying content is *never* acceptable. Writing your own, better, original content on the same topic encourages the evolution of blogging. Stealing content from other authors is damaging to the blogging community, does no one any good, and will result in far more negative effects than positive *for everyone*.

The bottom line: If anyone reverse engineers your keyword and writes a slightly better post that outranks you, smile, tip your hat to their win, and return to the drawing board to create improved content that will one-up them. Steel sharpens steel and this kind of “friendly” competition improves the quality of content our community produces as a whole

Expanding on your “topic authority areas” according to Google results (Advanced Technique)

During your blogging career, as your site matures you will eventually notice trends for your site with content on specific topics or specific keywords driving a significant portion of traffic from Google. This is a very unofficial acknowledgment that Google is recognizing you as “topic authority” and (generally) any content you create on closely related topics will rank highly and quickly if optimized for low competition keywords. Take note of this cue and use the brainstorming methods above to expand on the target topics and keywords that Google is unofficially acknowledging as a “topic authority” on. (We’ll discuss more about writing more content to expand on-topic authority later).

Step 3: Filter Out by Keyword Difficulty Rating (Via Keysearch or SEMRush)

The next step in our process involves quickly checking the keyword's difficulty rating to eliminate the possibility of a high competition keyword that may have slipped through the cracks. There is the possibility that despite a low number of results in SERP a keyword’s top 10 results may be high authority sites with well-optimized pages and lots of backlinks.

Use a combination of the difficulty score on your favorite SEO tool and ensuring there are 2 Google SERP results with lower DA than yours.

Step 4: Confirm That the Page 1 Results Have Either 2 Results with Lower Da Than Yours Or Lack On-Page Keyword and Search Intent Optimization

Now, we should have a very slimmed-down list of potential, low-competition SEO keywords to rank for. For the sake of thoroughness and saving ourselves potential pain, later on, it is still worth the effort and time to manually check the page 1 competition of the remaining keywords, by looking at the domain authority and on-page optimization of the top 10 results in SERP for the keyword

To do this, I recommend searching each remaining keyword on your list in an SEO keyword research tool that displays the DA and on-page optimization of the first 10 results in SERP for easy analysis. There are many options but I (once again) recommend Keysearch, as the interface makes it quick and easy.

Criteria:

- Minimum two results on page one with DA number less than the DA of your site
- Two results with under optimized on-page SEO

If the keyword passes this final step, it is absolutely an ultra-low competition keyword that you should be able to rank for, even with a newer website.

Note: As you will likely be in a keyword research tool for this process, I recommend combining it with the following step – checking monthly search volume for the keyword

Step 5: Filter Out Keywords by Monthly Search Volume (Using Keysearch Or SEMRush)

For the final keyword research step, run each of your remaining keywords through your keyword research tool and record the monthly search volumes. Do not discard any keywords at this point.

If a keyword is a low competition keyword as we've screened, we are only using the monthly search volume to decide whether the keyword warrants its own piece of content, or can be added to a post as an additional keyword to drive additional traffic.

For keywords warranting their own post, 500 monthly searches is an ideal number to shoot for, but if the keyword research process is delivering slim results, set the minimum number of monthly searches at 200.

Why do we do filter out monthly traffic as the last phase in our process?

Because if a keyword is easy to rank for but has less than 200 monthly searches, it simply means it isn't worth our time to write a dedicated post on the keyword – however – there may be opportunities down the road to add the keyword to existing posts or other posts to increase the number of keywords a single post ranks for and subsequently increase traffic.

On-Page SEO and SEO Writing

How to Write Article for SEO Keywords and Structure Content For SEO

Once we've identified our target SEO keyword, we now need to optimize our post with our chosen keyword to communicate to search engines and readers what our content is about.

We optimize our posts for a specific keyword using a combination of "on-page SEO" or "on-page optimization" and SEO writing built on good competitor content analysis and searcher intent research.

On-page SEO is the process of placing our target keyword in specific areas of the content to signal to search engines the topic (and keywords) for our post.

SEO writing is the process of researching SEO competition and searcher intent for a specific keyword and using that information to outline and write an article that is more comprehensive, engaging, and competitive than all other alternatives in the Google search results.

In this chapter, we will guide you through the on-page SEO keyword optimization and SEO writing processes to help you write content that ranks on page 1 of Google.

In This Section

- What Is "On-Page SEO"
- The On-page SEO Checklist
- How to Frame an Article for SEO
- How to Benchmark Content against ranking competitor content for SEO
- How to Write for SEO
- How to Optimize Click-Through Rate from Google and Search Engines (for SEO)
- Off-page SEO: Sharing content to spark engagement
- Off-page SEO: Popular Link building tactics

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- On-page search engine optimization (SEO) for a targeted SEO keyword signals to search engines (and readers) what our content is about
- Good SEO keyword research should include outlining our content for readability and benchmarking against the top 10 results in Google for the keyword

What Is On-Page SEO?

“On-page Search Engine Optimization”, more commonly called “on-page SEO” is one of the essential components of optimizing a website to be crawled by search engines and ultimately to rank highly for specific keywords in Google.

We complete on-page optimization by placing our chosen keywords in a handful of strategic places within our post according to our on-page SEO checklist (which we’ll review shortly).

Why is on-page SEO important?

On-page SEO, strategically placing our target keyword within our post, is important for two reasons:

- 1) It clearly communicates the target keyword of our article to search engines
- 2) It clearly communicates to our readers that our content is *exactly* what they’re searching for, overtly and subliminally.

How To Do on Page SEO: The on-Page SEO Checklist and How to Apply It

Once we have identified our target keyword for a post, we must return to the post and confirm that it has been properly optimized on-page. To do this, ensure the target keyword is placed in each of the text sections/post elements of your post.

On Page SEO Checklist:

- Title
- H1 Tag (likely title tag)
- H2 and H3 (subheadings)
- Meta Description
- Image Alt. Attribute
- Image Caption
- In Paragraph Text (3x)
 - In the first 100 words of paragraph text (1x)
 - In the first 1000 words of paragraph text(1x)
- Additionally: For each LSI keyword, add word to 1 subheading and 1 paragraph

Tip: Use an SEO Plugin to Track On-Page SEO

Although no plugin is required to do on-page SEO, confirming that you've optimized your entire post appropriately can be time-consuming or tedious to do manually. Your first option is to manually search (using "ctrl + F") your post for your target keyword. The easier approach is to use an SEO plugin that checks your post for your target keyword.

Additionally, a good SEO plugin allows you to easily edit your meta description and edit a separate title that applies specifically SEO, allowing you to create a very SEO optimized title to show up in search engine results while maintaining your more reader-friendly title on your own site.

I highly recommend using the free Rank Math plugin for WordPress to check your on-page optimization.

On-Page SEO FAQ

- **Do I need to use the SEO keyword *exactly*?**
 - Yes, you do need to use the verbatim keyword in the post elements listed in our on-page SEO checklist
 - **What is the best plugin for on-page SEO?**
 - Rankmath is the best, lightest SEO plugin at the moment and is free.
 - **Can I optimize my post for more than one keyword?**
 - Absolutely, and it is highly recommended that you optimize every post for one primary keyword and 4 to 5 alternate keywords as long as the text remains natural
 - **How should I optimize for non-primary keywords?**
 - Follow the same on-page SEO checklist for all of your non-primary SEO keywords, however, avoid including extra keywords in the title or meta description as it can cause the post to look spammy and read more unnaturally or appear to be keyword stuffing.
 - **Can I use the keyword too much?**
 - Yes, it is possible to use a keyword too much. Avoid “over-optimizing” or “keyword stuffing” a post. Instead, stick to the number of instances listed in the on-page optimization checklist. If you do need to repeat the same words again, use synonyms for your SEO keyword or use an LSI (Latent Semantic Indexing) tool like LSI Graph to find the keyword synonyms recognized by Google for your SEO keyword
-

Optimizing For Search Intent

What is search intent

Search intent is the true reason behind a search and ultimately revolves around what the average searcher for the term we’re optimizing for is hoping to find during their search.

Why is search intent important?

As Google’s algorithm grows and complex computing concepts like machine learning help search engines understand exactly what a post is about (beyond simple keywords), the value of search intent will continue to grow in SEO and your site’s success will hinge on your ability to align your content with not just the target keyword, but search intent.

An example of search intent in action

Though the concept of search intent seems (and is) simple, we need to do light search intent research to analyze the search intent for a target SEO keyword.

For instance, if I asked you what you would hope to find if you search the phrase “traveling to Russia,” what would you expect to find? Perhaps a blog about Russian travel? Notes on someone’s experience traveling to Russia? Perhaps flights into Russia? With the key phrase alone, it is very difficult to guess the intent behind the search.

Now, when we actually go into Google and search “traveling to Russia”, I find destination snippets, a Russian visa page, tips for Russian travel, and “things I wish I knew for my first trip to Russia”.

This second step, searching in Google, allows us to better understand searcher intent for the average searcher. For a broad term like “traveling to Russia” we realize most searchers are interested in visa information and listicles with tips for visiting Russia for the first time. By clicking into and scanning each result on page one of Google we can identify the common topics, subtopics, and words shared by each of the results, we better understand and can better address search intent.

This potential ambiguity of the search intent for keywords is one more reason we love longer, longtail keywords that tend to be very descriptive and less ambiguous about the intent behind them.

Understanding Search Intent Helps Us Determine If We Can/Can’t Write the Article

Oftentimes, when we find an SEO keyword, we have an idea in mind of what we *want* to write, but Google is only going to rank articles and posts that match the average searcher’s intent and the need the searcher is trying to fill. Using Google search and some quick analysis to understand the true intent helps us determine if we’re capable of writing about what is most likely to rank. Once we’ve decided whether or not we can write on the general topic, we can do more in-depth research to see what sub-topics we’ll need to cover (via competitor analysis) and ultimately write a frame of our article with all of the necessary sections to rank.

How to assess and address searcher intent for a targeted Keyword: Review competitor posts focusing on subheadings and sections

The easiest way to *fully* analyze the search intent for a keyword is to click through and scan the posts of the first 20 results in Google. The top-20 results will be very well SEO’ed and structured making it easy to scan and extrapolate the sub-topics.

For each post clicked, scroll down the page scanning the subheading to identify the sub-topics included in the article that address search intent. List all of the sub-topics you analyzed in the headings of the top 20 posts, organize them in a logical flow as you would for a post, and you

have a frame for your article that completely addresses search intent for your target keyword, with all of the sub-topics.

Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) Keywords: What They Are and How to Use Them in On-Page Optimization

Google frequently presents beautiful and juicy SEO opportunities to small, nimble, and responsive hustlers that keep their ears to the ground and are reactive to the latest updates and changes in in the Google algorithm and SEO.

With the continuing trend of Google moving away from simply picking articles for its SERP that list keywords and moving more towards featuring articles that address the ideas, questions, and problems search are posing, Latent Semantic Indexing or "LSI" and Natural Language Processing or "NLP" are becoming concepts that bloggers should become very familiar with as they will drive SEO industry changes in the future.

Understanding both LSI and NLP will put you at the head of the blogger pack in the future.

What is Latent Semantic Indexing

Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) is a process used by search engines to discover the words and phrases people (searchers) use about a topic, an idea, and particularly a search query or "search keyword".

Note that LSI keywords are not synonyms. LSI keywords are closely related terms within the immediate topic or within closely related topics.

For example, LSI keywords for "run" would not be dash, jog, or trot. Those are synonyms.

LSI keywords for run or running would be stretching, shoes, race, exercise, etc.

Why are LSI keywords important?

As search engine algorithms and the process of optimizing articles for search engines evolve, the "search keyphrases" or the search engine user's exact queries are becoming less important while the searcher's general idea behind the search, and their intention for the search (e.g., learning a sufficient amount on a specific topic, comparing products for purchase, solving a problem) become more important.

For an article to fully address the searcher's driving idea behind the search, or the search intent, a comprehensive piece of content responding to that search key phrase must address a handful of other topics and follow-on questions.

Google uses the processes driving Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) to compare documents on closely related topics to then index words in clusters, that occur multiple times in various frequencies throughout the documents, that more accurately represent the idea and intention behind the search than a single key phrase alone.

The results of the process for us are LSI keywords.

For every primary key phrase, that searchers search in Google and we as bloggers and search engine marketers target, there will be a cluster of "LSI keywords" representing closely related concepts and ideas that we need to address to comprehensively address the intended idea behind the search, the searcher's intent to ultimately solve the problem and immediate follow on problems.

LSI keywords not only help us fully respond to the search intent behind a primary search query, but additionally help us signal to Google what our content is about, but loosely placing LSI keywords within our content, helping Google index the content for our target keyword as well as related keywords

Where to find LSI keywords

Though we could use expensive SEO tools (some of which are very good), the cheapest and most reliable place to find LSI keywords and keyphrases is on the Google results page for our primary query.

Within the Google search results, there are four opportunities to identify LSI keywords

- Related searches
- People also ask
- Google autosuggest (the autocomplete function in the Google search bar)
- Bolded terms in Google snippets

These four areas provide us plenty of LSI keywords, and information about additional topics to cover within our content to make it comprehensive for our reader and send clear signals to Google that our content is comprehensive as well.

Related Searches

The related searches field, generally located at the bottom of the Google SERP page, reveals, verbatim, LSI keywords that Google directly associates with our primary keyword and that generally fall within the search intent of our primary keyword

People also ask...

The people also asked section reveals a set of FAQs that are directly related to our keyword and are not pure LSI keywords but can be thought of as one step removed from standard LSI keywords. Because the phrases are structured as questions, they are not pure LSI keywords, however, we can glean the primary phrases and target intention/main problem to address from each of these fans. These keywords are best addressed as full questions within an "FAQ" section of our post.

Google Autosuggest

Within Google, if a user types in a keyword to search, Google generally suggests a list of 5 to 10 more specific longtail variations of the primary keyword. This is the Google autosuggest function.

The Google Autosuggest function not only delivers the most popular longtail variations of the keyword but delivers LSI keywords as part of the longtail variations. Simply remove the target keyword from the beginning of the suggested keyword, and you have additional LSI keywords

For instance, when searching the key phrase “Malcolm Gladwell Outlier,” Google autosuggest recommends “Malcolm Gladwell Outlier summary,” “Malcolm Gladwell Outlier quotes,” and “Malcolm Gladwell Outlier review,” among many other options. From these suggested keywords we glean summary, quotes, and review as LSI keywords it would be useful to include, and address with content, if we were writing a post about Malcolm Gladwell’s book “Outlier.”

Looking for LSI Keywords Beyond Google

Beyond Google, countless, pricey SEO tools deliver LSI keywords. Keep in mind that very rarely will these tools deliver more data than you can glean from Google and it will never be more accurate, however, the tools may simply help you identify LSI keywords faster, apply them within your writing faster, and double-check to see that you’ve used them all faster. This can be useful once you’ve scaled to create a well-monetized blog in which time is money and the function and efficiency of the tool pays for its cost, but until then, gleaning keywords from Google will do fine.

The Surfer SEO tool offers the best LSI keyword SEO writing optimization tool on the market today.

How to use LSI keywords

Once you’ve identified the LSI keywords for your target search phrase, simply use them throughout your article ideally giving them a paragraph. For fairly significant LSI keywords, consider adding them to a subheading being sure not to forget opportunities in the image alt attribute tags

What is NLP

Natural Language Processing, or NLP, has been around since the 1970s but is now the process Google uses to understand keywords within the context of the content around them and assesses their importance within the text and the sentiment around them accordingly.

NLP began being applied in the Google search algorithm with the 2019 "BERT" update.

A sidenote on NLP: Natural Language Processing is an extremely complex concept that Google performs combining artificial intelligence/machine learning and data science, and complex

linguistics. If this concept doesn't sink in for now, just skip it. This will be a trend that becomes very influential in the future, but the other concepts in this book are more important to understand now.

Why are NLP keywords important?

Natural Language Processing helps Google with the following tasks:

- Understand a word using the context of the words around it
- Helps Google understand the sentiment of a word - examining positive and negative sentiment on the page and subsection level, grading the level of sentiment
- Rates the importance of words and the idea they represent with a text
- Ultimately helps Google understand the "feeling" of our texts on a mathematical scale and rate the feel of it against other articles or other elements within the same article. So, if all 10 results on Google for a target keyword have positive sentiment and our text is neutral, we likely won't rank as emotion and sentiment (positive or negative) drive engagement.

The major takeaway from NLP

Understand that Google, specifically the complex algorithm behind the search engine, is increasingly "reading," analyzing, and processing text just as humans do. Content that flows naturally, is "tight" delivering more information, meaning, and feeling per "x" number of words, drives emotion, and carries perceptible layers of meaning within the context of the search will increasingly be rated as "good" content.

Ultimately, with the complexity of Google and the 10,000 engineering minds behind the algorithm, there is no way to know exactly how will Google can change so we can preempt it.

However, NLP pushes Google one step closer to perceiving and assessing content like a human will.

Thus, the best knowledge we can take from the addition of NLP is to write good writing for humans. That is the best hedge against future Google updates.

How to use NLP keywords

To assess how your text compares to competitors' content and improve accordingly, simply search your target query and click through the resulting content for your competitors in positions 1 to 10.

Then, review each instance of your target keyword in the text and assess the text surrounding the word, to ensure the ideas and topics surrounding the target keyword in their text are included in your text and that the mentions of the keyword in your text are similarly emotionally engaging at minimum.

This approach will ensure the topics and ideas associated (via NLP) by Google with your target keyword in your competitor content are also associated with your article.

Competitor Content: How to Benchmark Against It for Your Content and Better Content Writing and SEO

The best source for discovering what content will do best in Google *is Google*. This makes Google our most powerful tool for “framing” content. By benchmarking our content against the highest-ranking competitor content, we create a frame that serves as a map for creating high-performing content.

By examining and deconstructing the top 10 to 20 results in Google for a given keyword we discover the sub-topics and sections we need to fully answer a searcher’s question, fill the searcher’s need, fully respond to the search intent, and perform well on the metrics that matter to Google (click-through rate, time on page, and pages per session)

In the next section, we will lay out the steps that tie together creating an outline for an article that responds to user intent and is more informative than all other ranking pages in Google for our target keyword.

Creating Article Outlines for SEO

Now that we've gathered the essential data for a well-optimized post (keyword, search intent, competitor post contents, etc.), we will now piece together the essential information into an outline for a great article.

Our goal with this outline is to have the structure for a post that fully responds to search intent and user needs and structures all of the information we will deliver logically with good flow. The following process will walk you through creating an outline for your article.

The Process of Outlining an Article For SEO

1. Identify your target SEO keyword
2. Confirm Search Intent for your target keyword using the top 10 results in Google
3. Write an article outline consisting of section subheadings researched in other articles and brainstorming subheadings from your topic research and knowledge including the following:
 1. Intro
 2. Table of Contents
 3. Sections
 4. Title
 5. Meta
 6. *Note: Remember the content guidelines: Max 3 paragraphs between headers, 7 lines per paragraph*
4. Review your subheadings to confirm you have included your primary and secondary SEO keywords
5. Perform competitor benchmarking research of the Top 20 results in Google to bolster article outline adding any missed topics learned by scanning the headers, sections, and general topics of the competitor content
6. Analyze Google SERP search snippets and FAQs in search results to ID extra, structured content (e.g., FAQs, answering specific questions, step by step processes to include, content structure (listicles, processes, reviews, etc.))
7. Brainstorm what questions the searcher will likely ask next, decide whether to include the answers in the article, write a new article, or link out
 1. Keyword expansion and answering the "what next"
 - i. Google Autosuggest
 - ii. Google FAQ snippets
 - iii. User forum FAQ's

8. Consider additional ways to bolster your content with relevant information
 1. Google Autosuggest
 2. LSI keywords (related searches)
 3. Related keyword suggestions
-

SEO Writing

Now that we've created a frame for our content, we need to "fill it in" to create our content.

Aim to write no more than 3 paragraphs between each subheading, with a maximum of 5 sentences per paragraph. If you do happen to exceed 3 paragraphs, add another header or a relevant image to break up the text.

Check that your post is optimized for the target SEO keyword according to the on-page SEO checklist

After you've completed writing, return to the on-page SEO checklist to ensure your post is optimized for your keyword in the appropriate places and includes 4 or 5 non-primary keywords to boost competitiveness.

Do use keyword synonyms, don't stuff your post with keywords

Avoid keyword stuffing or "over-optimization", which occurs when we include a specific keyword too much. This kind of writing feels robotic, unnatural, and damages the user experience. To maintain the user experience while practicing good SEO, use synonyms and related keywords based on LSI tools or related keywords according to SEO tools and the Google search results.

Add internal links to other content on your site, to keep the reader reading on your site

Throughout your content, sprinkle links when appropriate to other content on your site, embedded in the text. This is a great way to keep users on your site improving your metrics and their experience. Aim to add at least 5 internal links in every post.

Add a section with related content recommendations after the conclusion

Optimizing For Maximum Click Through Rate in Google with Titles and Meta Descriptions

The “Click Through Rate” in Google is a percentage represents the number of clicks our posts receive in the Google search results divided by the number of times the result shows up in search (called ‘impressions’). Click-through rate is one of the easiest and most rewarding elements of SEO to optimize as it takes so little effort and creates such a high payoff

Why is CTR useful?

1. Search results with higher CTR are pushed higher in the rankings
2. A small increase in CTR (~1%) translates to a dramatic increase in traffic
3. Google Analytics provides plenty of data for analyzing and optimizing CTR

Search results with higher CTR are pushed higher in the rankings

Google’s algorithm has a complex method of evaluating posts and that takes into account many unknown metrics – but one of the metrics we do know about is “Click Through Rate” in Google search. If a result in Google is clicked more often than the competitor posts (thanks to a good title and meta description) Google takes this as a sign that searchers find that link more valuable. Google responds to this by pushing that result up in the rankings.

Ultimately, increasing CTR increases your ranking, which increases traffic.

A small increase in CTR (~1%) translates to a dramatic increase in traffic

The average CTR varies by position in Google, but in the bottom portion of the top 10 results, a CTR rate of 3% to 7% isn’t uncommon. Increasing that by even a single percent is a large jump in traffic for a single article. That makes for an easy traffic boost by simply improving a title and meta description.

How do we Optimize CTR: Titles and Meta Descriptions

The click-through rate in Google revolves completely around two elements – the title and the meta description.

The title and meta description are the first elements of your post that searchers interact with as they are the two elements that show up in the Google search results.

Make your title and meta description more enticing, more emotionally driven, and clearly more useful and searchers will click your link over the competition every time.

How To Write SEO Titles for Maximum Click-Through Rate

Titles of posts are the first things we, as readers, see whether we're scanning search engine results, social media, or even a list of articles on a blog. As writers, by crafting engaging titles that incite emotion, draw the reader in, and make the reader feel what will happen, we drastically increase the chances of a reader clicking on our post and making it to our site so we can begin cultivating a relationship with the reader through great content.

In this section, we'll share some ideas on how to make clickable titles that pull the readers in.

Tips for great titles

1. Use your target SEO keyword at the beginning of the title (for SEO and CTR)
2. Use power words that drive action
3. Use emotional words that engage the reader and connect on a level beyond logical
4. Use odd numbers in the title
5. Limit the title to 60 characters

The Blog Millionaire's Perfect Title Formula

Of all of the "formulas" for creating titles, I've found The Blog Millionaire Podcast's Brandon Gaille's approach with the "Perfect Title Formula" to be the best as it is easy to follow and has given me great results. Anytime a post is underperforming in Google CTR, try using the perfect title to spruce things up.

The Perfect Title Formula

Odd Number + Superlative/Power Word/Emotional Keyword + Target Keyword + Secondary Keyword

Examples:

- 17 Amazing Reasons for Backpacking the Balkans and Traveling Croatia
- 21 Essential Costa Rica Packing List Items for Your Jungle Vacation
- 7 Fastest Ways to Save Money for An Around the World Vacation

...now let's break this down

Odd Number: Numbers in titles are often clicked as it implies the article is well organized and scannable. Odd numbers are clicked more often than even because they *feel* more natural and less packaged. Lead your title with an odd number in any post you can.

Superlative/Power Word/Emotional Keyword: Power words, emotional words, and superlatives drive clicks as they communicate “the most” of whatever the reader is looking for and connect on an emotional level (vice intellectual) which drives a more impulsive urge instead of a thought. Whenever your titles *feel* boring, add an emotional word or power word.

Target SEO Keyword: Using the exact SEO target keyword serves our on-page SEO purposes foremost, but also connects with the reader by communicating the content has *exactly* what they searched for, communicated in their exact language (used to search). Oftentimes, even using the same words but changing word order can reduce clicks.

Secondary Keyword: If it can be accomplished naturally, add a secondary keyword to drive more clicks. If it can't be done naturally and feels like forced SEO, avoid it.

Optimizing Meta Descriptions and Title for Maximum Click Through Rate From Google

The meta description is the short paragraph-long description that is displayed in the Google search results after your title. Though the meta description doesn't count *directly* for SEO (with Google), it is still important for convincing searchers to click *your* link over all of the other options.

Why does the meta description matter and why should you use it: To increase Click Through Rate

Though the meta description isn't counted directly into your SEO (the keyword used in the description doesn't count), the opportunity to convince searchers *why* your result is appropriate for their search is valuable because it can help you increase your click-through rate in Google. Search results with higher click-through rates move to the top of Google more quickly. Additionally, creating a good meta description (or improving it), along with improving your title and making it more clickable, is the quickest way to increase traffic to a post that is already ranking in Google.

The meta description is often underused or not used, but ensure you use it for every post

Roughly 55% of bloggers make the meta description too long and ~30% of bloggers don't even edit the meta description. For you, this means if you spend an extra 10 minutes crafting a good meta description, your post will be set to outperform the competition in Google.

How do we edit the meta description?

The easiest way to edit the meta description is by installing an SEO plugin like Rankmath. After installing the plugin, scroll to the bottom of your post while editing and editable fields for both the meta description and the title displayed to search engines will show up

Guidelines for a good meta description

We will go through writing a good meta description step by step, but keep these meta description tips in mind

- Use the target keywords
- Use emotional keywords and power keywords to make your meta description emotionally driven and persuasive
- Drive a call to action to click on the meta description (Discover X, learn about the Y you need to..., etc.)

- Make the keyword relevant to the title and your post with the flow and a natural bridge between the two
 - Limit your meta description to 156 characters
 - Only use numbers and text in your meta description, no special characters
-

How to write a good meta description:

1. Search your target keyword in Google
 2. Read all of the results on page 1 of Google for your target keyword – reverse engineer the meta descriptions by noting the power words and emotional words they use, their call to action, and common ideas between them. Take these notes and build the ideas and driving emotions into your meta description
 - What emotions are they trying to drive?
 - What calls to action are they using to get people to click?
 - What ideas are repeated between them
 3. Write your meta description using your target keyword in the first half of the first line: Google highlights target keywords in meta descriptions, which helps draw the user’s eye to your post
 4. Use emotional keywords in your meta description to make it emotionally driven and persuasive
 5. Focus on an action within your meta description followed by a preview of the benefits users will gain: “Discover the ‘X’ that will help you ‘Y’”
 6. Limit your meta description to 156 characters
 7. Return to your Google Analytics data to check the “CTR” and continue experimenting and optimizing the meta description accordingly
-

Action Items for This Section

- Understand the elements of the on-page SEO checklist and record them in your playbook
- Pick a keyword and follow the process to write an article frame for SEO
- Take that same keyword and practice benchmarking that frame against the top 10 in Google

Practice writing a Meta description and Title optimized for click-through and benchmarked against the top 10 results in Google

Writing Good Content

HOW TO WRITE GOOD CONTENT FOR PEOPLE, IN A WAY GOOGLE LOVES

In the past, good writing could be described as extremely subjective, with heavy debates taking place about the best writers and books of all time with arguments powered by personal preferences.

However, today, as bloggers with a handful of marketing channels, we can generally describe what makes “good writing” and aspire to write along with those guidelines.

In short, in terms of the typical “content” bloggers write, **good blog writing solves a problem for the reader or serves the reader’s intentions, in an engaging, concise way, underpinned with transparency and accuracy.**

The Traits of Good Writing for Blogs:

- Solves a target problem (or question) and solves as many follow-on problems as reasonably possible
- Engages the reader and keeps their attention, possibly in an entertaining and emotion-provoking way
- Is concise, delivering the information, and serving the purpose of the writing in only as many words as necessary
- Is accurate, based on empirically observed facts, and sourced when cited data is involved – if opinions or unchecked ideas are involved, they are clearly noted as such
- Is transparent about the intention behind the writing (sales, political influence, etc.) and clearly identify any potential conflicts of interest (e.g., affiliate marketing)

Now that we have identified the traits of good writing, let’s review some actionable steps you can use to write great content

Before writing...

1. Perform searcher intent research for your target key phrase to develop a clear view of the searcher intent, the searcher’s problem, the solution you will present, and likely alternatives
2. Do sufficient research to clearly understand the topic you’re addressing and related topics
3. Before writing, outline your content, be clear about your message, the information you’ll deliver, the solution you’ll deliver, and the driving emotions you’ll use at various points in your communication.

4. Structure the content outline with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, and paragraphs/subsections within the body that cover your key phrase's required topics and LSI topics in a logical order.

General guidelines for structuring and writing the content

5. Within this construct, start by guiding the reader from a place of rapport building and assuring them you understand their issue and have a solution (introduction). Introduce your posts using the "Agree, Gain Rapport, Promise, Preview" approach for introductions. Do this by first writing a descriptive statement about the problem to be addressed that the reader will agree with. Then, gain rapport by sharing your experience with the problem and discovering a solution. Next, within the introduction, promise that there is a solution you can share that your reader can apply. Finally, offer a preview of the solution and invite them to continue reading the article.

6. Within the body of the content, deliver an overlapping and compounding stream of ideas and facts that guides the reader from problem to solution providing any necessary information to apply the solution.

7. Conclude by finishing with a concise wrap-up of what was covered, what was achieved and the primary takeaways. Additionally, wrap-up with the most important points of the article (ideally 3 points) and links to follow on content that will solve the reader's logical next problem.

Advice for readability and engagement throughout the content

8. Throughout the content, format your content for keeping the reader's attention and good readability on both desktop and mobile desktop by using "F-pattern formatting" and short sentences and paragraphs throughout the content.

9. With "F pattern formatting" in writing, use 3 to 5 sentences maximum per paragraph, with no more than 2 lines per sentence. Use subheadings or an image every 3 to 5 paragraphs and a subheadings at least every 6 to 10 paragraphs to avoid creating walls of text. Ensure that each heading offers a clear takeaway for each section.

10. Ensure every section (of 3 to 5 paragraphs, usually preceded by subheadin) has a very clear takeaway of information, intention, or an action item to create easily scannable content. This will ensure that the writing is "tight" delivering more value per word count, is more engaging, and serves the reader more than it would if the takeaway is unclear or stretched over a longer piece of writing.

11. Avoid repetitive use of words, phrases, or speech patterns and robotic speech devoid of feeling.

12. Engage the reader emotionally by adding proven emotion-provoking words to your writing to drive sentiment and strategically communicate feeling and to add variety and further emotionally engage the reader

Editing and proofreading

13. Edit and proofread for punctuation and grammar with a proofreading tool like Grammarly. Use a tool like the Hemingway editor to review for readability.

14. Before publishing, read the article aloud to gauge flow and how engaging the article is, then do final edits on the article to make it more emotionally engaging.

Additional Resources for learning how to write better content

Grammar books

Consider reading reliable quick guides on writing and grammar, like “The Little Red Writing Book” by Mark Tredinnick as a reminder of good writing practices as well as “The Little Gold Book of Grammar” by Brandon Royal or “The Elements of Style” by William Strunk Jr.

In the very casual world we live and communicate in, unstructured with a plethora of text communication and very rare showings of the grammar police, it is easy to lose track of the grammar and style rules that make writing enjoyable, artistic, and standardized in a good way. Reviewing virtually any writing and grammar guide will refresh your memory of the common and standard practices so you can maintain professionalism as a writer where you choose to and consciously discard it in others.

Reading the classics

Though the style, intention, and purpose of the classics of literature (such as 1984, To Kill a Mockingbird, and Atlas Shrugged) are very different than the shorter, purpose-focused writing of blogging, the emotion influencing and style rich writing of the classics, and absorbing those via osmosis just by reading, will add depth to your writing and make it more engaging than your average blogger.

Reading New Books, Fiction and Non-Fiction of All Genres

Whereas constantly reading the classics will add style and emotion to your writing, reading new books that weigh heavily in culture (pop and otherwise) will help you intentionally recognize and adapt to what audiences are reading now and how they are absorbing information.

Books such as Jordan Peterson’s “12 Rules for Life” capitalize on the “listicle writing” trend in a much deeper way, while additionally tackling controversial issues and standing firm on a single side which, as can be observed in social media, resonates well with readers today. Additionally, books such as Sapiens, Lifespan, and Outliers make sense of mounds of research communicated in digestible pieces that are well-sourced and laced with the story for maximum engagement.

If you stay on top of the trend of reading what’s new and what is, justifiably, taking readers by storm, you will better understand how to write for the style of readers *today*.



Monetizing Content

Whether you are writing a hobby blog, content marketing for your business, or blogging as a business, there is always an opportunity to monetize your blog.

For an established blog, the income can be incredibly passive, allowing you to focus on creating content (or whatever else you want in life) while money rolls in.

In this chapter, we will review the primary methods for monetizing a blog and I'll recommend the methods I prefer for long-term blogging success (and income) with the least effort possible.

In This Section

- Overview of the major ways to monetize a blog, and the ways I recommend
- Diversifying your blog income streams: Why everyone should do it and how
- Passive income streams vs. active income streams in blogging
- Overview of the Types of Monetization
- What dictates the best method for monetizing your blog?
- How blogs make money (and how much on average) by niche
- Advertising Network Ranking and Comparison + Good Info on Monetizing via Ad Networks
- Understanding Affiliate Programs

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Affiliate marketing is the easiest way for new blogs to monetize, followed by programmatic ads if the site has more than 10k monthly session
- All mature blogs should include a product to diversify the blog's monetization strategy
- Most sites that make more than \$25k per month offer a course
- The main methods for monetizing a blog are affiliate marketing, ads, selling your own products, and delivering courses
- Sites with <10,000 sessions per month should monetize with affiliate marketing from day 1
- Sites with 10,000+ sessions should monetize with ads on Ezoic then Mediavine
- As soon as a site has a consistent following it should deliver a related information product (eBook, software, spreadsheet)
- Once a site has sufficient reputation, authority, and audience, courses are *the* most lucrative monetization path, and every blog makes \$25k+/mo. has one

Blog Monetization: Planning How Your Blog Will Make Money

Whether you're blogging for passion or blogging for business, making money with blogging and knowing how to make money with blogging is an important idea to understand.

Even if you are a hobby blogger or blogging for passion, creating a blog (around your passion) that pays enough to continue writing about your passion is a great idea – as you can end up in the dream position of getting paid to share knowledge on your passion topic.

But before your blog can make money, you have to structure your blogging processes like a business, refining your blog's "business model" and designing how your blog simultaneously provides value to readers while monetizing honestly and morally.

The methods most blogs use to "monetize" their content are very straightforward, and the majority of blog profits come from a handful of easy to deploy streams. Now let's list and examine these methods to see which is best for your blog based on niche, blog maturity (age, audience size, traffic sources), and your preferences for active vs. passive income streams.

The primary blog incomes streams (divided by passive income streams and active income streams are as follows:

The major semi-passive income streams in blogging:

- Affiliate marketing
- Programmatic Ads
- Sale of owned, information products and courses

The major active income streams in blogging

- Sponsored posts
 - Direct ad sales
 - Lead generation / converting readers to clients / selling services
 - Selling owned physical products
-

Things to keep in mind when designing how your blog will make money

- **Monetize with passive income as much as possible and avoid trading time for money:** Be conscious of trading time for money and opt for income streams that lean more towards “passive” than active, continuing to make money even when you’re not working
 - **Understand that a good blog that is meeting its potential will never truly be passive income:** Though your blog will continue to show ads, promote products, and guide people into courses, you will still need to refresh content at a minimum and write new content to maintain rankings, along with maintaining relationships with readers via email marketing
 - **The optimal monetization path for each unique blog will vary** based on the age of the blog, the organic audience, and the business model it supports (a simple content platform or content marketing for a linked business)
 - **85% of income from blogging comes from ads, affiliates, sponsored posts, consulting & services, and courses:** Recognizing these as best practices and building your monetization strategy around these to start helps you build in repeatable success and learned best practices from everyone else’s failures
-

How Blogs Make Money (Broken Down by Niche)

Personal Finance: \$9,100 /mo. | Difficulty: 13

- Affiliate Marketing - Survey Programs (23% of total affiliate income)

Food: \$9,100 / mo. | Difficulty: 38

- Programmatic ads, Amazon Associates (45% of total affiliate income)

Travel: \$5,000 / mo. | Difficulty: 78

- Amazon Associates (22% of total affiliate income)

Marketing: \$4,200 | Difficulty: 68

- Amazon Associates (12% of total affiliate income)

Lifestyle: \$5,200 | Difficulty: 69

- Amazon Associates (51% of total affiliate income)

Source: (Gaille)

Guidelines For Monetizing Your Blog Efficiently

- Avoid trading time for money
 - Avoid selling out and providing ingenuine advice for compensations
 - Always make your foremost goal delivering value to your readers and honoring their trust
 - Start monetizing your blog with affiliate marketing and progress to programmatic ads at 10,000 sessions
 - Once you've established enough expertise and authority, create and deliver an information product designed to lead into a course, *then* deliver a course
 - Be sure to list appropriate disclaimers according to FTC requirements
-

Deciding Which Monetization Paths To Build Your Blogging Strategy On

The best monetization approach for you and your blog will change as your readership (and visits to your site) increases, as your brand becomes more established, and as you gain expertise and credibility in your niche. As such, I recommend following this path:

1. Short Term (from Day 0): Affiliate marketing
2. Mid Term (at 10,000 sessions per month): Serve Premium, Programmatic Ads (Ezoic then Mediavine)
3. Long Term: Own Products (Information Products, Courses) (After you have enough expertise to create a full eBook, then proceed to a course if appropriate)

This path focuses on creating low effort, nearly passive income at all levels of growth for your blog without trading time for money. For each approach, once the mechanism (hyperlink, ad integration, eBook, and sales funnel) is established, upkeep is very low and the mission returns to focusing on growing traffic.

In addition to my three preferred methods of monetizing a blog, listed above, there are other options that I advise against because they trade time for money (limiting our ability to scale).

4. Sponsored Content: Potentially compromises the integrity of the writing
5. Services and Consulting: Trading time for money isn't scalable

Note, that if your existing business (agency, retailer, consultancy) revolves around a service then using your blog as a platform to promote and sell services is an excellent idea. *However*, if

you plan on being a blogger whose core competency is blogging, then affiliate marketing, ads, and selling your own products is the approach that will lead to the most success, scalability, and freedom

Now that we have introduced each of the primary income streams in blogging, let's review how each monetization approach works.

How Your Blog Monetization Should Change as Your Blog Grows

Throughout the life of a blog, the optimal optimization strategy will shift as the blog matures. The niche and sub-niche, the size of the blog audience, intent of the audience (unique to the type of content and problems solved) all dictate how best to monetize.

Very rarely will a (good) blog be monetized by a single income stream. Instead, any good blog will be monetized by a strategy balancing two income streams and ideally three.

For any good blog monetization strategy, new income streams will continually be added as the blog grows.

How Blogs Generally Adapt Monetization as Audience and Income Grows

- **STAGE 1: Intro blogs (\$0 to \$2,000 monthly) Affiliate Marketing and Ads:** Generally, make income with ads only and some affiliate marketing
- **STAGE 2: (\$2k to \$7,500 monthly) Adding Sales of Information Products, Optimizing Affiliate Marketing, and Premium Programmatic Ads:** Generally, amplify income by optimizing affiliate products, links, and tracking and introducing sales of own information products in addition to admission to Mediavine or AdThrive
- **STAGE 3: Professional Blogs (\$7,500 to \$25,000 monthly) Introduction of Courses for Monetization:** Generally, blogs in this range amplify income by optimizing email capture, building an email series, and selling products and courses
- **STAGE 4: Outlier Blogs (\$25,000) Courses makeup the majority of income:** Master email marketing (without increasing traffic) and developing owned products and courses

This progression shows the *general* trend of how blogs monetize *but* the best strategy for your blog is to monetize with whatever means brings the most value to your audience and aligns with your skills.

If you are an expert within your sub-niche, don't be afraid to monetize with an info product or course upfront. Yes, sales and conversions will be lower with a small audience, but revenue will grow as your audience grows to make your blog income strategy potentially lucrative and scalable from the start.

Why Do Blogs Monetize with These Trends?

Starting with affiliate links and ending with courses...

With new blogs, the problem is just not having enough time to do anything besides write content and market it. Most of us start from zero traffic and have far too many tasks on our plate to even think about providing services that can be sold and not enough time (or creditability) to warrant writing a book or course yet. Additionally, our audience is too small at that point to make ads worth the space.

As such, **for new blogs affiliate marketing is the perfect monetization approach.** The approach is as passive as it gets (just embed a link in a post, that's it) payoff can be anywhere from \$50 to \$500 per 1000 visitors if done correctly. We can start doing this with any audience size, and the income will grow as our traffic grows once we've embedded the links.

As our **blog audience grows (usually to 10,000 sessions per month) programmatic ads become worth the sacrifice of** the real estate they take up on our sites, paying roughly \$8 to \$90 or more per 1000 pageviews, depending on the ad network. We can add this to our already existing affiliate marketing income.

A little further down the road, our credibility is established, when our site is built enough to allow *slightly* more free time and investment in other areas, we have effectively narrowed our niche and understood our audience, and we have begun to understand email marketing and "nurturing relationships with a digital tribe." At this point, **developing and selling information products (books, software) becomes worth the sacrifice of time and effort and worth the opportunity cost due to site maturity, our growing, expansive knowledge base of blogging, our niche, and our audience.**

Finally, as our blogs top out on how much more the audience can grow and **as the relationship with our audience deepens as our credibility in our niche grows, building a course to monetize our knowledge in a cohesive package makes the most sense (for us and our**

readers), capitalizing on the authority of our reputation and knowledge by delivering a high value and higher dollar product. Note that nearly every blog that makes \$100,000 or more per year has a self-hosted course

Monetizing Your Blog with Affiliate Marketing

Ultimately, all means of making money on a blog revolve around selling something – whether that “something” is yours or someone else’s.

When it comes to selling our own products, the process of creation, delivery, and sales can be cumbersome, daunting, and discouraging. Luckily for us, millions of brands realize how hard selling and spreading the word about a product actually is, and they invite us to help them spread the word and sell *their* products. This is the essence of affiliate marketing.

The beauty of affiliate marketing is in its simplicity. All we do (as writers and publishers) is introduce our readers to products that we genuinely believe in. In exchange, we receive a commission, and this approach can create a significant income source for our blogs. This all happens without the hassle of developing a product, delivering a product, or even handling customer issues, making it an excellent way for early-stage blogs to get started.

Affiliate Marketing

What is affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing is the process of recommending specific products, services, and brands to your readers and receiving a commission for each of the purchases your readers complete that originated via your content.

Affiliate marketing conversions from your site are tracked via tailored hyperlinks to the products/services that contain a tracking code unique to you and your site. These tracking codes and “affiliate links” can be edited to even report which page and link a reader started on and which product they ultimately purchased.

These affiliate links unique to you are created within a publisher dashboard that is created for you after you apply to join and are approved for whichever affiliate network manages the brand and products you wish to share with your audience.

Each brand has a set of terms and conditions for affiliate links dictating the compensation and the “cookie window” in which you get credit for a purchase that originated from a click on your site.

Compensation rates vary from product to product and brand to brand usually 3% to 15% of a sale for physical products and up to 50% of a sale on digital products.

The cookie window, or the period of the click in which you receive credit and compensation for the sale, varies from program to program. For instance, the Amazon Associates affiliate program cookie window is only 24 hours, while the cookies for some recurring services are as long as 6 months.

How Does Affiliate Marketing Work? How Do You Get Started?

After applying to and being approved for specific affiliate marketing programs (e.g., Avantlink, CJ, Amazon Associates, etc.), publishers *generally* must apply for partnerships with individual brands (e.g., REI, Mission Workshops, Trip Advisor, etc.) within the overarching affiliate program.

After acceptance to the program and partnership with a target brand, we can generate customized tracking links for the brand's products. These links contain the publisher's ID and track referrals and sales originating from the publisher's (our) sites. For each successful conversion or sale, the publisher (us) receives an agreed-upon commission.

Any product or service that can be sold online can be sold via affiliate marketing – physical products, digital products, services, commissions, flights, accommodations, etc. There is no limit to what can be marketed as an affiliate, earning you a commission.

Understanding Affiliate Programs

Affiliate marketing is an essential technique on the path to full monetization of a blog as it grows. Affiliate marketing stands out from ads because it can be incorporated on day one simply and easily and tends to have higher "RPMs" (Rate Per 1000 Sessions) paying much more than ads for every 1,000 views.

Non-intrusive, simple, and a perfect way to monetize any blog, affiliate marketing is essential for building a blog as a business

Affiliate marketing is the action of marketing other brands' products in your content by using trackable hyperlinks embedded in text and images and attributing credit for the click-through or the sale to you. For each transaction that originates from a link on your site, you will receive an agreed-upon commission for each sale that varies widely by affiliate program and brand.

How Much Does Affiliate Marketing Pay?

Affiliate marketing pays a commission rate (generally between 3% and 15% for physical products and 10% to 30% for digital products) on all sales tracked back to your site that was initiated through affiliate links embedded in your content. As such, the payoff for affiliate marketing is heavily dependent on your content, your practices in embedding affiliate links into your content, and the size of your audience.

My personal experience, and that of my co-bloggers, shows that the rate earned per thousand page views (RPM) for affiliate marketing tends to be *much* higher than with ads, ranging from \$70 to \$500 RPM on extremely well-optimized sites that market high ticket, high dollar products.

Affiliate Programs Comparison

Amazon Associates

- Easiest to join
- A high conversion rate is balanced by a short “cookie window” 24 hours
- Low commission rates for the industry (~3%)
- *Warning: Frequently adjusted commission rates*
- Requires you to make a sale within 6 months to stay in the program
- An excellent way for new bloggers to begin monetizing
- Highly recommend signing up

Avantlink

- Hosts thousands of premium merchants
- Pays relatively well for physical products (~5% to 15%+)
- Tracks your sales very well
- Requires an Alexa ranking of lower than 3 for admission to the program
- Highly recommend signing up

Shareasale

- A popular platform for smaller companies and startups with physical products
- Commission rates tend to be good
- Plenty of digital products available with higher commission rates
- Highly recommend signing up

CJ Content Publishing

- A subset of CJ publishing (formerly Commission Junction) that makes brand partnerships easy along with finding sponsored posting opportunities and more “expansive” brand partnerships

- Requires minimum traffic of 10,000 sessions
 - Gives automatic access to affiliate partnerships with virtually any merchant on the platform
 - Highly recommend signing up
-

Other Large Affiliate Programs to Join (Just In Case)

1. CJ
 2. Impactlink
 3. Pepperjam
 4. Individual brand-specific affiliate programs
-

Only Sign Up for Programs Based Specific Products Or Brands You Wish To Recommend

Whereas the common question is “which affiliate programs should I join” in hopes of making successful affiliate sales, it is much better to first find products that you can genuinely recommend and that align with your content, and simply join the affiliate programs that offer those products.

To find the correct affiliate program, simply go to Google and search “[your target product] affiliate program” or “[target brand] affiliate program”. The company’s affiliate signup page should be one of the top results and will guide you through the signup process.

Additionally, signup up for the handful of affiliate programs listed above as most merchant’s affiliate programs are part of these larger programs

There are literally hundreds of affiliate marketing programs on the internet and it doesn’t do any good to sign up for *any* of them if you won’t be recommending the products on the platform or if the products on the platform aren’t a good fit for your content or audience. Recommending products that don’t align with your content and audience will result in wasted time and rapport as your readers just won’t convert and won’t trust your recommendations going forward if they’re not good from the start.

Instead of signing up for affiliate programs I recommend simply searching for and joining affiliate programs as you think of products/brands that you want to recommend in your content.

Whenever you find yourself thinking, “Hey, this would be an excellent product for my audience,” go into Google and search “[brand] affiliate program”, follow the results to the brand’s main page for affiliate partnerships, then follow the instructions to join the program.

Once approved, you'll be able to get affiliate links (and credit/commissions) for any of the products you recommend with a trackable affiliate link.

How To Create and Embed with Affiliate Links

Once you've identified a product you want to recommend, searched for the brand's affiliate partnership page, and applied to the respective affiliate marketing program, you'll need to generate affiliate links for the product you'll recommend then embed the link in text, images accordingly.

To generate a custom link, go to the respective affiliate program main site, navigate to the tools section and look for something along the line of "custom link creator" or a variant of that. Click the options on the link builder to ensure you can create a custom link with a "deep link".

"Deep links" will allow you to create a trackable, affiliate link that guides the reader to a specific page (and product) on the merchant's site. Providing a link *directly* to the product you're sharing in your content will dramatically increase conversion and the performance of the link as this will eliminate the need for the user to click any further to get to where they're supposed to be.

Once you have generated this trackable link, with an embedded destination link, copy the link, return to your blog, and either hyperlink text or hyperlink an image in your post. After the affiliate link is embedded, once the words are clicked, the user will be taken to the merchant's site and you will receive credit for the click and a commission if a sale is made within a specific window of time following the click depending on the "cookie window".

The "cookie window" or the amount of time after the initial click onto the merchant's site that users have to make a sale within for you to get credit, varies by brand. Some generous programs will attribute credit to you (and pay you) up 6 months after the generated click. Other programs, like Amazon for example, only allow a 24 hour window, and Booking.com only pays if a user makes a purchase in the same session that they initially clicked the affiliate link.

Affiliate Marketing Best Practices

- Embed affiliate links within the text

- Use linked product images with affiliate links
 - When creating affiliate links, ensure to track the page they will be embedded into to make analysis and affiliate conversion optimization better
 - Link often – especially to Amazon
 - Write comparison posts and reviews
 - Create “best of” lists
 - Use linked product images in posts
-

Best Post Types for Affiliate Marketing

Some types of content lend themselves better to affiliate marketing because users are already in the mode of researching a potential purchase and are genuinely *hoping* for recommendations. If you wish to maximize affiliate marketing revenue, write these types of posts that cater to potential customers seeking recommendations.

These best posts for affiliate marketing are as follows:

- Comparison posts
 - Product Reviews
 - “Best of” lists
-

FTC Disclosure Requirements: An Essential Component of Affiliate Marketing

As there is an opportunity to make a significant profit with blogs by admittedly leveraging the trust of our readers, the FTC mandates that we do so honestly and in good faith, which I can appreciate.

A major component of blogging for profit is the FTC mandates for disclosing financial relationships and compensation made from your recommendations and mandating that all endorsements must be honest, not misleading, and made in good faith.

I highly recommend reading the FTC guidelines for endorsements (in blogging and otherwise) to ensure your blog is legally compliant.

You can find that information here: <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/ftcs-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking>

How To Increase Affiliate Marketing Income

- a. Track, measure and optimize continuously
 - b. Optimize your affiliate marketing approach routinely (products, text, placement, etc.)
 - c. Link consistently throughout your content and site
 - d. For every article ask “what product relates to this content that can help the reader?”
 - e. Only recommend products that line up with searcher intent based on your target keyword
 - f. Aim for non-intrusive, text links
 - g. Hyperlink images within posts
 - h. Optimize routinely based on click-through data, conversions, and performance across various products, brands, and affiliate programs
 - i. Create a marketing plan for each monetized post, conducive to the content and recommended products, to drive traffic from sources that will appreciate it
 - i. Funnel traffic to well monetized and high performing posts (in terms of monetization) via internal links on your site
 - ii. Target high dollar products to recommend via affiliate links
-

What Content Is Best For Affiliate Marketing: Problem Solving Content...

Affiliate marketing works best when recommending products that solve the problem which drove a reader to your page. This could be the problem of comparing products, looking for a process or planning something.

In every piece of content wherein there is a problem to solve and tools are required, those tools become opportunities for honest, genuine affiliate marketing that creates value for your reader.

If you aim to make money off of your site or need to make money to fund your site, adding plans for the following posts to your content plan will create natural monetization opportunities that are mutually beneficial to you and your readers.

The best types of content for affiliate marketing are as follows

1. Recommendation Lists
2. Product Reviews
3. Guides and tutorials (requiring products or services)

All of these types of posts are built around recommending products, services, and other tools that help the user solve a problem and allow you to *naturally* embed affiliate links while responding to the driving need.

Why I Choose Affiliate Marketing, Ads, and Own Products

Monetizing a blog is quite simple at its base. Simply connect your readers with products and brands that are directly related to your content and that they will appreciate. In exchange for the “introduction”, you will receive a commission or fee. This is the same tactic magazines and newspapers have used for years (print ads) *except* it is much easier for small players to enter the space now.

Tracking sales and commissions is extremely accurate, and the availability of plenty of data allows us to optimize the ads we show and the products we recommend to our readers.

There are countless other means of making money from a blog, such as selling a service, selling promoted posts on your site, and even selling your own products (which I do recommend), however, **affiliate marketing is the perfect place to start monetizing your blog, followed by joining premium ad networks and serving programmatic ads as your traffic grows, and selling your own products as your brand becomes more defined later.**

Connecting readers with brands through **affiliate marketing, and premium ad networks is the way to start monetizing your site.** These two ways of monetizing a blog are passive by nature (only requiring that you maintain traffic to your blog after embedding the programmatic ads and affiliate links), pay well (between \$10 and \$500 per 1,000 users), and are simple to use from the start.

Though I love ads and affiliate networks for monetizing a site in its early stages (first few years), to push your blog’s income to the \$7,000 per month and up the range, you will need to deliver your own products (information products are the most efficient) or a course eventually. Once

you (and your site) have established enough expertise and authority in your niche, adding a product and/or a course is the best move. Nearly every blog that brings in \$25,000+ per month sells a course, showing that delivering your own products makes the sky the (income) limit.

Don't worry, we'll lightly touch on these two options so that as your blog matures and you hit the right stage of growth, you'll have the knowledge necessary to return back to this concept, deliver a product or a course, and continue your blog's growth.

In this section, we will review my recommendations for how to start making money on your blog, which approaches you should take first, and we'll finish with a review of all of the other common ways for monetizing a blog and why I do/don't recommend taking that approach.

Monetizing Your Blog with Programmatic Ads

One of the oldest forms of monetizing written media is advertisements – visuals designed by brands and placed in magazines, newspapers, and blogs to sell a product, build a brand or drive a call to action. In return, the publication received compensation in exchange for the space used for the ad in its publication

Though the days of print are waning, “ads” are just as strong as ever, though their evolution and the evolution of the information age make delivering ads easier and more convenient for blogs and small websites.

One major change from the days of print media, when brands simply paid a flat rate for an ad that everyone reading a magazine would see and no idea if the reader would actually see it, programmatic ads have created a much more calculated experience for bloggers, readers, and brands to meet.

Advertisements were the primary means of monetizing newspapers, magazines, and various forms of print media for ages. This tradition continues with blogging, only now monetizing via ads is smarter, easier, and more accessible for smaller publishers (like us), as the process is automated and we don’t need to sell our own ad space within our blog thanks to premium advertising networks.

Today, programmatic ads and premium ad networks make running ads on your site easier, more lucrative, and provide a better user experience, thanks to big data.

What Is Programmatic Advertising

Programmatic advertising is the automated buying and selling of online advertising and then automatically displaying them on your site. This online auction for ad space on *your* site maximizes the revenue you can make from ads while eliminating the hassle of actually having to sell ads.

Programmatic advertising leverages dynamic auction-based buying and selling of ads for the space on your site to ensure you receive the highest revenue per ad possible. Additionally, advancements in analytics and the use of artificial intelligence allow for dynamic ad and content layouts to test for the best user experience and use the analytics of your site, readers, and ad performance to provide the most relevant advertising possible.

The result, with programmatic ads, is an easy-to-implement method of advertising on your site that maximizes revenue and generates completely passive income.

Ads pay a rate per mille (RPM) that is calculated as a rate for every 1000 sessions on your site. These RPMs can be as low as a few dollars (on Google AdSense and smaller networks) up to \$45+ on premium ad networks that actively optimize ads and your site as well as constantly develop relationships with merchants to advertise on your site with “premium ads”.

Why You Should Join Premium Ad Networks

“Premium” Programmatic Ad Networks: Higher Revenue, More Tools, and More Support

Though Google AdSense delivers programmatic ads and countless other companies do as well, the paid rate per 1,000 readers (commonly called “Rate Per Mille” or RPM) is usually so low that it is rarely worth the user experience dip to serve programmatic ads. However, premium ad networks, particularly Ezoic, Mediavine, and AdThrive, deliver a more “curated” ad experience to readers, made capable by building relationships with brands and high-quality publishers and bloggers to garner a much higher RPM.

Whereas normal programmatic ads revenue can range between \$1 and \$7, premium ads are commonly touted as delivering \$10 to \$45 RPM. Even better, premium programmatic ad networks deliver some amazing technical benefits (data, analytics, user experience testing) and collaborative support (“publisher networks”, great technical support).

Of the many benefits of programmatic ads, the most prominent benefits for bloggers are the ability to collect and analyze data and optimize accordingly. My favorite two purposes in action today are using artificial intelligence and machine learning in the programmatic ads experience and leveraging user experience data and ad performance to optimize ads

Monetizing via programmatic ads is simple and easy once your traffic reaches the minimum thresholds to join each network and provides you with a low-effort, recurring revenue stream. This extra money with free time allows you to focus on other elements of your site and audience growth, which in turn increases your ad revenue.

Additionally, the best ad networks and publishing networks have some amazing tools and capabilities, from using artificial intelligence and advanced analytics to help you analyze your site to supportive networks of staff and bloggers providing valuable coaching for increasing your profits. Let’s talk about what the best ad networks offer that make premium ad networks sweeter than just an increase to your bottom line.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning in premium programmatic ads help us optimize better and earn more

“AI” and “machine learning” are buzz words popping up everywhere that I won’t attempt to define in this book, I will simply label them as “computing processes that actively learn”. Within the programmatic ads space, companies like Ezoic are using AI and machine learning to dynamically test an infinite number of ads, ad layouts, and content layouts on your blog to not only maximize ad performance (i.e., profits) but to test for the best general layout for user experience, so you can learn from it. Plus, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The capabilities that come with a premium ads service for bloggers are immense and go far beyond the initial payout.

Premium programmatic ad networks make it easy to leverage user experience data and ad performance to optimize ads

Google Analytics is an extremely powerful tool for bloggers, delivering information on the user experience and performance of each post. Premium ad networks generally layer data on top of Google’s robust stack of data, showing us which posts make the most ad income, how posts can be improved, and more.

Extra Bonus: A Support Network of Experienced Bloggers and Tech professionals

“Collaboration” has been a buzzword for years, but good ad networks take this to the next level by connecting bloggers within their network. This means that once you’re in (with, say, Ezoic or Mediavine) you’re part of a community of publishers (bloggers) that constantly share information and best practices and also have the tech support of the ad network to lean on for ad issues, site issues, and higher-level analysis of industry trends.

[What Ad Networks Should You Consider Joining?](#)

Though there are plenty of options for ad networks to join, I highly recommend sticking to the following three as they have some of the highest RPMs (relative to audience size), provide a valuable network of support for growing your blog, and additionally provide some amazing tools.

- **Ezoic:** Min. 10,000 sessions per month, provides great analytics and the Site speed Accelerator
- **Mediavine:** Min. 50,000 sessions per month, provides an amazing support network
- **AdThrive:** Min. 100,000 pageviews per month, delivers some of the highest RPMs in the industry

Additional Ad Networks to Consider

- **Monumetric:** 10,000 monthly sessions minimum
- **AdSense:** No monthly sessions minimum

You'll notice that the lowest minimum audience for the premium ad networks is 10,000 sessions per month. Below 10,000 sessions per month, I recommend forgoing ads as the compensation (usually \$1 to \$7 RPMs) isn't worth the sacrifice in user experience. Instead, focus on monetizing via affiliate marketing during the journey of growing your blog from 0 to 10,000 monthly sessions.

Stats and Facts for Ads In Blogging & How Much Ads Pay

- 72% of blogs making more than \$2,000 / mo. use Mediavine or AdThrive
- Ezoic is the new kid on the block and the best choice for blogs with 10k to 25k monthly sessions
- Mediavine is run by 40% of bloggers and generates 35% of overall ad income (barrier of 50,000 monthly sessions to be admitted)
- AdThrive was used by 32% of bloggers but generated 57% of overall ad income (barrier of 100,000 monthly sessions to be admitted, must have US-based majority)

An Overview of The Major Premium Ad Networks

These three ad networks, Ezoic, Mediavine, and AdThrive are hands down the only ad networks that I recommend aiming for. The compensation (RPMs) along with the support network and additional tools make the sacrifice of having ads on your site very much worth it

Ezoic

For blogs with monthly audiences of 10,000 to 25,000, Ezoic is *the* best option and well worth joining.

Ezoic is the perfect “entry-level” premium ad network, as the minimum threshold for admittance is 10,000 user sessions per month. For most Ezoic publishers that have made their earnings public, RPM’s range from \$7 to \$15. Even better, Ezoic has some amazing tools for helping your site grow.

The RPMs others have reportedly ranged up to \$30 per 1,000 sessions, but keep in mind this is heavily dependent on your niche, how well you optimize for ads, and how well you optimize for maximum engagement.

Ezoic’s primary selling point (an awesome one) is the use of artificial intelligence to constantly test ads and post layouts with your audience to optimize not only for ad earnings but user experience as well. The result creates a site with ads that your users still engage highly with and a ton of data for you to analyze when producing more content.

After being admitted to the Ezoic network, advanced analytics on your site are one of the great perks, taking what you normally see in Google Analytics a step further to show which content makes you the most money and how.

Additionally, the free CDN (Content Delivery Network) services via Cloudflare help speed your site up along with caching and even a “Site speed Accelerator” which costs extra but is well worth the speed it gives your site, and the additional SEO boost you will receive, make Ezoic an easy choice.

Setup and installation are rather easy and painless with several different options and the Ezoic support team was very responsible and helpful every step of the way in my experience.

Finally, Ezoic’s big data analytics feature (specifically crafted for analysis of big data + advertising) takes Google Analytics data and layers ad earnings data and data from its own experiments, for a robust set of analytics you can use to understand what kind of content pays best and how to optimize your site for ad revenue.

All around, Ezoic is an amazing service and tool I would recommend applying for as soon as you break the 10k sessions per month mark

If you do join Ezoic, be sure to allow the service to run for *at least* 3 months as your RPMs will naturally start low and then grow as Ezoic learns your site and audience. You will creep into your *true* RPMs at roughly the three-month point.

Compared to **Monumetric**, another programmatic ad network that opens once you’ve reached the 10,000 monthly sessions minimum, my preference is Ezoic thanks to its generally higher RPMs and robust analytics.

Ultimately, I highly recommend joining Ezoic once you reach the minimum monthly sessions threshold. When you do, check your Google Page Speed Insights score and consider signing up for the Site speed Accelerator, and routinely leverage the Ezoic analytics.

To join Ezoic, head over to the Ezoic home and apply today.

Mediavine – The Network You Should Join At 25,000 Sessions Per Month

Once your blog matures enough to join Mediavine, I highly recommend making the switch. Publicly available information on Mediavine earnings show RPMs of \$15 to \$45, although this number is heavily dependent on niche, audience, and optimization. On my own blog I've seen RPM's as high as \$90+.

The Mediavine Publishing network is a programmatic ad network created by bloggers and is differentiated by high RPMs and a very robust support network. Mediavine requires a minimum of 50,000 sessions per month and it makes sense to jump from Ezoic to Mediavine at that point.

Within 2 days of moving from Ezoic to Mediavine, I saw my ad RPM double and continue to climb from there.

RPMs observed by the bloggers I spoke to ranged from the low end of ~\$15 per 1,000 sessions to \$45+ per 1,000 sessions on the highest paying sites.

Beyond these high paying RPMs, tons of content on the Mediavine site, very responsive staff (for technical issues or general blogging help), a very informative newsletter, webinars, and an equally informative Facebook group exclusively for Mediavine publishers. Additionally, Mediavine constantly pushes out useful content on how to grow your blog, how to optimize your site, and how to maximize ad revenue available only to Mediavine publishers. All of this makes Mediavine a logical next step at the 50,000 sessions point.

When you reach the minimum of 50,000 monthly sessions, definitely apply to join the Mediavine Publish Network.

To join the Mediavine Publisher Network, head over to the Mediavine homepage and apply today.

AdThrive

AdThrive is reputed as paying the highest RPMs through the blogging and self-publishing industry. AdThrive is very common with food bloggers but still open to any blog with a minimum of 100,000 monthly pageviews and a primarily US-based audience.

RPMs tend to be so high that many food bloggers making 6 figures tend to monetize primarily via ads through AdThrive.

If your site meets the minimum requirement of 100,000 monthly page views with a primarily US-based audience, consider joining AdThrive

Best Practices For Monetizing With Ads and Increasing Ad Revenue

Regardless of which network you are on, structuring your content for maximum user experience and optimal ad placement will increase ad revenue. The better user experience you deliver with your content, the longer readers will read, and the more opportunity for money-making ad impressions. Use the following tips to structure your content in a way that will maximize your ad revenue while improving your user experience.

- Format content with the following in mind
 - Write shorter paragraphs allowing for more spaces within the content to insert ads
 - Increase font size and line-height to make content users read, improve user experience, and keep users reading longer
 - Use headlines (H2, H3, H4) to break content avoiding text walls, and improve user experience
 - Use more unique images to keep the content engaging and the user reading
- Be sure to include internal links or related links to answer the user's next question and guide them to the next piece of content on your site – keeping the reader longer and increasing ad impressions along the way
- Optimize for mobile to keep content engagement high on all platforms
- Continually produce more content
- Create and embed video content to keep the user engaged
- Constantly work on improving user engagement metrics (time on page, pages per session)
- Write longer content: Longer content (a higher word count) keeps users engaged longer and allows for more ad impressions throughout the content
- Contact your ad network's support for a one on one consultation on how you can improve your site's ad performance

- Allow at least 3 months for the ad network to learn your site, optimize ads, and reach peak RPM for your site
 - Use the analytics within your site to see which posts and which types of content generate the most revenue (highest RPM), then repeat what works
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Things To Know About Monetizing Blogs Via Ad Networks

1. RPM or “Rate Per Mille” is the average rate earned by publishers (you) for every 1,000 views of their content and is the standard means of measuring profitability across ad networks
 2. CPM of “Cost Per Mille” is the price that advertisers are paying for every 1,000 views to advertise on your page – both metrics are good to become familiar with and useful for comparing across platforms
 3. The profitability of your ads (your RPM) is affected by your audience location, audience demographics, user experience, user engagement (click through, time on page, etc.). As such, some ad networks are geared for (and pay better) for the US or North America based traffic, and certain characteristics of your site
 4. Desktop ad traffic pays up to 4x as much as mobile traffic, and android traffic pays more than iOS traffic
 5. Though Mediavine *generally* pays higher RPMs than Ezoic, some blogs have seen higher RPMs with Ezoic than with Mediavine
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Selling Owned Products (Information Products)

In a study of the highest-earning blogs, all of the highest-earning, outlier blogs had one thing in common – they hosted their own products and courses.

Though affiliate marketing and ads make for great sources of passive income as we build our blog, the most lucrative opportunity for monetizing expertise was packaging information (or expertise) into a product – generally an information product (e.g., eBook, spreadsheet, course, etc.). This one-time investment of the time, energy, resources, and effort to produce a digital product becomes a resource that can be sold an infinite number of times with virtually no additional cost.

Additionally, selling an information product can be accomplished with any traffic level.

Let's dig into the opportunity of taking the same expertise you deliver on your blog and packaging it into an information product your readers want and need.

Why selling products makes sense: Your blog delivers snippets of information, and your readers want more

Your blog is built on your expertise and sharing information that your readership appreciates. Creating an information product with a more exhaustive and complete set of information packaged into a single book or course serves you and your readership well. An information product simply allows you to continue giving and sharing, without the 3,000-word limit and targeting/serving readers that want “more”.

As we take the opportunity to ditch the “3,000-word average” of blog posts we gain the opportunity to go extremely in-depth on the topics that our readers want more of. Case in point: This book that you are reading is the culmination of nearly 100 blog posts, repacked in a digestible way I could never achieve on the web. By writing this book I have been able to structure the information in a digestible way and deliver the information in a more accessible way than you (the reader) would experience digging through 100 blog posts.

Why you should sell your own products: The opportunity to deliver higher-margin products that cater to your readers

Though the 30% commission of an affiliate partner's eBook sounds great, or the 15% commission on a physical product seems fantastic, it doesn't compare to the 100% you keep by creating your own product.

With the same conversion rates as your experience with affiliate marketing, this adds up to 3x to 7x **more revenue** than you might otherwise enjoy *or* the opportunity to sustain your blog on only 1/3 to 1/7 the traffic. In either case, taking the control of creating your own product empowers your blog and creates independence in an everchanging space.

Information products are an excellent way to monetize a blog by providing your readers a more comprehensive and organized resource on the topic they already come to your site for. Monetizing via eBooks is the most common and simplest option.

Once you've completed the heavy lifting of creating a digital book, distribution of your digital book and payment are fairly simple thanks to widespread tools that easily patch into WordPress.

There are hundreds of approaches to creating, marketing, and distributing an eBook, with complex sales funnels and follow up, but to get started (and experience in delivering your own products) go the simplest method possible.

Write your eBook and edit using Grammarly, "publish" via PDF, and distribute by creating a landing page on your site and using one of the checkout services below to handle checkout and download of the PDF of your eBook.

More Reasons to Create and Sell Your Own Information Products

- Products allow you to keep more of the margin
- Information products help establish you as an authority in your niche
- Well made products can remain evergreen (with slight refreshes) as income sources indefinitely
- Products allow good monetization at any traffic level
- Information products allow you to respond directly to the needs and requests of your readers
- Most blogs making \$5000 to \$9000 a month sell their own product
- Nearly all blogs making \$25,000+ per month sell their own course

Best Tools for Product Distribution on Your Own Site

- Gumroad
- Selz
- Amazon

Additionally, consider shopping cart plugins for WordPress such as WooCommerce.

Distribution via Amazon

Additionally, consider distributing via Amazon for Kindle. Though the profit margins are slimmer when distributing via Amazon, the enabled reviews, additional exposure thanks to Amazon's massive presence, and widespread proliferation of the Kindle platform makes Amazon and the Kindle platform a good *additional* option for eBook distribution channels.

Why would you choose to publish on Amazon?

- 70% of book sales happen on Amazon, so being on Amazon gives you exposure and a piece of the pie (\$178 billion in the US in 2019)
- No hosting issues, sales funnel issues
- Can be done without even having a blog or site

[Here Is a Summary of The Steps To Self-Publishing With Amazon](#)

1. Create a Kindle Direct Publishing account
2. Enter the details for your book (title, subtitle, description)
3. Choose the right Amazon keywords for your book (low competition, high volume)
4. Choose the right category for your book
5. Save your manuscript in a Kindle supported format and upload your manuscript (Link to supported Formats)
6. Create a book cover (possible for free via Canva)
7. Price your book to sell
8. Upload and sell

[FAQs For Selling e-Books and Information Products](#)

Should I password protect my eBook?

Though the protection of your eBook from plagiarism is a valid concern, weigh the cost of potential plagiarism against the time you'll likely spend handling emails from people who have lost the password to file. I, and most of my blogging friends, have chosen to distribute our eBooks without passwords to keep this income stream as passive as possible and minimize the amount of time spent on customer support. and in the worst-case scenario in which users illegally share your eBook – any publicity is better than no publicity, right?

Sponsored Posts

Once you've built a following and regular audience, you won't be the only one interested in sharing a message with your readers. Brands and businesses will all vie for your audience's attention and they will be willing to pay you for the service.

Whether you write the content about the topic of a brand's choosing in exchange for compensation (sponsored posts) or allow someone else to write a post on your site in exchange for compensation (guest post) there are plenty of opportunities for selling space on your site.

Though this is a tempting opportunity, be judicious about what messages you allow others to post on your site or that you get paid to post for – your readership naturally expects that you deliver unbiased and genuine information. Knowing that you have been paid to present your audience a message can erode the credibility and trust you've worked so hard for.

If you do receive compensation for a post, be sure to disclose the fact that you were compensated for the post to comply with FTC regulations and maintain trust-building transparency with your audience.

How to sell sponsored posts

As your audience and presence grow and your content shows up in Google searches, is shared on social media, and is praised by word of mouth, you will naturally receive offers for sponsored posts. To make this process as easy as possible, be sure to correctly set up you're about page and add a section on how to contact you, how to work with you, and the projects you are willing to work on – listing sponsored posts as an option.

Additionally, I recommend joining publishing networks (such as the CJ Publishing network) as newsletters commonly go out with solicitations for sponsored post partnerships.

How much should you charge for sponsored posts?

Rates for sponsored posts should vary with niche, audience size, and the amount of time it will take to produce the content. There is no standard sponsored post rate as I've observed rates as little as \$200 and as high as \$25,000 for a single post.

Price your posts at the value you believe your time and your blog are worth and don't budge.

Other Opportunities for Monetizing Your Blog

The monetization opportunities for your site are endless, with the right niche, audience, content, and context.

Here are a few other highly successful income streams to consider for your site

- **Developing and hosting virtual courses:** Creating a course with extensive video, audio, and text structured in a digestible and effective format could fill an important need in the lives and personal/professional growth of your readers. By taking your robust library of content and making it more digestible, you do your readers a service that will benefit both sides
- **Virtual Summits with additional content organized into a permanently accessible member area and continued sales after the conference:** Serving your audience by running a live virtual conference followed by access to a growing library of video on a high-interest topic is a lucrative option. By gathering expert opinions and thought leaders and delivering the content in one spot we provide a product as robust as a course that includes a wide breadth of diverse views on the target topic
- **Selling Services (Coaching, Consulting):** An easy way to monetize your expertise, but beware of trading time for money in the long-term vice focusing on scalable income streams
- **Lead Generation:** For blogs that have the potential to generate leads for professional services (legal advice, dentistry, home improvement services) collecting the contact info of interested and potential customers and reselling it could be an excellent opportunity although ensure you are abiding by the privacy laws in your country and respecting the expectations of your readers

As your blog matures, your audience grows, and your other income streams require less maintenance (ads and affiliate marketing), you should absolutely consider the options above to continue the growth of profits, refinement of your blog's business model, and serve the needs of your readers.

A Note on Information Products Vs. Physical Products Vs. Services

Information products are by far the simplest to produce and deliver, create the most passive income, are the easiest to sell, manage and deliver (through automation). of all of the income stream options, you should strive to create this *first* after affiliate marketing.

Physical products are a significant opportunity, however, stocking, shipping, customer service requirements, and managing returns make it very labor-intensive compared to delivering digital and information products. Additionally, your income/profits are limited by the stock on hand and the stock you can produce. On the other hand, after a single information product is produced, the sales/income can be infinite and are limited only by your potential sales. If there is a unique and significant upside to a potential physical product, then seize the opportunity, however, weigh it accurately against the upside of selling information products.

Services (such as coaching or consulting) may *appear* lucrative but these opportunities limit us with a “time for money” situation and require significant relationship management and sales efforts (generally) compared to selling both information products and physical products. As most owners of mature blogs grow their audience and income, they tend to shy away from delivering services and more on delivering scalable and passive income-producing information products.

However, services can be a significant source of income for hustlers and blogs/businesses that need an income stream to stay afloat until more passive income streams come to fruition. If you initially opt for the services route, make an intentional effort to additionally build income streams less dependent on trading time for money to set your site up for scalability and unlimited growth in the long term.

The draw of your blog is the *information* contained within. As such, the most suitable products to sell, and most efficient, are quite often information products. Take advantage of this opportunity and the benefits over all other options by developing and monetizing an information product (that has genuine value for your clients) as soon as possible.

The Types of Information Products You Can Sell

This all *seems great*, the opportunity to create and sell something yourself, but it is really possible?

Yes, it absolutely is.

So, what should you sell as your own information product?

Though the initial answer is generally an eBook or a course, you can create and sell any tool that can help your readers within your niche solve a problem they've come to you with.

Here are a few examples of great information product opportunities by category.

- eBooks
- Spreadsheets and trackers (e.g., budgeting, project management trackers, content planners)
- Software (e.g., apps, WordPress themes, WordPress templates)
- Courses (e.g., cooking courses, professional skills training, language courses, etc.)
- Video series and virtual conferences (within a paid membership area)
- DIY plans and designs (e.g., furniture plans, tiny house plans, home project plans)

Where To Get More Product Ideas: Your Favorite Blogs and Blogs For Sale

Many good blogs these days are monetizing with their own product that was created in response to the needs of their users. If you need some ideas, **google your niche and click-through sites scanning what is for sale on their sites** to spark some ideas.

Additionally, sign up for and peruse markets that sell websites, such as Flippa or Empire Flippers, to get ideas of products you can create for your site and the income possibilities

The biggest determiner in whether or not you succeed in selling your own products: Whether or not you start

Of the most successful blogs selling their own products, two traits distinguish them from the rest: just starting, and building relationships via email marketing.

Just Start: There will never be a perfect time to start and you will likely never make a perfect product. Likely, the first product won't make enough to be your only product – which is all the more reason to start. As soon as you have enough knowledge of the market and expertise on your topic, start creating your own product. Get that first “learning experience” out of the way so you can roll that first product experience into the second product.

Collect Emails from Day 1 and Build Relationships via Email: In a major blogger study, Brandon Gaille discovered that bloggers who made \$9,000 per month and bloggers that made \$25,000 per month generally received the same number of visitors per month to their site, but \$25,000 per month bloggers learned how to capture email addresses better, build relationships better, and create/deliver products better. To max out the returns you receive from selling your own product, begin collecting emails and building relationships with your readers via email *immediately*. This way, you will consistently receive input, questions, and critiques that will

shape your product into something useful, and you will have an audience ready and waiting to hear about the product you created *for them*.

Other Monetization Opportunities

Though affiliate marketing, premium ad networks, and selling your own products are excellent options for monetizing, they are not the only options for monetizing. Consider these monetization opportunities as well, as long the method serves your readers and serves your mission

- **Sponsored posts**
 - **Lead generation**
-

Sponsored posts

Having the attention of an audience is a valuable thing, and something that brands will definitely pay for – hence the sponsored post. Sponsored posts are pieces of partnered content in which either you or a brand partner write a specific piece of content that serves their needs and is hosted on your site.

I personally do not take on sponsored posts as I want my audience to know that anything, I say is my objective, unadulterated perspective. However, many bloggers use this as a means to monetize in the early stages of blogging, making hundreds of dollars from a single post.

If you go this route, be sure to respect the trust your audience has in you or you will lose the hard-earned rapport.

Additionally, be aware that Google is keen on preventing paid link-building efforts and actively analyzes networks of blogs to identify and penalize blogs that *appear* to be selling or buying links. Withing sponsored posts, be sure to clearly communicate your affiliation (e.g., partnered, sponsored, etc.) with your audiences and tag any links within the article accordingly as ‘rel=“sponsored”’ and ‘rel=“nofollow”’.

Lead generation

As bloggers, we can collect email addresses and contact information for individuals visiting our site and seeking a service that we can't provide. In these cases, we can (with the proper legal processes) collect these email addresses and sell the contact information as potential clients to

professionals that may be able to provide the service (e.g., doctors, divorce lawyers, roofers, home improvement specialists).

If you choose to monetize via this route, confirm that you are handling the reader's contact information legally according to the state and country you live in and following all required disclosure processes.

Diversifying Your Blog Income Streams: Why Everyone Should Do It and How

The opportunity in blogging is a fantastic one, but it is a constantly shifting one. Google algorithms are constantly changing. Large affiliate networks (like Amazon) are constantly changing commission rates. Ad networks are constantly adding new tools. and the speed of change will only accelerate – especially in the area of monetization.

Affiliate marketing didn't exist in 2010. Now, affiliate marketing is a major, automated income stream. Selling links was the way to make money in 2010, now that income stream has disappeared. There wasn't an ad network that paid well for sites with less than 10,000 sessions 5 years ago, now there are several.

The only thing you can count on not changing is the fact that blogging will constantly change.

This change creates risk – the risk that the monetization path you are relying on now (affiliate marketing, ads, selling a non-evergreen product) will change in a heartbeat. The question is, which one will change?

Who knows...but the best way to hedge your risk is to not put your eggs (websites, traffic, and monetization plans) all in one basket (one monetization stream)? The answer is to diversify and build income in as many areas as possible in a reasonable way so that any major changes to the industry will not cripple you. If you have already built up the tools and resources in the areas not affected, you'll never be overly affected by any potentially devastating changes.

Build your site, and monetization streams, at a pace that works for you, but *DO NOT* forget to diversify your income streams.

Action Items for This Section (Affiliate Marketing)

1. Signup for the following affiliate marketing networks (don't worry, all are free): Avantlink, CJ, Shareasale, Pepperjam
2. For affiliate marketing: Brainstorm 10 products and services you have used that you can genuinely and naturally recommend in your writing. Search for their affiliate programs, and signup
3. If your blog is at 10,000+ sessions per month, go sign up for the appropriate ad network (Ezoic, Mediavine, AdThrive) today.
4. Add the appropriate, FTC compliant disclosure statement to all content that contains affiliate links or to any sponsored posts
5. Brainstorm three information products that you could produce on your site
6. Consider how you could simultaneously write content for your blog and repurpose that content for your first eBook or information product
7. Brainstorm 10 digital products you've heavily considered purchasing in the past. What were they? Why did you almost buy them? What can you create for your blog that is similar and just as enticing?
8. Brainstorm a potential course or virtual conference that you could provide one day that would deliver value to your readers far beyond the cost. What would it be about? What would it need to include? What would it have to be to make it more valuable than a college course or anything else out there? Now, get a notebook and start brainstorming the topic, structure, contents, and requirements of this course today, and continue brainstorming (notes recorded in this notebook) until you reach the point that a course *is* the perfect next step for your blog.

Marketing Your Blog: How to Build an Audience and Get Readers On Your Site

Creating a blog, filled with engaging, informative content isn't enough. That is only half of the job. Now, we need to connect that content with the readers it was designed for by marketing your blog.

Marketing a blog is the process of finding where readers that would love your content live on the internet, then joining their "tribes", building rapport and trust, and sharing content in a no-pressure way. In this approach to digital marketing, readers will be drawn to your content as you deliver more value than you receive every step of the way.

As readers visit our blogs and enjoy our content, we continue to build relationships with them, capturing email addresses, staying in contact, and sharing more content they'll love as a mutually beneficial favor.

This is what successfully marketing a blog looks like.

In this section, we will review the tactics that will help you build a marketing process like this that grows your blog and serves your readers, and help you decide the best marketing "channels" on the internet for you.

In This Section

- **Rule #1 of Marketing Your Blog: Deliver More Value Than You Receive**
- **The Blog Marketing Process: Steps for Getting Readers to Your Blog**
- **The Marketing Channels I Recommend for Blogging & Why**
- **Digital Marketing Overview: How to Get Readers to Your Content**
- **The marketing channels I recommend**
- **Pinterest Marketing Overview**
- **Reddit Marketing Overview**
- **Quora Marketing Overview**
- **Overview of Marketing in Facebook Groups (Borrowed)**
- **The Channels I recommend Disregarding: Instagram, Facebook, and other Social Networks**
- **Why most social media doesn't make sense for most bloggers**

The Takeaways & Facts Up Front

- Your blog will need 2-3 "tribes" in which your content is welcome to survive. Begin cultivating rapport in those tribes now.

- Aim to build marketing channels that are less dependent on algorithms or changes towards “pay for engagement”
-

Rule #1 of Marketing Your Blog: Share Your Post and Your Ideas Delivering More Value Than You Receive

In the world we live in today, it is common (and justified) not to trust marketing communications. The average American is exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 advertisements each day. Each ad is a bid for their hard-earned money and a large portion of those advertisements offer something we don't even need. With such an aggressive business and advertising environment we live in, with corporations large and small trying to sway our decision making processes against our own best judgment, nearly any marketing communication a person is posed with that is not *exactly* what they want at *exactly* the right time will likely be met with defensiveness. This includes bloggers peddling blog posts...and rightfully so.

As we think through the process of how to market our blog to attract readers, I want you to keep these aggressive, intrusive tactics in mind, and do everything in your power to avoid them.

As a blogger and content creator, your number one goal should be to make content so valuable that it is naturally shared with enthusiasm because it entertains, engages, or solves a problem for anyone who reads it.

Now, think one step further. As we approach our “readers to be” in our preferred “marketing channels,” we want to approach them with the same care, delivering value in every interaction that far exceeds the gain we receive from a single click. We want to share so much value in every interaction that our soon-to-be readers are enticed to click that link to our post because they're impressed with the value we've shared so far, and they don't want to miss out on the value that waits behind that link.

We deliver this value after we've joined their “tribes” that align with our niche, after we've built rapport, and after we know they'll be receptive to what we have to share.

That is how we will market your blog and your blog posts in social media and most “digital marketing channels”, one post at a time, sharing the value that draws people in naturally.

The Blog Marketing Process

1. Revisit the idea of who your “target reader” is by asking these questions
 - a. Who will benefit from your content?
 - b. Whose problems would be solved by your content?
 - c. Who would fall in love with your content?
 2. Find where (on the internet) your target readers live and spend their time
 3. Spend time wandering through the places your potential readers live, getting to know their tribes, and understanding what kind of content (e.g., posts) they respond to best
 4. Contribute to their tribe in the way most popular with them, building rapport along the way
 5. In each post or content share you make within their tribes, share a robust contribution in the language they speak, that doesn't require them to go to your blog – somewhere within that post, at the beginning or end, share a link to the source content alluding to the fact that the original post (on your site) is even more valuable
 6. Setup the appropriate email capture mechanisms on your site, with lead magnets
 7. Create an automated email series to further cultivate the relationship and familiarize the reader with your content
 8. Regularly email your email list to share content that delivers *immense* value to your readers and to maintain/grow the relationship with your loyal readership.
-

1. Revisit the idea of who your “target reader”

To connect with our target readers genuinely, we need to fully understand our target readers. By doing this, we'll have the knowledge to find them where they spend their time on the internet, speak their language, and build rapport with the ultimate goal of solving their problems and delivering the value they need (in the form of blog posts) to create a long-term relationship.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who will benefit from your content?
 - Whose problems will be solved by your content?
 - Who would fall in love with your content?
-

2. Find where (on the internet) your target readers live and spend their time

Now that we understand who you are writing for, we need to understand where they “live” on the internet. Not literally, but where do they spend the most time, interact, and find their content. Is it Facebook? On news sites? On forums?

Answering this question will help us understand where to find and connect with your target readers.

To understand where we’ll find your target reader, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do my target readers spend their free time on the web to entertain themselves?
- Where do my target readers go to answer questions?
- Where do my target readers go to research purchases?
- Where do my target readers go to find their news?

When answering each question, think broadly – which websites, forums, groups, social media platforms, questions, etc., do they use?

In doing this step, understand that our blog marketing will not succeed on all platforms or in all the groups that we list. Our individual styles, the nature of our content, and the nature of our different reader demographics mean that our marketing will fail in some “channels” and excel in others, and this is exactly what we want – to understand what works and repeat it. For now, we’re in the brainstorming phase, to test our marketing channels in the experimentation phase of establishing our blog post marketing processes.

We will review my favorite marketing channels shortly, but in brainstorming, consider each of the following platforms as options as starting points.

- Reddit
- Quora
- Specific Forums
- Facebook Groups

3. Spend time wandering through the places your potential readers live, getting to know their tribes, and understanding what kind of content (e.g., posts) they respond to

Once we’ve identified “places” on the internet where our “tribes” of potential readers live, we need to live with them for a period and experience them, the culture, and the environment for each tribe, in each channel.

Our goal is twofold:

- 1) Understand if we fit in enough to that channel to genuinely connect with the tribe and share our ideas

- 2) To understand what we will need to do to succeed in the chosen environment/channel/tribe

Taking some time to observe what happens in the place where we wish to share our content is prudent due diligence and necessary to gain the kind of insight that makes for great “marketing”. Keep in mind that “great marketing” is actually just sharing in a mutually beneficial way that benefits readers more than it benefits us.

During this phase, pay particular attention to how often external links are shared in the groups and forums, how acceptable it is to share external links based on the culture, and what types of links/content are best accepted. This information should inform the cadence at which you share your own content and can also inform your content creation process so that you are creating content that members of your target group actually gravitate to.

An example of this may occur on a Reddit sub for DIY projects at home when we run a blog about woodworking plans. Spending some time reading through the posts and interacting with comments, paying attention to what gets upvoted (liked), and how cordial the interaction lets us know if we even have a chance at delivering the kind of posts that excel and whether we’ll succeed or not. It also allows us to screen the Reddit users as the type of people we want to write for.

If the “tribe” communicates in a way that is natural to us and accepts the kinds of sharing (posts) we provide, then we have a potential “marketing channel on our hand.

4. Contribute to their tribe in the way most popular with them and build rapport

We’ve spent some time observing the group, its etiquette, and the content that succeeds, so we should be ready to contribute now, in a way that *doesn’t* benefit us, to test and warm up to the channel and tribe.

In this stage, spend some time simply contributing to the community in a way that adds value with no links back to your blog. If done properly, you should gain rapport and recognition as someone that shares things worth hearing.

This period of “contributing without gain” allows you to adjust to the community and tailor your delivery to the audience in a no-pressure way. This prepares you to later contribute in the same way, but with a link to your own content in days to come.

-
5. **Share a robust contribution (post) in the language they speak, that doesn’t require them to go to your blog, and add a link to your own content as the source, alluding to the idea that the post on your blog delivers even more value.**

After you have learned the tribe, spent time in the tribe establishing credibility and building rapport, and contributing, then start contributing just as much in each post simply making the subject of the post the topic of your own content.

Share enough in every post to ensure each reader receives sufficient value without needing to click your link. This approach may seem to deter readers from clicking onto your blog (because they don't need to) but actually garners more likes/upvotes because the post serves the community well ultimately gaining more visibility, establishing more credibility, and serving you better in the long run. If you're worried about giving too much in the post, err on the side of giving too much away for free. For the sake of credibility and rapport, you always want to give more than you receive.

Within the post, embed a link to your content with a call to action along the lines of, "if you're interested in more on [X] feel free to follow the link to this post." Adding a teaser of the additional value the full post has, vs. partial post in the tribe.

6. Setup the appropriate email capture mechanisms on your site, with lead magnets

Now that users are clicking into your site, you want to solidify, maintain, and develop the relationship with them by capturing emails and connecting with them directly.

Not only does this allow you to share new content with them directly, and even guide them through your posts in an automated email series, it builds a list of contacts that *will* be interested in your products to sell, once you start selling them.

Ensure that you have well-designed email opt-ins and appropriate lead magnets to make the proposition of signing up worth the benefit the reader gains.

7. Create an automated email series to further cultivate the relationship and familiarize them with your content

Once you know that the reader is interested in your content and clearly wants more (indicated by the email subscription), start the relationship by guiding them through your best content via email. Funnel these new readers into an automated email series that introduces your blog by sharing the most important posts, and follow up by maintaining contact in a way that builds the relationship by serving the reader.

(Note: We'll review all of these requirements for good email marketing in subsequent chapters)

Regularly email you're the reader on your email list to share content that delivers *immense* value and benefits to maintain/grow the relationship with your loyal readership.

Regularly, but infrequently, reach out to your email list to share new posts and to generally connect and keep the relationship warm and interesting.

This relationship (maintained via email marketing) will be great for sharing posts *directly* with your most loyal readers but will have its highest value in marketing products you will create and sell later on

Now that we've gone over the blog post marketing process in a very general way, let's briefly overview and compare the marketing channels I recommend examining for your own marketing plan.

In the following sections, we'll dive deeply into the marketing tactics and how we will execute good marketing on each platform.

The Marketing Channels I Recommend for Blogging & Why

These are the marketing channels I suggest all new bloggers start with and test in their initial focus.

1. Quora
2. Reddit
3. Facebook Groups (Borrowed)
4. Forums (Niche-Specific)
5. Email Marketing

Each of these marketing channels serves a very specific purpose (either short-term promotion or long-term promotion), are very predictable, and can be beneficial with a process-oriented marketing approach. Better yet, the best marketing and promotion on these platforms happens for free, as long as we come in with the right research and aim to give more than we take.

Keep in mind that very few people/blogs will perform well on all of these channels, and that's fine. The most important thing is to test your blog's performance on all of the platforms, aiming to identify 2 to 3 platforms or 3 to 5 tribes across channels to consistently share your content with.

Reddit Marketing

What is Reddit

Reddit is a single website touted as “the front page of the internet” that is essentially a massive collection of forums on every topic imaginable. On Reddit, users (Redditors) post ideas and questions and discuss questions through comments. Reddit is heavily information based its users are accustomed to reading medium to long-form content, making it a great opportunity for bloggers to share their content.

Despite this seemingly juicy opportunity, don't jump in without understanding Reddit culture first. Reddit culture and etiquette are very strong throughout the site and places user experience and the desire for intellectual contribution far above the tolerance for “self-promotion.” Redditors will eat self-promoting bloggers alive. Though this has been a problem for many bloggers that only wish to use Reddit as a platform for marketing, content creators to genuinely join and interact in Reddit communities (“Subs”), contributing far more than they gain have a great opportunity to interact with a tribe that is interested and devout to their niche.

Generally, it is better to approach Reddit as a user, just another Redditor engaging that *just so happens* to have a blog, instead of engaging as a brand or a blog that *just so happens* to have a Reddit account. Approach Reddit with this mentality and you won't necessarily be welcomed everywhere, but you'll find plenty of tribes to join, contribute to, and (eventually) share your content in.

Why market your blog on Reddit

- **High traffic in the short term:** Reddit posts can send thousands of users to a post in a single day, with post-life being roughly a week, but still less fickle than most social media.
- **SEO value in the long term:** Reddit sometimes tags links as do-follow links for heavily upvoted content which is a positive traffic signal for Google (via Google Analytics tracking codes on your site) and a great way to jumpstart SEO on new content
- **Interaction with an engaged, interested tribe within your niche with value placed on in-depth, long-form content:** Reddit has some of the most in-depth conversations on the web, allowing you to go more in-depth than you would on other channels and share your perspectives and expertise, as long as they add value

Who should market on Reddit? Which niches will succeed on Reddit?

The determining factor of whether or not Reddit is suitable for a blog is less about the niche and more about the author.

If you can join Reddit and actively participate (and be welcomed into) the sub-Reddits that relate to your blog *without* sharing your own content and while still being informative and gaining respect, then Reddit will likely be a great channel for you. If you cannot simply

contribute to the subs without promoting your own content then avoid Reddit as the experience is likely to be somewhat sour for you.

However, if you can make the switch to delivering value first, marketing on Reddit can be an experience ripe with potential success and great experiences.

A Brief Overview of Reddit Marketing

To successfully market on Reddit, identify the Reddit “subs” that are relevant to your niche and join them.

After joining your target subs, read the about section of the sub for base-level knowledge, rules, and etiquette for the sub. You’d be served well to read all of the recommended reading and introduction articles for the sub, all listed in the about section. Then, simply spend some time observing and interacting in the sub-Reddit to learn the culture and what type of content succeeds (gets “upvoted”) within the sub.

Start interacting by first just commenting on shared posts in a way that adds value to the sub, not just giving praise for ideas. Ask questions, encourage discourse, and share information in a way that makes everyone’s experiences better. Once you have a solid understanding of how to add value in the sub, begin sharing posts of your own that add value, but *do not* link to your own content until you’ve figured out how to create posts on Reddit that garner positive interactions and upvotes.

Finally, after you’ve built a healthy understanding of the sub-Reddit and rapport within the sub-Reddit, begin posting and sharing the valuable concepts and excerpts from your own content and linking out. You should still make it a point to deliver *more* value to the users in the sub than you get by posting. Be sure to respect the etiquette of 10 non-promotional posts to every 1 promotional post to avoid seeming spammy and bringing on the Reddit wrath, burning your channel, and getting kicked out of a sub.

Note: We’ve included more information in the Reddit Marketing Chapter of this book, so, jump to it if you want a more in-depth review of Reddit Marketing

Quora Marketing

What is Quora

Quora is a question and answer site on which users equally pose questions on nearly any topic and are open to answering questions on any topic as well. Users then upvote answers to questions which push them to the top of the answer stack increasing visibility within Quora.

Quora's user base consists of over 300 million active users that tend to skew towards male, educated, adult, and professional than the user bases of other platforms and social media.

Reddit, which has a primarily male user base and heavily text-based interaction on the platform, is the perfect complement to Pinterest, which skews females in its demographics and is heavily visual and "lighter" in its content. Both deliver long-term results for your blog and pairing them makes it possible to reach nearly *any* demographic.

Why Quora for marketing your blog

Using Quora is a simple, low-risk, and straightforward means of marketing as great answers (that we can embed with links to our content) are upvoted, increasing visibility and clicks to our site, while content that is "not so good" simply sits with no adverse issues.

Though the payoff for answering each question can be somewhat slim, compared to the potential traffic on Pinterest, Reddit, and via SEO, Quora is an excellent place for new bloggers with no other assets for marketing to share their content. This sharing (even with lower traffic levels) can jumpstart SEO, traffic to our sites, and social sharing.

Additional features on Quora, such as blogs, give even more opportunities to leverage Quora's reach for our blog marketing purposes.

Which blogs are Quora marketing best for?

New blogs, product content, tutorial content, and informative content.

For new sites and blogs, Quora is an easy way to garner traffic, as long as you are willing to provide a well-crafted answer to the question posed, and you are selective about the questions you choose to answer.

Any informative content will likely be a good fit for promotion on Quora.

How to market your blog on Quora

Hop on Quora and search for your niche's topic to search for questions to answer. Be selective about which questions you answer, aiming for low competition questions with few (less than 4) answers and a high potential for views. As long as your content revolves around sharing information on a topic or solving a problem, you will easily find a Quora question to answer and parlay into a visit to your site in exchange for a more in-depth answer.

When answering, give just enough of the answer to be informative and fully respond to the question, and be more in-depth than any of the other answers, then allude to the extra value

you deliver on *your* post before linking out. Providing 20% to 30% of your blog post value in your Quora answer is a good metric. Throughout your answers, balance text with visuals to make the content more engaging and increase the number of views

Note: We've included more information in the Quora Marketing Chapter of this book, so, jump to it if you want a more in-depth review of Quora Marketing

Email Marketing

All other forms of marketing for your blog should lead to capturing emails and email marketing.

Whereas every other marketing channel and approach is based on a platform we do not own, email marketing, supported by our email list, is the only channel we *do* own. Creating a list of email addresses for dedicated, interested readers makes our blog resistant to the fickle whims of social media algorithms, Google algorithm changes, and blogging industry changes. More importantly, email marketing allows us to build relationships with a tribe of readers and potential customers for products we create down the road.

We absolutely need to market our blog via other channels to *gain* traffic, but email marketing helps us *keep* traffic through the storms.

Invest in email marketing from the start of your blog for the long term, high ceiling potential for success.

What is Email Marketing (for Bloggers)?

Email marketing can basically be broken down into a two-part process.

The first stage in email marketing consists of capturing the email addresses of users, generally via strategically placed and designed “opt-ins” throughout the site, through which users can sign up for email updates in exchange for “lead magnets”.

The second stage in email marketing (that extends indefinitely) consists of cultivating the relationship with your reader (and new subscriber), sharing content, updates, and potentially sharing products too through email communications.

The goal throughout this email marketing experience is to continually stay connected and build rapport with your readers so that, at a later date you can share new posts, share new products, or canvas your tribe for ideas, interests, and unmet needs.

Key Terms in Email Marketing

- **Opt-in:** A box on your site that users submit their email address, and optionally other info, to subscribe to your emails
- **Lead Magnet:** A free product delivered in exchange for the reader's subscription, generally a small, low effort information product

Why is email marketing important for bloggers?

- 1) Email marketing is the only marketing channel you will ever *truly* own
- 2) Email marketing and a well-developed email list is the defining trait of bloggers that make \$10,000+ per month and sell their own products

We've already discussed how social media channels and their algorithms can change access to your audience at any instant, but an email list is something you will *always* own and can use to connect directly with your users. This is the main reason email marketing complements your blog (which you own) so well.

Additionally, bloggers that make more than \$10,000 per month are differentiated by how they sell their own products and courses. This ability to sell their own information products is heavily underpinned by great email marketing (and a long email list) that allows them to gradually share and sell those products to a tribe that has already expressed interest in and subscribed to regularly receiving their content. The resulting sales, from broaching a tribe that is familiar with you and expects you to create content and products *for them* far exceeds the potential sales that would come from cold dropping a product we've created in a forum or group on social media.

If you want your blog to make more than five figures a month, then mastering email marketing and creating a large email list is a prerequisite.

When should you start email marketing for your blog?

You should start capturing emails from the traffic to your site *immediately*.

Granted, you will not create a perfect opt-in, lead magnet, or email series at the start, and likely won't for some time, but you should *start* the process immediately. You can always optimize and improve at a later date.

Overview of the email marketing process

1. Embed email subscription opt-ins on your site (read the email marketing section below for more details)
2. Offer a “lead magnet” in exchange for subscribing to your email list
3. Trigger an automated welcome email and email series that guides the new subscriber through your best and most significant content
4. Continue emailing your list of subscribers to update them on new content while genuinely staying in touch and building the relationship (and rapport)
5. (Down the road) leverage your list as part of a marketing campaign for the products you will eventually sell

Note: We've included more information in the Email Marketing Chapter of this book, so, jump to it if you want a more in-depth review of Email Marketing

The Channels I Recommend Disregarding (At the Start): Instagram, Facebook, and Other Social Networks

Though the initial urge (and recommendation from observers) for new bloggers is to jump on every social media platform and blast their posts – I highly recommend against this.

Yes, you should go onto all social media platforms and claim the handles for your brand...for later use.

No, you shouldn't waste time building a presence or followership on social media if you don't already have one. Here's why...

You own your blog. You don't own social media platforms.

Your blog is an asset *you* own and that *you* control. No one can alter it without permission. No one can take this away from you. No one can alter how users behave while they're on it...except you.

Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and *every* other platform are all owned by their parent companies (and their shareholders), which can dictate changes on the platform (algorithms, visibility, monetization schemes, etc.) that detrimentally impact you at any time, and you have *no* say in it.

For this reason, it is a better investment of your time and energy to build content on a platform that you own and build it in a way that traffic naturally gravitates to it without heavy social media promotion on fickle platforms. Focus on making great content on *your* platform, not on social media. *Then* share lightly on those platforms to guide potential new readers to your content, but invest heavily in your own content. Don't invest heavily in the content on a platform you don't own.

Social media platforms (and the “influencers” on them) are subject to the whims of algorithms and corporate changes

Talk to any Instagram influencer that has been around more than a few years and you'll hear the horror stories of algorithm changes that cut their user engagement in half overnight, subsequently cutting their income.

As Facebook sought out ways to monetize and settled heavily into ads, Facebook began limiting the access of brands to followers of their pages or groups – this meant that even though users had already subscribed, brands still had to *pay* to access their followers.

and the horror stories of social media marketing go on and on.

It is the job of social media platforms to make money from the users and adapt their business model (and algorithms) accordingly, usually targeting businesses and brands (like us) to pay for the platform (via ads and promoted posts). As such, we can depend on social media traffic to *not* be dependable in the long term.

Though it may feel like a quick win to invest in social media, each minute spent on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat is generally better spent creating excellent content, optimizing for SEO, sending out brief “signals” to Google via our chosen marketing platforms, and allowing our audience to share what resonates with them.

Don't invest in someone else's business. Invest in your own.

Pinterest Marketing

A warning upfront: Be careful with Pinterest thanks to algorithm changes and changes in “recommended best practices”

Historically, up until ~2019, Pinterest was an excellent place for bloggers as diy'ers, homemakers, and dreamers used this visual search engine to find recipes, tutorials, unconventional home projects, and travel ideas – the content that bloggers do extraordinarily well, often better (at least more genuinely) than large magazines. This match between what bloggers offered and potential readers needed to be added up to an excellent match. Also, given Pinterest's appreciation for beautiful "pins" or images linked to an original piece of content, whether old or recycled, made it possible to plant the seed of a pin and either watch as it went viral months later or simply reuse it by re-pinning 6 months later.

As of late 2021, Pinterest isn't as kind to bloggers. The algorithm behind Pinterest has shifted preventing the cascade of readers Pinterest once offered bloggers, and instead of keeping users on the Pinterest platform. Additionally, new, more time-intensive content, such as video, is taking over Pinterest as the medium of choice and making the "effort to reward ratio" less favorable to bloggers.

From the perspective of a longtime blogger and digital marketer, Pinterest will likely continue to adapt the platform as the powerbrokers at Pinterest experiment with what the platform will become. Unfortunately, these changes will translate to at best increasing dips in traffic for bloggers who have invested time and energy marketing on the Pinterest platform. At worst, the algorithm will deliver the kind of chaotic and volatile swings in traffic that can trigger migraines and make planning a content and marketing strategy with Pinterest as your primary medium a nightmare.

Do yourself a favor and invest time sparingly marketing on the Pinterest platform if at all, and, as a new blogger, *do not* make Pinterest your primary source of traffic.

What is Pinterest

Pinterest is a visual search engine in which well-designed "pins" are shared by creators and reshared by users on "Pinterest boards" that we, as Pinterest users, build, manage, and fill with pins. These pins are indexed by Pinterest (just like Google indexes our blog posts) using titles and descriptions which we as bloggers and content creators optimize for our topics.

Unlike Facebook and Instagram, Pinterest is much more search engine than it is social media. Though there is comment functionality (like on social media), there is little conversation and interaction and post-life (the length of time a posted pin drives traffic) can continue for months or years as it gets shared.

The Pinterest community is huge, with 320,000,000 active users each month, and 80% of women 25 to 55 use Pinterest. Over 50% of millennials and 40% of dads use Pinterest every month, and both numbers are growing.

Why market your blog on Pinterest

Within all of those demographics, users are frequently researching purchases as well as trying to solve problems and find DIY projects. This makes Pinterest an excellent platform for blogs and small businesses to share their ideas in a manner and place readers/customers will be receptive to. This fact, combined with the average lifespan of Pinterest posts with traction driving traffic for a year or more makes it an excellent opportunity for any problem-solving post, recipe, tutorial, or review to be shared on.

If you are weighing which social platform to invest your time and energy (after Google) Pinterest should be considered as your first option.

Which blog niches are best for Pinterest?

- Travel
- Health and Fitness
- Food
- Finance and Budgeting
- Fashion
- Family and Home
- Education
- Lifestyle
- Blogging
- DIY/Tutorials/How-To

A brief overview of how to market on Pinterest

To successfully market on Pinterest, start by researching what keywords you'll use with "Pinterest SEO" and the basic search function.

After narrowing down your Pinterest "brand keywords", create and build out your profile and 10 boards, then populating your boards with a handful of pins to get started.

Finally, create 3 to 5 Pinterest pin templates and fill the 3 to 5 templates for each post on your site, then embed the pins in your site using Pinterest SEO keywords in the title and description.

Finally, share your pins in rotation in such a way that you will pin multiple times per day (ideally using an automated tool such as Tailwind).

When you've cycled through all of your pins, return to the pins and update the title and description, and repeat the process to re-pin.

You should regularly access your Pinterest analytics dashboard to analyze which pins are the highest performing, analyze the design cues, niches, and content that are most successful, and then update pins, pin info, and posts accordingly.

Note: We've included more information in the Pinterest Marketing Chapter of this book, so, jump to it if you want a more in-depth review of Pinterest Marketing

Action Items for This Section

- Claim the handles and usernames for your brand on all of the platforms listed above (Reddit, Quora, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and any other potential forums)
- Screen out three marketing channels listed above to start with. Identify two to three “tribes” on each and join. Start by observing. Progress to engaging.
- Begin posting (as a genuine user) on the two to three platforms that best fit your content, personality, and preferred approach.

If you have a site already, create opt-ins and a simple lead magnet to start capturing emails today. Use the free version of “MailChimp” to power your email marketing until you proceed to the email marketing section of this book

Chapter 7 Other Essential Blogging Concepts and Lessons for Beginner Bloggers

In every craft or trade, certain guidelines aren't necessarily *low* but will absolutely speed up the journey to success and make for a more efficient, high-quality outcome. Blogging and content marketing are no different.

The art and practice of blogging is a beautiful, evolving, and messy beast that requires information and borrowed techniques from a large smattering of knowledge domains. The following is a list of things to remember and valuable concepts that have contributed significantly to my own blogging success. Though these ideas don't fit into anywhere else in this manual, they're still *very* valuable – so, they're here.

Each concept assists us in staying focused on what matters and dismissing what doesn't. When the noise of "to-do lists" and tasks gets loud and we're in a dark tunnel of creation wherein our start point and endpoint are no longer visible, remembering these ideas will help you stay on the right track and do what matters for your goals.

In this section, we'll review a handful of important concepts that if adhered to will help you avoid the bumps, bruises, and wasting of energy that many bloggers before you learned the hard way.

The Imperatives for Success in Blogging

1. Choosing Yourself is essential
2. Stay focused on 80/20: Do what creates the most results *for you*, avoid what doesn't
3. Adapt and Pivot Constantly: In the content, audience, marketing, and monetization
4. Always plant seeds that require little time, and little effort first
5. Nourish and tend to projects that prove themselves, ignore those that don't
6. You can always return to improve later, but starting quickly and efficiently is essential
7. Focus on long-term outcomes over short term gains, and understand which actions lead to short/long term outcomes.
8. You will need one, healthy channel to connect with tribes. Cultivate the health of that "relationship"
9. Once your processes are established, trust the process
10. Don't fall prey to doing what everyone else does, just because they do it
11. Assess routinely. Repeat what works, eliminate what doesn't, experiment based on your gut
12. Knowing your why

13. “The One Thing” and knowing your “one thing”
14. The lean startup method
15. The last hour principle

“Choosing Yourself” and Why It Is Essential

In the world of print media filled with large players, stacked and intense hierarchies, plenty of bosses, and even more screens that work had to pass through, the organization had to choose you as a writer. The organization had to approve your resume, approve your experience, hire you, and then place you.

In this “new world” wherein self-publishing takes advantage of the same opportunities as the big players, we no longer need an editor to choose us, validate us, and sign off on our work.

However, we do need to choose ourselves.

This is a valuable lesson from Seth Godin’s teachings.

Choosing yourself means, upfront, deciding that you are capable of taking on this journey, you are skilled enough to learn and adapt as you need to to achieve the objectives, mission, and overall success you have in mind. *You* must be confident that, with the right research, diligent work, and consistency, you can put out content as good as or better than what that editor would require from you.

You don’t need that editor to choose you as a writer and as a publisher.

You can choose yourself, build your own platform, write your own content, to share that *valuable* content with the world.

But the first step is to not wait for someone else to choose you, and not wait for anyone else to give you permission.

The first step is choosing yourself.

Do this before you do anything else.

The 80/20 Principle and Why It Is Important In Blogging

DO WHAT CREATES RESULTS FOR YOU, AVOID WHAT DOESN'T

The “80/20” idea relates to the Pareto Principle or “the law of the vital few” derived from Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto’s research showing that roughly 80% of effects (and successes) come from 20% of the causes.

In blogging, this means that of *everything* you could do on your blog, only 20% of the tasks you could perform will produce 80% of your success. By vigilantly focusing and dedicating effort to the tasks that you know produce results, and eliminating those that don’t deliver results you can see, you will build and run your blog more quickly and more efficiently, without wasting time or energy

Unfortunately, many bloggers get caught up in the hype of what they *think* will lead to success. Ads. Posting on Instagram. Managing a Facebook group. Investing in costly products. For most bloggers, all of this is done without question whether the investments of time, energy, and money are contributing to their success, and by how much.

How to put this into action: Maintain a record of tasks that you perform on your blog, such as keyword research, writing, posting to different digital marketing channels, guest post outreach, purchasing specific tools, and everything else involved.

Then, routinely (once a month at the minimum) review everything you are doing and try to find whether or not it is showing measurable results such as an increase in readers, improvement in SERP rankings, affiliate commissions or benefit delivering improvements to your site.

If something works, repeat it and do more of it for as long as added effort produces added benefit.

If something isn’t contributing to the success you want, vigilantly eliminate it.

Repeatedly and consistently performing the handful of tasks you know will lead to success based on your experience, and the experience of those that have succeeded in the areas you wish to emulate

Straightforward Recommendations

The 80/20 rule will be great in practice, but until you have enough experience and time trusting the process, you won't know if a tactic is not working, or if it just needs more time. To get you started, use these recommendations of what to do and what to avoid based on what contributed to my own success and to the success of other professional bloggers as well as the mistakes that delayed that success.

What to *Always* Do (for starters):

- Start the content creation process with SEO Keyword Research, only writing articles around low competition keywords
- Do invest in Pinterest Marketing
- Cultivate relationships with “tribes” for digital marketing on Reddit, Quora, and other forums, keeping in mind their engagement standards and rules
- Seek out opportunities to guest post that are a mutually beneficial fit

What to Avoid:

- Instagram (Unless you already have 10k followers with high engagement)
- Facebook and Facebook Groups (Unless you have 10k followers)
- Other “Social” Platforms
- Avoid wasting time on “share threads” for Pinterest, Facebook, or any other social media unless you are seeking initial shares for content to jumpstart SERP and Pinterest performance

How To Survive Your First Two Years Blogging: Adapt and Pivot Constantly *TO OPTIMIZE CONTENT, AUDIENCE, MARKETING, AND MONETIZATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE, PROFITABLE, AND ENJOYABLE BLOG FOR YOU IN THE LONG TERM*

Blogging follows trends and innovations within the technology industry, publishing industry, popular culture, and more, all of which make the process of blogging and what generates success in blogging an everchanging target.

If you enter blogging with the plan to do things one way indefinitely, you may succeed in the short term, but industry changes, in the long run, will leave you behind.

Blogging started as journaling, heavily unformatted “weblogging” which was simply the domain of jotting down thoughts with no clue of how to monetize.

With the rise of mobile, an ever more connected society, the decline of print media, and the rise of digital media, blogs began to move to the forefront as entertaining, consumable media

ready for the digital age. With major publications moving from print to digital, the standard of what makes “good digital content” changed, evolved, and improved. Today, thanks to that pressure, blogs are no longer “unformatted digital diaries” but varying degrees of true, digital, publications, formatted for peak user experience, designed to be as engaging as your favorite magazines, curated in a professional way that helps them compete and rank (within Google and your email inbox) with the largest recognized publications on the planet.

My own travel site ranks in Google right next to Conde Nast Traveler’s results, GQ’s results, and more, and goes to the same reader inboxes.

That adaptation – maturing and becoming more refined as a publication – was a requirement for blogs to grow, survive, and thrive with readers.

Outside of style and design, technological evolution, the digital economy, and the availability of digital infrastructure (monetization channels, marketing channels, software) have heavily influenced how blogs grow, the standard of what is a “good blog”, and which blogs survive.

Always Plant Small Seeds (and Perform Tasks) That Require Little Time, and Little Effort, First

If a project can be done in 15 mins on a one-time basis and adds value, do it immediately. Don't put it off for routine tasks that go on for hours or days as you are delaying the success of your site

Examples of Small Tasks that Create Big Results

- Creating site opt-ins
 - Creating quick (1 hour) lead magnets
 - Improving site speed
 - Validating SEO keywords before writing
 - Performing benchmarking research (against competitor content ranking in Google) before writing
 - Framing articles before writing
 - Adding internal links to your posts
 - Adding trackable affiliate marketing links to monetize your posts in a trackable way
 - Viewing the performance metrics of your top 20 posts weekly to see what has gone up or down and why
 - Using a notes app on your phone to write in your downtime, instead of using social media
-

Water and Tend Projects That Prove Themselves

In line with the 80/20 rule, if you notice that something is working for your site performance, audience, or monetization, keep doing it.

Some examples of tending to proven projects and tasks include:

- Writing within a topic that Google is recognizing your authority
 - Sharing content within a channel/tribe wherein readers are giving you positive feedback and thanking you for your content
 - Continuing to monetize with affiliate partners that are showing good sales and commissions
 - Interacting in blogger support groups that continually share novel, useful information and alert you of coming changes
-

Remember You Can Always Return to Improve Later, But Starting Quickly and Efficiently Is Essential

Do not believe that every post, page, or project has to be perfect, as “perfect is the enemy of good”. Simply do the work diligently and when you have reached a natural finishing point, publish it. Do not obsess for hours aiming to make *everything* absolutely perfect and correct. Deliver good quality, but don’t require yourself to deliver perfection.

The beauty of blog posts is that you can *always* update them. You can always clean them up, tune them to recent SEO performance and keywords, and re-share them. If an article is performing in your top 20, you can set aside a day to bolster content, improve formatting, and add value to the reader...later on.

For those posts that are imperfect, not of significant value, or don’t attract tons of views, it is ok. These “lesser posts” are all part of the creative process and will sink below your naturally better content. They won’t damage your reputation beyond repair or break your site, so don’t feel the need to make everything perfect.

Put in the time to do good, consistently high-quality work on the current project, when it is done publish it and deliver it, and then move on.

Don’t waste time chasing perfection. Do realize you can always go back and improve content.

Focus On Long Term Outcomes Over Short-Term Gains, and Understand Which Actions Lead to Short/Long Term Outcomes.

If you pay for ads, you will likely get traffic, but you’ll sacrifice valuable money that could go into much-needed tools for your site in the long term.

You could spend hours posting on Facebook and Instagram to gain likes and shares, but know that the algorithm will cause this traffic to dwindle within a week.

You can spend hours on “share threads” wherein other users will share your content in exchange for sharing there’s but know the effects and results won’t even show up in your traffic metrics a week later

On the other hand,

You could invest those hours into learning SEO and applying it to your site. It takes up to 9 months for SEO traffic to max out, but the traffic can continue for years and this is how most major blogs grow traffic.

You could invest time-sharing into understanding Pinterest, developing a strategy, and understanding Pinterest automating tools that can lead to massive amounts of traffic that take months to take off but can continue for years.

You can give up after a year of not seeing fame and fortune from your blog, disheartened and disgruntled, or go in understanding that with dedication, consistency, and a will to adapt, you can build a blog with full-time income and enduring traffic in two years. Very rarely any less.

The point is that you will be presented with plenty of opportunities for how to approach working on and growing your blog. Many opportunities that focus on the short term may seem exciting, but will not lead to long-term success. Many opportunities that lead to long-term success require consistency, diligence, hard work, and staying focused in seeming failure-ridden times.

Don't get caught up in the short term. Focus on the long term.

To Start, Focus on Cultivating One, Healthy Channel To Connect With Tribes To Share Content With Later.

CULTIVATE THE HEALTH of THAT "RELATIONSHIP" AND BUILD IT IN A GENUINE WAY

"Digital marketing", "social media marketing", and "content marketing" are all pretty buzz words that can be picked apart in a hundred different ways to describe one thing – attracting people to build relationships with and starting a conversation.

The easiest, most genuine, and most valuable way to approach building traffic to your site is by connecting with tribes that align with your niche and sub-niches, building genuine, mutually beneficial relationships with them, and eventually sharing content that adds value to *their* lives. This is a foolproof way to "market" your blog, as few people will refuse a gift that has genuine value *for them*.

The best places to find these tribes are in already existing forums, where in-depth conversations take place. These can be forums on smaller sites, forums on larger sites like Reddit, or clustered under topics within question-answer forums such as Quora.

Invest the time into understanding and connecting with the tribe that relates to your sub-niche and you'll have an eager audience in waiting.

Once Established, Trust the Process

Trust the Process. Once you've written enough content to see a small smattering of results (e.g. readers), once you've shared your content within tribes enough to tell which tribes generate traffic, and once you've seen enough of your content rank to see what Google likes *from you*, trust that.

The process of blogging, and the path to success, will be a path filled with repetition, repeating these things over and over that work consistently. As the blogosphere changes, your audience grows, and your skill grows, you will adapt your processes to be more efficient and effective.

Until then, simply trust that you are doing the right thing and continue doing it until measurable, visible feedback shows you how to do something differently or better.

Along the path between startup and success, trust the process and just keep going.

The Major Evolutions and Trends In Blogging To Follow

- Increasingly automated monetization channels
- Design and UX moving toward simplicity, prioritizing speed, and serving mobile-first
- Content – engagement, accuracy
- Increasingly writing content for engagement, pleasure, and informativeness for people, not Google, additionally prioritizing authoritativeness in delivery and standing within community/industry
- Artificial Intelligence in writing
- Artificial Intelligence in SEO and SEO analysis

The Evolution of Monetization in Blogging

In the early 2000s, many blogs made money by selling outbound links from their site, until a Google update penalized this practice, eliminating how many blogs earned money – outside of selling their own products.

Since then, bloggers have adapted through unstructured monetization practices (sponsored posts, curated ads, own products) to heavily automated and structured monetization practices of current (affiliate marketing/linking, programmatic ads).

Even more, many bloggers are pushing further into the information age by focusing on delivering premium information products – such as courses, and virtual summits – as their primary monetization strategy. Though these monetization strategies are lucrative and are creating most of the 6 and 7 figure bloggers out there, the internet is cluttered with courses and info products which some argue is turning into an economic bubble waiting to be popped.

Most bloggers that clung to selling links, manually placed ads, and outdated information products absolutely saw profits decline and likely did not survive. Those that adapted captured the opportunity of new and evolving markets.

Whether or not courses, virtual summits, programmatic ads, and affiliate marketing are here to stay is debatable.

What is not debatable is change, and that if a blog wishes to survive and succeed, the blogger will need to recognize and adapt to those changes.

Evolving Design and UX – More Refinement, Mobile First, Site Speed

If you're able to find a snapshot of a site from 2005 the first thing you'll likely notice is the appalling design, which destroys the user experience. No matter how good, how useful, or how engaging the writing is, the crudeness of the site will likely prevent you from enjoying the "user experience". Herein lies another major area in which blogs *will* evolve, and you will need to follow (or lead) to succeed – design and user experience.

Compare that crude site to amateur blogs of today and the difference is vast. Thanks to free, open-source, and cheap platforms (such as WordPress, Wix, and Blogger) and plug & play themes that nearly automate the design process, having a clean, well-designed site is not only easy, it is required as a start point. Now, please understand that your site does not need to be "DaVinci level artistic" but merely needs to meet the current standards of design and UX so that users will focus on *your content* without being distracted by the outdatedness of your site.

In the chapters that follow, we will discuss how to use the best and cheapest tools available (WordPress, WordPress themes, and Canva) to create a well-designed site, so don't worry. For now, simply understand that User Experience (UX) and design is an evolving area that you will need to be aware of and occasionally update your site accordingly.

Within the UX and design area, you will specifically need to pay attention to these aspects:

- General Design
- Color Palette and Branding
- Site Flow
- Site Speed
- Mobile Experience

Site Design: Simplicity, Speed, and Mobile First

Even if you are not a designer, you are likely able to point out good and bad designs. Elements such as the use of white space, contrast, balance in composition, proportion, hierarchy, pattern, flow, and a handful of other contributing elements we rarely recognize create eye-pleasing experiences. However, even how these elements are acceptably combined changes over time. Look at cars, furniture, and posters from the '50s, the '70s, and today. You'll notice that most are "well designed" but not all fit with the design trends of today.

For your blog to continually thrive, you will want to update it for the design trends of the moment. Yearly or once every two years is enough to stay abreast of trends and keep an updated user experience.

Not sure where to start?

Major app developers have their own standards for design. For a roundabout introduction, search for the latest Google or Apple app design guide for inspiration on how to *start* putting together your own digital assets if you can't hire a designer.

Additionally, research the color palette and how designers pair and avoid pairing colors. This knowledge will not only help in creating your website but also when creating content for visual search engines – like Pinterest and Google images.

Site Speed

No one likes waiting, and this is becoming more so the case as we move further into the information age. The days of waiting a minute for a webpage to load are far gone. With such impatient readers (I'm definitely one of them) staying on the trend of maintaining the fastest site speed possible is absolutely necessary.

In late 2018, Google began taking page speed into account when ranking pages for keyword search results. In my own sites, I saw traffic increases of ~50% within a month for my fastest pages, and a drop of ~50% for my slowest pages, with all of that performance, changes sticking to this day. This heavy focus by Google (the primary source of many blogs' traffic) translates to a need to optimize your site for speed, just as much as design.

This issue of site speed becomes more complicated when we take into account how most new bloggers bloat their sites with too many plugins, the wrong plugins, and oversized pictures, which all slow *everything* down much more than you think.

Stack this problem with the fact that more than half of users access blogs from their mobile devices with naturally slower connectivity making page speed *even* lower.

What's the takeaway?

The speed at which your site loads matters heavily, for your users, and for your search traffic.

Continually work to increase the speed of your site by:

- Choosing a lightweight, fast theme
- Minimizing the number of plugins installed on your site (ideally less than 10)
- Only use fast, lightweight plugins, and remove plugins that aren't
- Compress and optimize all images uploaded to your site, aiming for under 100kb for most pictures

- Use script minification and caching plugins to speed up your site
- Use the Google Page speed insights tool to test how fast your page is and find the places you need to optimize
- Consider using third party speed services, such as a CDN or Ezoic's Site speed Accelerator

With technological advancements, 5G on the horizon, and newer, better (not necessarily faster) software coming out daily, what makes a site “fast” today or what is considered fast, may not be fast tomorrow. However, you will still need to maintain a fast site through all of the changes. Do this by routinely (every 6 months) benchmarking your blog's speed against Google's recommended standards, then adapting accordingly.

Confused yet? Don't worry, this was simply an introduction to the things you need to know. In the SEO Fundamentals section, we'll walk you through checking and optimizing your site's speed quickly, and easily

Mobile Experience

Once upon a time, we all wandered the web via huge, bulky desktops.

Then, laptops came along and we took our digital lives around the house, to coffee shops, and beyond

These days, mobile is everything. For most people, their lives are tethered to and lived through smartphones.

More than half of traffic to blogs will happen on mobile devices – meaning – if the experience isn't optimized for mobile devices, more than half of your readers will have a horrible experience and not come back.

In that transition from laptop to mobile, so many things change creating several requirements we need to respond to:

- Incorporating responsive site design that adjusts size and formatting to the smaller screens of mobile devices.
- Writing content that is shorter, more digestible, and can be consumed while waiting in line, or waiting for a friend
- Optimizing content and site speed to maintain a fast experience on smaller devices
- Design the elements that help users “flow” through content – menus, internal links, banners, and popups – to be conducive to smaller screens

- Ensuring monetization strategies – affiliate marketing, ads – are conducive to the mobile experience

These are a handful of the requirements of the moment to maintain a good experience during the continued rise of mobile experiences over laptop/desktop experiences.

To ensure you're staying abreast of the changes in mobile, simply browse your own site on a smartphone or tablet every so often. Anytime you notice an element of your site's experience that is lagging behind your competitors and the leaders address it before the trend leaves you behind.

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