



Professional Development

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Blogs and Networking

In the middle 1990's everyone started talking about needing a website. Now, the new "must have" is a web log or blog. While blogs can come in all shapes and sizes, a blog is just a very simple way to publish a journal, record of events, thoughts, ideas or whatever the author wants to write about. A blog sits on a website – whether that site is run by you, your company or managed by a third party that will "host" your blog.

Blogs started coming into the general public's awareness with a large number of political blogs written during the 2004 U.S. Presidential election campaign. Because of this, you may think blogging is part journalism and part political commentary, and therefore not of interest to you or the advancement of your business.

Blogs can be journalism. They can be political commentary. They can be personal diaries or journals. They can be a forum for collaboration. They can also be a way for you to show your uniqueness and build a conversation around your business and professional interests.

Technically Speaking

Because blogs are designed to be easily updated and are already on a website, you may find a blog could replace or supplement an email newsletter. They are easier to set up, easier to update, and you don't have to worry about emails getting delivered!

If you already have a website, adding a blog can help you get more visitors who are interested in you or your organization because you will be writing about your area of expertise. And since search engines love websites that are tightly focused and updated often, your site could move up quickly in search rankings.

There are plenty of places to learn much more about the technical aspects of blogs and blogging. Just do a search on Google (or your favorite search engine) to get the latest information.

How You Can Benefit

Let's say you are an insurance agent. You have expertise in life insurance and a specific set of benefits you bring to your clients. A blog gives you a platform to talk about the latest ideas related to life insurance and life planning. You can give clients (and potential clients) tips and checklists. You can give them new ideas. You can relate the latest news to your products and services. The ideas for customer relationship building are endless. Three specific benefits of blogging include:

Getting to know you. The blog becomes a part of how you brand yourself. If people read it, they will feel like they are getting to know your company, its products, services and mission. Imagine your best referral sources sending potential referrals to your blog as a way to help them get to know you. In this way your blog can be leverage – people are more qualified when they call or refer you for business.

Making it easier. Have customers that have a good rapport with your company? Encourage them to send their friends and colleagues to your blog as a way to make a connection. With little or no effort you can expand your outreach without a word said.

Keeps you “on top” of your game. By writing about your business and the benefits of your products and services, you will stay current and fresh. This will facilitate networking situations by giving you something fresh and new to talk about when having conversations with potential customers and new referrals. It also gives you new ideas to share with customers as you build relationships with them.

How to Get Started

Lots more can be said about blogging and how it might help you build your network, but this should give you some initial ideas. Make a goal to post new information to the blog weekly, as well as:

1. **Start reading some blogs.** Do a search in Google for specialty blogs. If you are an engineer, search on engineering blogs. If you are a manager, search on management blogs. You get the idea. Read what others are doing and writing about. Email them and build a collaborative network with these people.
2. **Learn About RSS.** RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is one way to “publish” your blog to the world. There are many free RSS readers that you can use to keep track of the blogs you are starting to read. Pick one (there are many) by searching for “Free RSS Reader” in your favorite search engine.
3. **Read Debbie Weil.** Debbie is an expert on blogging for business. You can find her blog at <http://debbieweil.com/>.
4. **Start a blog!** If you see value in blogging, jump in! Go to <http://blogger.com> and get started in less than five minutes for free.

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