

BLOGGING FOR GUESTS

**How Hotel, Restaurant
and Tourism marketers
can attract guests and
increase profits with blogs**



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Thanks for reading.

Introduction

So....let me guess.

You've heard a lot about blogging. Maybe you read a few regularly, and maybe you stumble across other websites you don't even realize are blogs. Perhaps you publish your own blog to promote your business.

The fact is blogging has greatly matured over the past five years or so. Instead of just being a place for people to talk about their personal lives, top blogs today are more like magazines: constantly updated with new articles. Some even have whole editorial teams working around the clock to produce quality content.

Blogging has emerged as one of the most powerful ways to publish information to the web. And, as we'll explore in this ebook, there are many uses for the hospitality and travel industry.

Let's get started....

A Quick History (*and why it matters*)

Blogging, as we know it, first started gaining popularity around 2002.

Sure, it wasn't a totally new concept. The term "weblog" was coined in 1997, and people have used websites to publish their thoughts for years. But with the introduction of tools such as Blogger and Wordpress, sharing our ideas became a whole lot easier.

This was different. It was exciting.

I know, because I was there. In early 2002, I started my first blog. Like many other people, it contained personal thoughts on things I found interesting. It was basically an online diary for my friends.

We were just exploring.

Then blogging started to grow up. Website owners saw how a blog could let them update their pages without working through a web developer. Marketers saw the publishing opportunities.

But wait...isn't this old news?

Stop...Stop! I hear you saying.

Isn't blogging so....well....2004?

What about Twitter? Facebook? Social networking?

Blogging has been around for a few years. But it's also matured into one of the most powerful online marketing tools we have today.

The best way to view blogs is as a publishing tool. It serves as your social media foundation. Later in this book I'll discuss ways you can use specific social media tools with your blogging, but first let's get the most important question out of the way....

Should you blog?

Just because I'm a big fan of blogs doesn't mean I think everyone should publish one. Blogging is not for everyone. Before starting a blog, ask these questions about your organization:

1. Do we have the time to consistently publish quality material?
2. Do we have enough interesting material to share?
3. Are we prepared to build and communicate with our online community?

Publishing a successful blog takes a lot of work. It's not going to solve all your problems overnight, but there are some very attractive benefits....

Advantages of blogging

Big advantage #1 - Search rankings & free traffic

Most buying decisions today begin with a web search. For this reason, it's important that your hospitality organization appears highly in search engine results for important phrases. When you're on top, more people will visit your website...which can lead to more sales.

Search engine marketing professionals only half-jokingly say the acronym BLOG stands for Better Listings On Google.

That's a little corny, but no one disputes the fact that search engines love fresh content. Sending people to a site that hasn't been updated for years can make search engines look outdated. Since blogs are the publishing tools of the web, it's only natural search engines love 'em.

I know this, because I've experienced it myself...

Case study: Hotel Marketing Strategies

My blog, Hotel Marketing Strategies, is at the top of Google for the ultra-competitive *hotel marketing* keyword. The site is just published by me, and I've only been blogging one year. But in that time, I've outranked dozens of company websites that have millions in annual revenues and entire teams of search optimization specialists.

As of October 2009, HotelMarketingStrategies.com is...

- #1 on Google for hotel marketing strategies
- #1 for hotel marketing blog
- #1 for hotel marketing ideas
- in the top 3 results for hotel marketing

All of these terms are very important to my company. Now, instead of paying a lot of money for people to hear my ideas, they find me naturally search results at no cost to my organization. I get 30-50% of my daily new visitors for free from Google searches, and currently have over 15,000 unique readers each month.

This experience -- along with other blogs I've worked on -- has convinced me blogging is among the top internet marketing tactics we have today.

Big advantage #2 - Blogs build your web presence

Your web presence is how often you show up on the web to people looking for what you offer. It's based on the philosophy of "distributed engagement": moving away from a website-centric publishing model, and working toward being seen many places online.

The more times you show up to the people who are interested in buying what you sell, the more likely you are to make a sale.

In the old days, you could get by with just putting up an online version of a paper brochure. Not anymore. Websites with a lot of useful, interesting content are the ones that attract the most attention.

People go online to find things, so the more content you can publish, the better.

Case study: Witt Istanbul

The Witt Istanbul Suites is a new, multiple-award-winning boutique hotel in Istanbul, Turkey. A few months ago, they built their entire website around a blog platform: Wordpress. Now, they can share media and insider information with their guests.

The benefits became clear shortly after they made the switch.

- Natural search rankings for important keywords dramatically improved
- Visitors browsed more pages on their site and stayed longer
- Interaction went up: people started using features like the printable map & directions

Big advantage #3 - It can make you a subject authority

People love insider information. When you can provide that you get their attention, and hopefully, their business. After all, the purpose of your website is to provide information that people cannot find elsewhere.

How does this look practically?

Tourism marketers can share what's cool in their region, and when to see it.

Restaurants can have their chefs talk about special new dishes.

Hotels can provide insider guides to their city.

Now more than ever, people want to be educated before making a purchase. Publishing insider information and going behind the scenes can make your guests more likely to buy from you.

Big advantage #4 - More influence & reach

Being a subject matter expert has many advantages, online and off. You'll get people talking about you, you can use that to dominate your online niche.

"Writing is the basis of all wealth." - Jeffrey Gitomer

I'd say it's also the basis of every successful marketing campaign today.

Blogs are the ideal platform for sharing ideas. Each post you write is automatically saved into a library of knowledge that visitors can browse through and you can re-use in future marketing material.

There are three popular ways bloggers re-package their content for further distribution:

- 1) RSS newsfeeds can syndicate your content to other websites, multiplying the number of people that hear about you and from you.
- 2) Automated email updates can be automatically sent to your subscribers.
- 3) Email or print newsletters. You can use your best blog posts in your newsletters.

"I edit a month's worth of blog posts and create a newsletter out of it, which goes to my address book of 20,000 past guests, colleagues, and past enquirers."

Chris, Whale Cottage Guest Houses Blog

Big advantage #5 - Blogs make a great social media hub

You'll notice the most powerful hospitality & travel marketing campaigns today use a mix of media formats to spread their message. Photos, video, and social networking services provide a nice supplement to text content.

A blog is an easy way to bring all these types of media together in one place. Having a central access point means more people see your content.

Sites such as YouTube and Flickr *make it very simple to publish rich media content on your blog. Often, all you have to do is click a button to include it. This makes life a lot easier for you: no technical skills required!*

With all the buzz about social networking, blogging has continued to quietly perform. This is because it helps you develop a critical mass of quality content that people can access in one location. This content can then be pulled into social networking sites - giving you the best of both worlds.

Disadvantages to blogging

Before we get carried away, it's important to realize there are some drawbacks to blogging.

The time factor is perhaps the biggest factor in creating a blog. Blogs are easy to start but difficult to maintain. Publishing a good blog is going to take you a significant amount of time. Of course, writing takes the most time. But you must also allow time for interacting with your readers and promoting your articles - if you want to grow.

Then there is the risk of publishing a blog that damages your brand's reputation. Fortunately, you can minimize this risk by creating publishing guidelines for whoever is involved with the blog. And remember, the potential to say something wrong isn't limited to blogs - it could happen anywhere.

Planning for success

Have a purpose

Have a purpose for publishing a blog.

“Everyone else is doing it” doesn’t count.

Successful blogs exist for a reason. What are you trying to accomplish?

The reason should align with your other business goals. This is not a ‘flavor of the month’ - it’s a long-term strategic investment.

Your reason might be:

- To increase website visitors and direct reservations
- To build loyalty with existing guests
- To help with recruiting talented staff
- To position your organization in your industry

Whatever the reason, you will be more likely to devote the energy required to make your blog a success when you have a clear purpose for doing it.

Understanding the major types of blogs

There are five general categories of blogs to work with.

1. Independent blogs - often used by one-location independent hotels and restaurants, these blogs can contain all the functions of the blogs below, including information on the business and topics of related interest for potential guests

- Example: <http://rogersmithlife.com/>
- Example: <http://www.whalecottage.com/blog/>

2. Brand blogs - narrower in focus than a one-site blog, the purpose of these is to promote the hotel brand by sharing news about what's happening within the company

- Example: <http://www.youmustbetrippin.com/>
- Example: <http://blog.mrandmrsmith.com/>

3. CEO/Manager blogs - often a more personal supplement (or even replacement) to the corporate brand blog

- Example: <http://www.blogs.marriott.com/>
- Example: <http://www.happyhotelier.com/>

4. Destination blogs - rather than promoting an organization directly, these blogs provide information on the surrounding area and upcoming events (in an effort to attract new visitors)

- Example: <http://www.govisithawaii.com/>
- Example: <http://www.spottedbylocals.com/berlin/>

5. Internal blogs - these are written for your own staff - to share knowledge and collaborate

- Most internal blogs are only visible to employees on an intranet

Who will blog?

There is no hard and fast rule here. A few people say it doesn't even matter.

In some organizations, there is a strong personality that prefers to run the blog alone. (Usually the owner) For others, sharing the writing responsibility among multiple staff is the easiest option.

"I get a good deal of help from our chef/bartender teams. If we have new menu items, seasonal wine/cocktail/food changes etc., then I ask them to feed me some info so I can write a blog. "

David Yusen, Heavy Restaurant Group

You might consider these questions when deciding who should author your blog:

- Are they a good writer?
- Are they passionate about what they are writing about?
- Do they understand your core business?
- Are they adequately familiar with blogs & blogging?
- Do they have enough time to consistently produce quality content?
- Are they authorized to make statements for your organization?

What will you write about?

Depending on the purpose for your blog, you may choose from one of the following types of blog posts:

- **Strategic** - a CEO or brand blog is a good platform to announce strategic organizational information. It serves as another media outlet. These types of posts are usually planned in advance, and not spontaneous.
- **Experiential** - uses personal experience to share information.
- **Analytical** - an in depth discussion on industry trends or business strategies.
- **Crisis** - addressing an important corporate or customer service issue that could affect your reputation
- **Trivial** - an off-topic post about personal experiences or observations.
- **Interview** - showcase your talented staff by posting short interviews on their area of specialty
- **Announcement** - breaking news is a great way to build readership
- **Instructional** - "How to..."
- **Informational** - "5 easiest ways to get to our hotel"

"I like to provide a balance of styles, but my most popular posts have been advice based."
Sheila Beal, GoVisitHawaii

- **Reviews** - "What we think of the new _____"
- **Lists** - "Top 10 _____ in _____"
- **Case Studies** - "XYZ Company's meeting experience"
- **Profiles** -- new staff, team members, employees of the month, etc
- **Link Posts** - cool stuff you find & want to share
- **Problem Posts** -- something in your industry, community, etc.
- **Contrasting Two Options** - two packages, things to do, cities
- **Rant** -- just get something off your chest!
- **Inspirational** - make people's day better
- **Research** - careful analysis
- **Collation Posts** - Summarize a collection of posts from other blogs on one topic
- **Prediction and Review Posts** - "Upcoming trends in"
- **Critique Posts** - "What I think about..."
- **Debate** - "Here's why..."
- **Hypothetical Posts** - "What if..."
- **Satirical**, and
- **Memes and Projects** - A multi-part series

The type of blog post you write will depend on your intended audience and marketing goals. You will probably settle on 3 to 5 different types of writing styles -- but I would encourage you to add some variety by occasionally writing in a different style.

More thoughts on content for your blog

Ask any blogger or blog reader for the most important factor in a good blog, and they will most likely answer: “**Content**”.

Content is the articles and media you will be posting to the blog. It's very important you plan interesting content if you want to attract a following.

To create this type of content, you need to think like a journalist. Ask: “What unique material can we develop that would engage, entertain, and inform our readers?”

Your goal is to be exclusive and newsworthy.

Exclusive so there is a reason to come to your blog. Newsworthy so that people care.

The holy grail of blogging is when your content goes viral: people share it around the internet - just because they love it. That's when your readers start to do your marketing for you.

“If you are looking to drive traffic to your site, make sure the topic is something that people are searching for. If you are looking to attract a lot of comments, blog about a topic that is controversial or people have different opinions on”

Rob Conaway, aGreatChef.com

Promotion

If no one reads your blog, you're wasting your time.

If blogging is going to be a part of your internet marketing plan, then building popularity for it needs to be a top priority. Too many well-written blogs go unread on the Internet because of a lack of promotion. Your investment into writing quality content is only worthwhile if it is read by the people that need to read it.

The first step to building a popular blog is to view the project as a major part in your marketing mix. Top bloggers understand what they're doing is serious business - and treat it that way.

This means you need:

1. Strategic goals
2. A publishing plan
3. A publishing calendar

Remember, the content is the marketing

The quality of your entries will have a direct effect on the success of your blog. There are a few reasons for this:

1. Search engines will usually bring the most traffic to your site. If you're not publishing relevant content regularly, less people will find you.
2. When visitors do find your blog through search engines, they'll quickly leave if it's not relevant to what they need.
3. If your blog content is interesting, it will be linked to and shared on other websites, bringing you more traffic from those sites and through search engines.

As you can see, it's a virtuous cycle once you begin posting good content.

28 (more) ways to attract new readers

With all due respect to Ralph Waldo Emerson - if you build a better mousetrap, the world will not always beat a path to your door. As a marketing professional, you know this. That's where an understanding of blog popularity building techniques is helpful.

Publishing great content is always the first step. Then you need to promote it. Here are some methods we have successfully used to increase a blog's reader base.

1. Link liberally to other bloggers, and request they link to you (where appropriate). Links are the currency of blogging. Don't be stingy here - share the love.
2. Comment on other blogs, especially in your industry. The blogosphere is built on community participation. If you want comments on your blog, take part in the discussion on other blogs. (Just a note: there's no need for comment spam - post intelligent responses and you'll be rewarded.)
3. Integrate and encourage social media sharing. This is easy to do, and the right post can receive thousands of new visitors if Dugg or otherwise shared in social media.
4. Promote your blog on your website and other advertising material. Not doing this could cause you to miss out on valuable traffic.

5. Harness the viral power of Twitter (Twitter is now my blog's #1 referral source)
6. Write keyword-driven blog content
7. Add your blog to relevant directories. This seems obvious, but adding your blog to the most popular directories can be a good way to attract new readers. Focus your time on the most trafficked sites, and ignore the directories that are mostly filled with spam sites.
8. Promote on Facebook. You may even create a Facebook fan page for your blog.
9. Promote LinkedIn
10. Create videos for your blog, then share videos on YouTube.
11. Participate in discussion boards and online forums.
12. Advertise on StumbleUpon for important posts
13. Right guest posts on other blogs in your niche.
14. Let other people write guest posts for you. It helps them, it helps you.
15. Create link bait. These are resources and other free goodies that other people want to share.
16. Be controversial.
17. Run a contest
18. Give away something free
19. Focus on writing cornerstone content that will remain popular over the years. On several blogs that I operate or manage, one post generates 25 to 40% of the overall readership -- even though there hundreds of articles on the site and tens of thousands of visitors each day.
20. Syndicate wisely. You may want to establish relationships with other websites to syndicate your blog's content. Just make sure they link back to the original article for search optimization purposes, and don't steal all of your search traffic. I have personally used this method alone to generate thousands of new readers each month on my blogs.
21. Consider using paid search advertising -- PPC -- in the beginning to generate recognition and visitors. I do this full for all of my new blogs, to generate traffic from the start and get things rolling.
22. Include an 'e-mail this post' a link on all articles
23. Invite people to your blog in person at conferences.
24. Promote individual articles, not just your blog as a whole
25. Create a mobile version of your blog if appropriate
26. Write about what people are talking about or searching for. To use Google analytics and trends tools to determine this.
27. Distribute important articles to industry websites that get a lot of traffic. This was one of the most effective methods I used at the beginning to build readership and search rankings.
28. Work hard, but have patience. The most popular blogs on the web today required at least 2 to 3 years to achieve their success.

"My number one tip is to use Twitter and Facebook as vehicles to drive blog traffic. I post a few sentences about an event or new promotion and include a link to our hotel blog for more information. This strategy gives consumers a call to action and improves blog visibility."

SarahEssary, The Citizen Hotel www.citizenhotel.com

To summarize: know where your ideal readers spend time online, and be there.

Don't waste your time. Make sure people are reading what you write.

Measuring performance

Profitable companies know that every marketing initiative must be tested to prove positive ROI. Success can be ambiguous. Achieving success depends on your goals for the blog.

Here are three measures of success most organizations would agree on:

1. New guests find you quickly and easily
2. You can reduce your PR budget
3. People share your content

I'm a bit of the metrics geek, so let's get a little more specific....

Metrics for measuring your blog's performance

- 1. Post Frequency:** number of posts / number of months. Blogs exist for frequent communication with their readers. Make sure your blog isn't just a website with the word "Blog" in the title.
- 2. Unique Blog Readership:** unique blog visitors + average daily feed subscribers. Since many people receive updates through RSS newsfeeds (half of my blog's readers do), you need to take these people into account as well.
- 3. Conversation Rate:** number of conversations & trackbacks / number of posts (during time period). Engaging your readers is a core purpose of blogging. How many of your readers interact with your blog?
- 4. External Benchmarking:** Technorati Rank. With so many voices in the blogosphere, it's important to make sure you're relevant. Technorati rank is based on the resources you contribute - and other people link to. You can't be a one-hit wonder, building your ranking takes time.
- 5. Cost of Blog Ownership:** setup & hosting + time invested / time period (eg, 15 hours/week @ \$75/hour). Since time is a big factor in blogging, also consider the opportunity cost of your blog.
- 6. Return on Investment:** Calculating blog ROI is a little more difficult, but consider these factors:
 - Conversion rates from traffic from your blog to your website
 - Improvement in guest satisfaction
 - Lowered cost of PR (press releases, media coverage, etc)

GENERATING SALES

Now the important part:

Generating sales from your blog

The goal of all marketing is ultimately more sales, whether you're trying to book more rooms or attract visitors to your city.

Blogging is no exception.

Some people feel that blogs and new media are more of a publicity tool -- something nice to have, but not necessarily something that you can track effectively.

I don't agree.

In my mind, every single marketing venture must result in new sales. Fortunately, there are ways that you can turn a blog into more sales, visitors, and reservations.

How is this done?

Turning readers into subscribers

Often, before making a sale you must first develop a long-term relationship with your readers. To do that, your aim is turn them from one-time website visitors into subscribers. When someone subscribes to your updates via RSS newsfeed or email, you have a much better chance of building this relationship.

Tip: offer an incentive to increase your subscription base faster. Often when I visit a website that says "sign up for our newsletter," I think "Why?" Give a reason.

For example, on my hotel marketing blog, I offer a free report -- 10 Worst Hotel Internet Marketing Mistakes -- to anyone who subscribes to the weekly e-mail updates. Here's a little screenshot of what the offer of looks like:

"Are you making expensive mistakes in your internet marketing
...without even knowing it?"

As a hotel marketing professional, I see many hotels making fundamental errors with their websites and marketing materials that cost them thousands in lost sales each month.

The worst part? Many are completely oblivious to what's happening.

To help you avoid this, I put together this special report: **10 Worst Hotel Internet Marketing Mistakes**

If you own, manage, or promote a hotel, you *must* know this information. To get instant access, fill out the form below and click the **Get Full Report** button.

You'll also get a free weekly summary of new ideas posted here...to help you stay in the loop of tactics that work.

Primary email: *

First name: *



It comes back to offering value to your readers with the purpose of building a relationship.

Practical blog monetization tips for hospitality & tourism

Building your subscriber base is all well and good, but will it make you money?

The short answer is yes, and here are some ways to encourage sales transactions on your blog: Share special blog-only rates. Breaking news on the blog builds readership as well.

Advertise your blog in your promotional material. Doing an advertising “two step” like this attracts more people than if you were to try to make a sale directly from an advertisement. Tell stories on your blog with an emotional appeal. Stories often sell better than a list of facts, and a blog is a great way to share the stories.

Finally, it's important that you remember to include a clear call to action in your blog posts. Without an obvious next step, your readers may not take the action you want them to take after reading your posts.

How to measure your blog's sales contribution

I recommend using a ‘cookie’ on your website that tracks how many people find you through your blog, and how many sales your blog is contributing.

Some parting thoughts...

“A mistake I made in the beginning was that I was reluctant to let my personality show in my writing style. That was frustrating for me, plus I think my blog was more boring. After I gave myself permission to be me, I started having so much more fun blogging. So, I’d encourage new bloggers to show personality. That’s one thing that sets blogs apart and engages readers.”

Chris, Whale Cottage Guest Houses Blog

“the biggest key to becoming successful at blogging is doing what you love and loving what you do. If you have a passion for a subject, it will show in your writing.”

Stephen, Manzanillo Blog

“Just start and Do It! Dare to make mistakes. The best learning is from your mistakes”

Guido J. van den Elshout, Happy Hotelier

What now?

BlogforGuests.com - our own new blog that will feature upcoming articles on how the hospitality & tourism industry can use blogs to attract more guests (*lots more case studies coming here shortly*)

BlogforGuests.com/services - do you need a new blog set up? Don't have time to write new entries, and want to hire someone to write them for you? We can help. A special partnership between Josiah Mackenzie, Adam Malseed, and the creative team at Gradigio is offering affordable blogging services.