

Book
04



Coming
Up with
Your
Best

Blog
Content

A
Zoho
Academy
Workbook

- Establish your blog's goal
- Know what content your prospects want
- Create killer titles
- Generate a range of post ideas
- Get inspired by varying your post "types"

The Value of the Business Blog

A blog is every business's answer to content marketing: a strategy that focuses on *giving value* to prospects instead of *valuing the product* with sales-specific copy (*that's* traditional marketing). Content marketing creates content that meets prospects' and customers' needs: It educates them, and maybe, it entertains them. And while there's no explicit promotion of your *product* in content marketing, you quietly confirm yourself as an authority through the wealth of information you're offering.



Utilizing your blog as a content marketing machine means building relationships with prospects and customers based on *trust*. It's a long-term commitment, for sure; but the more consistently you offer great content, the more likely you are to be found online, the more search traffic you'll drive to your website, the more loyal your readers will be, and the more you'll bolster your brand's reputation. What's more? You won't have spent a cent: The ROI on content marketing beats the ROI on traditional marketing by a long shot.

But how do you know *what* content to offer? How can you be sure you're giving your prospects what they *want*... and that you're offering enough variety to make it exciting? The goal of this workbook is to help you uncover the answer to these questions about your business blog's content.

Establishing Your Blog's Goal

Okay, that heading is a bit of a misnomer. Initially, you'll have *two* goals for your blog: One for your *business*, and one for your *readers*. But they'll ultimately merge into a single "mission".

Your *business* goals may include any of the following (and more!): creating brand awareness, increasing website traffic, generating interest, building trust, fostering community, becoming an industry expert, or increasing conversions. And of course, in the long run, if you're playing The Blogging Game *well*, *all* of these will naturally happen.



But establishing which of these goals to *prioritize* will help you make subtle-but important-decisions as you plan out individual posts. For instance, if your goal is to prove yourself an industry expert, you'll respond to current events as they occur in your industry. If your goal, ultimately, is to emphasize the features and benefits of your product, you'll focus on prospect pain points in your posts (remember: *No hard selling!*). If your goal to increase conversions, you'll emphasize calls to action in your posts... but not until *after* you've given your readers some terrific content.

Once you have an idea of what you're trying to accomplish for your *business*, you can move on to the most important question: How will your content gratify the needs of your *readers*?

Of course, to answer that question *well*, you've got to know who those readers are. You'll start with a buyer persona—a character sketch of your ideal customer that includes both demographic details (age, ethnicity, gender, education, income) and psychographic details (attitudes, values, opinions, and beliefs). What topics is your persona interested in? What problems and anxieties do they have? What motivates them? What keeps them awake at night? And where are they turning *now* to solve those problems and satisfy those needs?

Drill down and get specific with these personas, because you'll be “addressing” *every* post you write to them... so you'll need to know how to push their buttons at both the emotional and intellectual levels.

One great example we've seen is from *5 Minute Bookkeeping*, which states their blog's “goal” outright: “The best tutorials, tips & tricks to help you minimize bookkeeping and maximize profits.” *Thumbtack's* is, more simply, “Accomplish your personal projects.” Note that both speak directly to their readers, describing what the blog's content on the whole offers, and giving users a sense of how the blog will add value to their lives.

Exercise: Brainstorming Your Blog's Goal

The primary impact I'd like to see my blog have on my business is _____

The secondary impact I'd like to see my blog have on my business is _____

Even when I lose my initial passion for posting, what will keep me motivated to write is (knowing / feeling / seeing) _____

The three biggest problems or questions my buyer personas have, or are asking, are _____

Therefore, the most valuable content I can offer them is about _____

I can offer this content in a way that *also* allows my business to experience those primary and secondary impacts (above) by _____

The #1 Thing that All Good Business Blogs Have in Common...

...is that they educate users by answering their questions. “Educating” might mean anything from teaching readers about your industry, to offering recipes and health tips, to helping them run their businesses or handle their money better.

Now that you’ve got a clearer idea about whom you’re writing *to* and *about what*, you can start researching *how* your prospects and customers pose their questions. The “how” is crucial, because it’ll get you the keywords for your posts. Here’s where to look:

- **Your email inbox and chat archives.** How do your prospects and customers describe their pain points? The things they *do* or would *like* to do? What words do they use when talking about the benefits of your product?
- **Your employees.** Ask your sales team, customer service team, and floor staff how your prospects and customers talk about your offering. What do they most often ask about? What language do they use to ask about it?
- **Social media.** Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn... use the search functions on these platforms to see what people are saying about your business, industry, or product, and what topics are trending. (Tools like Zoho Social, Google Alerts, and Social Mention will notify you whenever your business is mentioned on these platforms.)
- **Keyword finders.** Wordstream’s Keyword Niche Finder and Google’s Keyword Planner are other great tools for discovering what keywords searchers are using to ask their questions. *How* are they searching for solutions? What tools are they looking for?

Exercise: Discovering What Your Prospects Want to Know

The top three questions my customers ask when they email my business are

The three words that come up most often when I go back through my chat archives are _____

My employees agree that the top three concerns prospects and customers raise in conversation with them are _____

When I search social media, the topics trending in my industry right now are

The biggest question social media users are asking about my business / product / industry is _____

When I enter my product or service into a Google search, along with the word “how” or “why,” the questions that display in the search engine results include

Creating Killer Blog Post Titles

The answers to the questions we posed on the last page should already have given you plenty of ideas for your first dozen or so blog posts. But *every* post will need a compelling title if users are going to click in a read.

How-tos, listicles, and question titles seem perpetually in style; and a Google search for “headline formulas” or “best blog titles” will give you plenty of ideas to work with. But since your business blog is now a long-term project, it’s worth making a habit of writing down the magazine headlines that grab you when you’re in line at the grocery store, or the blog titles that strike you as you’re surfing the web.



Exercise: Brainstorming Blog Post Titles

A Beginner's Guide to _____

What No One Else will Tell You about _____

The Ultimate Checklist for _____

Top 5 Reasons Why _____

The Biggest Misconception about _____

Why You Should Stop Worrying about _____

What Everyone Should Know about _____

How to Have / Create a _____ You Can Be Proud of

The Top 3 Ways to Do _____ Better

10 Examples of _____ that will Motivate / Inspire You

What _____ Has to Say about

Ideas and Inspiration

You've gone through your email correspondence, your chat logs, and picked your employees' brains for questions that will spur blog post ideas for you. Maybe you're running out of steam by this point. If so, here are a few other places you might look:

- **Ask your readers.** These are people who are already engaged in your content, after all. Maybe you write a dedicated post asking them what they want more of, and let them answer in the comments. Maybe you respond to individual comments on your posts and ask the commenters what more you can offer them.
- **Crowdsource.** We've already mentioned social; but it's a goldmine, and so worth mentioning twice. One strategy is to use hashtags by adding the word "problems" to whatever your industry is (#hairproblems, #decoratingproblems) to discover the challenges your prospects are experiencing.
- **Keep a finger on the pulse of your industry.** New studies, new technologies, new solutions, breaking stories about what your competitors are up to: Blog posts that respond to all of these things will alert your readers to the fact that you're plugged in and engaged.
- **Join an online community.** Whether it's Reddit or another platform altogether, there's something out there for your industry. You'll see popular queries (with a range of awesome and just-plain-wrong answers), and possibly get an international perspective.
- **Use your competitors to spark ideas.** What topics are working well for your competition? What can you add to, play devil's advocate with, or make better?

Exercise: Idea-Generation

I've asked my blog readers what they want more content about, and their top responses are _____

When I search for #[myindustry]problems on social media, the problems that come up are _____

When I search for my product or industry in Google News, the most recent news stories that display in the results include _____

When I type my product or industry into Reddit, the most interesting results have to do with _____

I've taken a look at my competitor's blogs. Among them, the post that is most popular is _____.

The post I most *disagree* with is _____.

The post I think I could write *better* _____.

The post I have more to say about is _____

Blog Post Types

Hopefully by this point, you're not short on *topics* to write about. Now how about switching up the ways you *present* that material? Formal constraints (of the kind you impose upon yourself when you begin with a title) can make for some of the most powerful posts. Here are some "types" worth experimenting with:

- **Lists.** ("Top 10," "5 Ways," "20 Reasons Why")
- **Resources.** Offer a list of best books / podcasts / products / apps / gifts / etc. You've done the work of vetting them—which means your readers don't have to do that work themselves.
- **Reviews.** These will help you position yourself as someone who's thinking critically about what's being written or made in your industry.
- **Responses.** Keep a conversation going with other leaders in your industry by responding to what they've already written.
- **Interviews.** Celebrities, experts in your industry, authorities in tangential fields: Your readers probably want to hear what they've got to say.
- **Case studies.** Share the stories of customers who once had the same problems your readers may have... and educate them by describing how those customers overcame their problems.
- **Multimedia.** "Spotlight" videos of your star employees talking about what they do. Infographics breaking down the data about your industry. MP3 files of the interviews we mentioned above. The point is to give your readers variety.

Exercise: Post Types

The best resource list I could offer my readers is a list of _____
which includes _____

The newest and most interesting book / podcast / product / etc. in my industry is
_____. I could review it by _____

Three people I can imagine interviewing for my blog are:

_____ about _____
_____ about _____
_____ about _____

The customer who would make the best case study for my blog is _____
_____ because _____

If I were to offer my readers a 3-5 minute video on my blog (or a series of them),
it would be about _____

Final Tips

This workbook focuses on your blog *copy* and generating topics to write about. But of course, there's much more to your blog than the words. Here are our final recommendations about other aspects of your blog:

- Your blog's **featured images** should be relevant to each post, simple and clean, SEO-friendly... and *legal*.
- You should utilize linking strategies, including *internal* links (links that connect your blog posts to each other) and *external* links (links that link out to authority websites... just make sure these open in new tabs!).
- Pay attention to analytics. Your host, CMS, or website builder should come with a built-in analytics feature. This feature will let you know which topics most resonate with your readers, which posts are most popular, what days and times your blog gets the most traffic, and where readers come from when they land on your blog (this is called "referral traffic"). How many posts did they read? In what order? This is valuable intelligence for future posts and re-posts.
- Build your blog's audience by guest posting on other blogs in your industry, syndicating your content, and sharing every post that gets published on social media. Ask readers to share if the post resonated with them. And if you do *each* of these things as consistently as you publish, you're bound to see terrific returns in the long run.

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