

Blogs Are Not Just for Soccer Moms

Find out how you may be missing out on an easy way to attract, capture and convert more leads for your business.



You've seen a wide range of blogs—some personal, some business related. The ease of creating blogs has allowed everyone to share more information—anything from our opinions about the most recent technology to a narrative about our vacation adventures. You may think that blogs are only for personal entertainment or maybe even current events, but you'd be wrong.

What can a blog do for your business? The simple answer: *tons*. The long answer: *well, keep reading*.

Having (and maintaining) a blog for your business is pretty much a necessity in today's quick-information climate. If you don't have a blog yet, we'll help you get up and running in no time. If you already have one, we'll help you take the next step toward optimizing its content, searchability, conversion rates and more.

So get ready to revolutionize the way you communicate with customers, potential customers and the rest of the world. It's time to put your blog to work for your business.

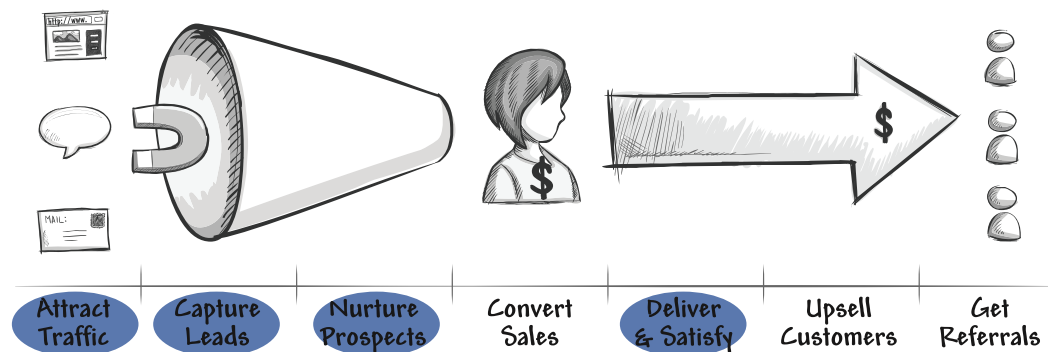
Blogging Overview and Purpose

Blogs can serve a variety of purposes along the Perfect Customer Lifecycle: They are a great tool to attract traffic, nurture prospects and even get referrals. Blogs also provide an inexpensive way for your business to leave a solid footprint in cyberspace. They require little or no setup fees, they are easy to maintain, and they don't require a Web designer or developer.

But let's be clear: Blogs are usually not meant to sell. Blog readers (and social media users in general) are sensitive to receiving useful information in a non-salesy way. If you want to link your blog post to a landing page with a whole slew of sales copy and "buy now" links, great! You're thinking the right way. But try to keep the blog articles themselves free of sales pitches. You want your readers to come back again and again, and if they feel like your posts are more sales than substance, they won't stick around long.

Blogs are about conversations. And just like the annoying guy at the dinner party, blogs that are all about "me" rarely work. This is an "us" initiative. Don't be a conversation killer—say something interesting ... then *listen*.

You'll find that a good blog can help you with many areas in the Perfect Customer Lifecycle.



Strategy

Simply *having* a blog won't do you any good; you have to maintain it, too. And by "maintain it," we mean consistently creating new content, responding to comments and otherwise staying current with your messaging.

It is important to develop a blog strategy. It's time for a little Q&A (our Q's, your A's):

1. How often will you post on your blog? It's important to commit to a schedule that you can keep up with. If you post erratically, your readers will visit erratically, and that won't do you any good. It is best to post at the same time each day/week/month to develop some rhythm with your readers. It's probably best to shoot for one or two posts per week, but your industry or personality may dictate another schedule. Just choose your frequency and stick with it. [Watch this quick video](#) about creating an editorial calendar.

2. What tone will you present on your blog? Funny? Serious? Informal? Technical? Decide how you want your blog to read. As a general rule, blogs can be much more personal and informal than traditional article writing. Think newspaper column (the ones with the little picture of the author) rather than a newspaper article (the ones that sometimes don't even have a byline). This is your chance to give your company a touch of humanity, so be yourself!

3. What information will you present? Stories? Statistics? Comparisons? Reviews? Product photos? There are a million different types of information you can deliver through a blog, and one of the best things you can do is diversify. If you are always presenting one type of information, mix it up a little.

For example, an attorney may get into the habit of always posting blog articles that focus on analyzing recent changes to the legal code. This is very useful information, especially if done in a cutting-edge, timely manner. But it would be great if the attorney mixed in some photos of a recent conference she attended, a book review (perhaps even a John Grisham novel) or a personal story that can be tied to legal principles.

Diversify your content and the readers will keep coming back!

4. How will your blog posts be formatted? Long? Short? Photos only? It's important to think through the goals of your blog and format your posts accordingly. If you're trying to educate your readers, longer posts are appropriate (and by long, we mean 250-400 words). If you're looking to merely keep your brand front and center, shorter posts (100-250 words) or simple posts with a few pictures are great choices.

But just as you should vary the types of information presented, it's important to change the formatting of your posts every once in a while too. Keep the same general template, but play with the length and style of your posts to keep things fresh. This might include slightly changing the location of images, expanding or contracting the length, or even adding a new voice (more on that later).

5. How will you use images? (And yes, you *should* use images wherever possible.) Images break up the monotony, give a visual cue to what you will be covering and open the doors to greater creativity.

If you're talking about a personal experience, include a picture of yourself in action if you can. If you're discussing a movie, include a movie poster image or even a video clip. With a little thought, you can usually think of an image to use with any blog post topic. Give it a shot. **For example:**

A post about trying to organize your contacts without Infusionsoft:



A post about how a new insurance plan will keep you protected:



You get the idea. Use images to add meaning to your words. But if you're using an image that isn't yours, be sure to give credit to the source somewhere on your blog page.

Blog Platforms

Now that you have a game plan for your blog, it's time to put everything into place. There are plenty of blog creation/hosting options on the market today. Many of these options are free, and others include a nominal fee. Let's take a look at some of the most popular solutions.

WordPress (.com)

WordPress.com is a free platform that is hosted on the WordPress domain. Your blog address will likely be www.yourblog.wordpress.com. This is a great way to easily create and maintain your blog. You won't need to upgrade any software, since it will automatically be updated online when changes are made to the platform. One drawback may be that you don't have full control since your blog is hosted elsewhere.

WordPress (.org) **Recommended for Infusionsoft Users*

WordPress.org uses the same platform as WordPress.com, but you have to download the software and host in on your own server. This takes a little more technological savvy, but also opens a lot of doors. You'll be able to customize your blog to look and feel just like your website, and you'll have a clean domain name (without the "wordpress" anywhere in the URL). Another benefit of this open-source tool is that developers are constantly coming up with new themes, plug-ins and other accessories. See <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/> for all the options.

TypePad

TypePad is a powerful blog platform, and it might be a little easier to use than WordPress. For businesses looking to create a great-looking blog without a ton of integrations, TypePad might be just the thing. It does carry a price tag of between \$9.00 and \$30.00 a month, depending on the package.

Blogger (Blogspot)

Blogger is Google's free, Web-based blogging platform. While it doesn't have the horsepower associated with WordPress, Blogger is extremely easy to set up and maintain. Blogger is also expandable—you can have up to 100 users on a single blog account, so multiple authors can access the content.

Tumblr

Tumblr is somewhere in between a full-fledged blog and a Twitter feed. It makes updating and maintaining your blog as easy as can be. Tumblr is a great choice for certain industries that want to highlight products (such as clothing), start dialogue (such as film reviews) or display images (such as photography shoots). Tumblr is also great for those looking to tap into the mobile media market.

Attracting Traffic with Your Blog

A blog is a great tool that can help you attract traffic. This is the first section of the Perfect Customer Lifecycle, and it is the foundation that all the other steps rest on. You may have the best product in the world, but without an audience, it's hard to make a pitch.

You should actively seek to drive traffic to your blog. That doesn't mean that your blog is the end of the road—quite the contrary. Your blog is just the beginning. The content on your blog will hopefully build awareness to the point that you can capture leads and do all the other fun stuff that leads up to converting a prospect into a customer and collecting the cash.

There are a few things you can do to attract traffic to your blog. Each of these suggestions is part of a bigger puzzle, and rarely do they make a difference alone. It's important to use a comprehensive approach to attracting traffic. Let's get to it.



SEO—blog style

Search engine optimization (SEO) is basically the art of getting noticed through Google (or other search engines). When someone searches a topic, will your blog appear in the results? Better yet, will it appear in the *first page* of results? A little SEO will go a long way in getting some organic traffic to your blog. Concentrate on these three areas for SEO success: keywords, fresh content and inbound links.

Keywords

A good place to start your SEO strategy is in the selection of keywords. Keywords are words that people type into their search engine, such as “plumber Gilbert Arizona” or “business strategy coach” or “screen printing baseball T-shirts.” Since most (or all) of your posts should include keywords relevant to your target market, you need to come up with a list of words you can use.

Since Google is the leading search engine, maybe it would be best to go right to the source for your research. The [Google AdWords Keyword Tool](#) allows you to get a comprehensive list of related keywords and how often they are searched. The lists the Keyword Tool produces will be a great asset as you write your posts. They are also very helpful when trying to think of topics to write about; simply write about what people are searching for.

Keywords should be sprinkled throughout your blog post, but not so much that it gets distracting. At the very least, keywords should appear in these sections:

- The title of the post (this will end up being part of the URL, so this is a must-do)

Example: *Roller Skating in Cleveland Has Never Been Better*

- The category tag(s)

Example: *Cleveland Roller Skating, New Roller Rinks, Cleveland Skating*

Fresh content

Search engines (and humans) like new content. The more you can update the content of your blog, the better. Build your content with keywords and categories that are relevant to your target market and watch your popularity rise.

Inbound links

Search engines are a little bit like teenagers—they tend to focus on the popular kids. As more people recognize your blog, your search engine ranking will be higher. Appearing in blogrolls, being mentioned in articles or other blogs, and receiving inbound links from other websites will all help your perceived popularity. One of the best ways to encourage others to link to your blog is to link to theirs first. The more you do for others, the better your chance of receiving some notoriety. Man, it *is* a lot like high school ...

Focus on these SEO principles and you will start seeing your traffic increase. But it won't happen overnight, so be patient.

Building Hype

Another way to increase your blog traffic is to build hype. There are several ways to do this, and here are a couple of ideas:

Contests/Giveaways

When in doubt, bribery usually works. Offer incentives for people to subscribe to your blog, make comments or drive more traffic your way. For example, you can run a contest where your prospects and customers can submit a photo of themselves with your product. Then, they can ask their friends and family to vote for their photo by leaving a comment on your blog. Your readership goes up, you get lots of comments, you reinforce your brand (by showing pictures of happy customers with your product) and you don't really do any of the work. The contestants are the ones driving traffic to your site! It's a beautiful thing.

Social Media

Use your social media influence to drive traffic to your blog. This could be as simple as Tweeting that you have a new blog post and asking readers to go check it out. This is also a great way to share past posts that may have been forgotten. Use a URL-shortening device (like bit.ly) to stay within the character limit on Twitter. On Facebook, you can link directly to your post.

How to Capture Leads on Your Blog

When someone comes to your blog, they have at least a little interest in you. This could be a great time to capture their information in a non-threatening way. Here are a few ideas to help you capture leads on your blog:

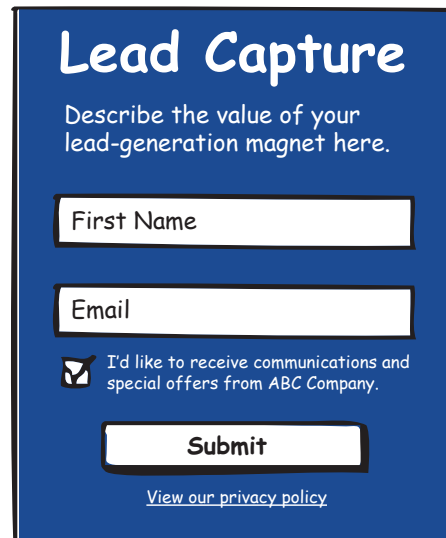
Special Offers

Your blog shouldn't be filled with blatant, hit-you-over-the-head advertising, but it is a great venue for thoughtful, strategic offers. If you're writing a blog post that goes hand in

hand with one of your other content giveaways, then by all means let the reader know about it.

Infusionsoft customer Laura Roeder is masterful at this. Check out the special offer at the end of one of her blog posts:

Since she was talking about a website-related topic in the blog post, she was perfectly justified in presenting her supplemental materials that have to do with creating a WordPress website. This simple link will take readers to a landing page that hosts an Infusionsoft Web form for lead capture. Brilliant!



Lead Capture

Describe the value of your lead-generation magnet here.

First Name

Email

I'd like to receive communications and special offers from ABC Company.

Submit

[View our privacy policy](#)

Get Subscribers

If your content is good enough (and we're sure it will be if you follow a few simple [copywriting creation best practices](#)), then you can ask readers to sign up for your email list. They'll receive your posts directly in their inbox and not have to navigate all those pesky URLs and links. In exchange, you'll capture their contact information, which you will **use responsibly** to build your relationship.

Simply put a Web form on your blog (in a noticeable location) to capture the name and email of those interested in receiving the email version of your blog post. Then, when someone fills out the form, Infusionsoft can start an automatic follow-up sequence that will send the blog post updates.

Using Your Blog to Build Brand Awareness

We discussed earlier that blogs usually shouldn't be used to sell things, but that doesn't mean they don't serve a marketing purpose. Blogs are a great way to build your brand awareness. The more you appear in cyberspace, the more recognized you (and your products) will be when it comes time for your potential customers to make a purchase.



The awareness phase is the first part of the sales cycle. Well before someone is ready to buy from you, they must become aware of your company and your products/services. This is especially true in a B2B setting, where the sales cycle can last from two to six months or beyond. Those who don't concentrate on building the awareness

phase often discover low conversion rates and an “eat what you catch” mentality—constantly trying to replenish their dwindling pool of prospects.

Having a great blog will allow you to keep building awareness automatically and should help you develop a stream of prospects that will bubble up through the sales cycle until they are ready to buy.

There are three things your blog needs in order to build brand awareness: credibility, frequency and interactivity.

Credibility

You need to establish yourself as the expert in your field—the more knowledge you can share, the better. A blog is a personal way to show that you *are* the expert. Your blog posts give instant credibility to you because they have your name right there in the byline. And if you address specific questions that your prospects may have, they’ll trust you as the authority on a given subject.

Deliver Relevant News

Check out what Infusionsoft customer Kent Phelps is doing with his blog. He is a partner in Durfee-Phelps, an estate planning law firm. He updates his blog with current news from both local and national lawmakers, keeping his clients in the loop. His clients (and potential clients) know that they can find all of the information pertaining to changing laws and regulations right on his blog. He is the authority and is building credibility with every new post.



Guest Authors

One way to add credibility to your blog is to include guest authors. If you associate with other experts, giving them a byline on your blog is a great way to establish credibility. Guest authors can even be other members of your team, such as a finance director, sales manager, fulfillment specialist, etc. When you determine what your readers need to know, find an expert who can deliver the information.

Frequency

People need to see messages multiple times before they act. So, over time, a blog can be a part of a brand-building machine that includes print and Internet ads, affiliate mentions, media coverage, word-of-mouth buzz and more.

But it's crucial to update your blog frequently so that it can be a major player in the brand-building game. Frequently updated blogs do better with SEO, get more comments and infiltrate a bigger area of cyberspace (i.e., your marketable prospects).

Don't try to build your brand in one or two clever posts. Instead, build your brand with consistent posts that keep you front and center in the minds of your potential customers.

Interactivity

Reputable brands seem to appear everywhere, and they become a part of our everyday conversations. And while you may not become the topic du jour at the water cooler on the day after the Super Bowl, you can still be a big part of the online conversation.

Blogs allow you to extend your brand's tentacles deep into your market and grab hold of potential consumers. You can use your blog to respond to news, answer questions, ask questions and more. Think of your blog posts as interactive conversations that happen to be organized in one location.

Here are some things you can do to increase interactivity:

- **Ask for comments**

Don't end the conversation, start it! Ask for feedback somewhere in your post and eventually you'll have a slew of comments that will add to the community feel. People love to see that other people are reading this blog too. Plus, you'll likely get a few "great post!" or "I'm going to go do this right now" types of comments, which instantly add to your credibility.

- **Respond to those who leave comments**

If someone takes the time to comment, don't ignore them. Thank them for their comment and continue the dialogue. Sometimes the best interaction comes after the initial comment.

Here's an example of how Kent Phelps responds to his readers to encourage interactivity:

- **Comment on other blogs and link back to your own**



Be a good community member by reading and responding to industry blogs. Sometimes that could mean commenting on a competitor's blog, but usually it means commenting on a blog that deals with a complementary service or product.

Here's an example: *"Great post! I really like what you had to say about finding the right location to fly remote-controlled airplanes. I recently wrote a post on fun things to do at local parks. I think flying might be the perfect thing to make a day at the park even more fun! Check it out at www.blog.getoutside.com/parks."*

- **Be a guest poster on another blog**

If you find a blog that you love to read and is relevant to your field or industry, ask if you can be a guest poster. But before you go out on a limb to ask for a byline, be sure to comment regularly so that the author knows that you care ... and that you know your stuff.

- **Use social media sharing tools**

Make it easy for your readers to share your posts with Facebook "Like" or "Tweet Me" buttons.

Blogs Built to Nurture Prospects

Blogs do a great job of expanding your brand awareness, but they can also take it a step further. After the "awareness" phase, potential customers enter into the "research" phase of the sales cycle. This is where you need to nurture your prospects until they are ready to buy. Nurturing means providing the information that your prospects will use to make a decision and eventually hand over their cash.

Blogs make a great “soft” call to action

Blogs are (hopefully) known as safe places where visitors won't be getting the “hard sell.” Including a link to a blog article in your marketing materials is a great call to action that will lead your prospects through the sales cycle without a lot of pressure. Typically, visitors will be more likely to visit a blog than they would be to visit a sales page. This is especially useful early in the research phase of your prospects.

Use your blog as your newsletter

Send your newsletter subscribers to your blog for their weekly or monthly updates. That way, you increase the site visitors *and* save yourself the time of creating two sets of content. On the reverse side, you can include a newsletter sign-up on your blog.

Use archives to continually publish content

The goal in the nurture phase is to give your prospects a wealth of knowledge and to build their confidence in your company. You've probably spent some time creating amazing content that you want the whole world to see, but what about those prospects who came in after the publication of that content?

You need to recycle your “bread and butter” content so that new prospects can see your best stuff too. There's nothing wrong with recycling your old content—it is yours, after all. But to make sure that your blog stays fresh and you don't get redundant with your long-time subscribers, bring up some of the gems you have in the archives via email links or social media mentions.

Using Automation Links

One way to get your prospects to read your blog is to send them there from your email marketing communications. Infusionsoft users can set up an Automation Link (or multiple links) that will track interest and send readers to the blog for more information. These links can appear in an email series, a video series, an email newsletter or any other type of email communication.

Using Your Blog to Deliver and Satisfy

Blogs shouldn't become irrelevant after the sale. In fact, they can be most useful in the “Deliver and Satisfy” phase of the Perfect Customer Lifecycle. Here are a few ways to tap into your blog's power after the sale:

Promote Usage

Depending on your product or service, a blog can be a great way to inspire your customers to use (and love) their new purchase. Write blog posts that include tips and tricks to help them get the most out of their purchase. For example, a company that sells blenders could occasionally post recipes or other fun ideas that help reinforce the purchase.

Provide Technical Help

Blogs are actually a great way to provide customer support, especially with a technical type of product. You can post updates, known issues and even answer questions right from the blog.

Surveys

To ensure that your customers are satisfied with their purchase, you can request customer feedback from your blog. Post a survey or ask open-ended questions to keep the dialogue going.

Conclusion

We hope you've seen just how important a blog can be for your business. Rarely do we find one concept that spans across multiple areas of the Perfect Customer Lifecycle. Keeping your blog up to date will bring you more traffic, help you build your brand, nurture your prospects and eventually deliver top-notch service to each new customer.

What are you waiting for? Let's do this!

Resources:

[Keyword Research Tools](#)

[SEO for Bloggers](#)

[Infusionsoft's Blog](#)