

## Blog Goals

Guidelines are only useful (can only be written) if we have clear goals. In most commercial cases, the goals of writing a blog are:

- Reinforce or establish authority in a given field
- Generate interest in your product or company

Blogs are more effective than traditional marketing materials such as newsletters because, in general, blogs are signed by their authors rather than being “anonymous”. Also, blogs facilitate dialog between the author and audience, including dissenting opinions. In short, blogs promote dialog, whereas traditional marketing materials are one-way communications.

The first step in making a sale is engaging your potential client in a conversation. Since blogs promote dialog, they are a great way to take this first step.

The guidelines that follow are based on the above goals.

## Measure and Balance

*“Nations collapse, buildings crumble, but data live forever.” Anonymous*

Blog posts are data. Anything you publish will most likely be saved somewhere on the internet in addition to your own web server. Search engines frequently store cached versions of pages so that they can verify their index. Other sites are simply “histories” of web pages, where you can see the contents of a page at any point in time. Bloggers may copy and paste quotes from your posts and comment on them. In any case, the lesson is the same: your posts live forever; will you still feel the same about what you’ve written when you’re old and grey?

**Guideline: Measure your words and balance your opinions.**

Suggestions:

- Never write about your personal affairs, or even hint at them
- Never disparage anyone, for any reason
- Moderate your readers’ comments (lest your readers fail to respect this guideline)

## Authoritative Voices Are Accountable

Establishing authority and accountability is accomplished in part by standing behind what you say. Visitors to your blog need background information about the author and to be able to contact the author directly (a street address, if not a phone number, is recommended). The goal is to promote the fact that the author is a real, identifiable person.

### Guidelines:

- Include About Us, Contact Us, and Terms of Use pages on your blog.
- Include your name and a timestamp at the end of every post. Most blogging systems do this automatically.
- Join “social networking” sites and link to your profile from your About Us page. Links to listings on the ABA web site are appropriate for lawyers.

## Authoritative Voices Speak Clearly

Blog readers tend to consume blogs faster than most other printed media. Likewise, they draw conclusions about the message based in large part on the presentation and depending on the sophistication of the visitor, on a variety of technical factors (is the blog hosted on a free site, does it include “permalinks”, etc.). Furthermore, the typical blog reader’s attention span is very limited. Shorter words and sentences play much better on the web than they do in printed media. Overuse of formatting or graphics distracts the reader from the message.

### Guidelines:

- Proofread prior to publishing and be consistent with formatting and punctuation.
- Limit posts to 250 words or less.
- Use terminology your intended audience is likely to use or provide a gloss if proper terminology is required.
- Don’t overuse **bold**, *italics*, UPPER CASE, or other formatting features.
- Include graphics, illustrations, powerpoint presentations, etc., *wherever they add value*.
- Write clear, succinct, blog titles of no more than 7 words.

### Suggestions:

- Compose your posts in an email addressed to someone who represents your intended audience, but don’t send it. This will help you focus your message. You can then copy and paste the email into your blogging system.

- Submit all posts to an Editor prior to posting. An extra set of eyes can spot and fix typos and common grammatical errors that would otherwise interfere with your post's message and undermine your authority.
- Print out a draft of your post and proofread the printed version. Proofing online is less effective than proofing a printed copy

## Participation Generates Interest

Successful blogs are a primary source of dialog for the readers. Sometimes the dialog is with the blog author(s) and sometimes with friends and colleagues regarding a specific post. Regardless, the key to generating interest lies in regular online participation in the "blogsphere" and forums.

### Guidelines:

- Schedule "blogging time" in your workweek and use this time for reading and commenting on other blogs and for composing your own posts. Don't interrupt other work to compose a blog. Rather, jot down the blog topic and compose it during your regularly scheduled time.
- Leave engaging comments on others' blogs and forums.
- ALWAYS link back to your own blog whenever posting on other blogs or forums.
- When referencing 3rd party information, provide a link to the source.
- Use the "future post" feature of your blogging system (if it has one) so you can schedule when a post should be published (in case you are on vacation, for example).

### Suggestions:

- Invite respected authorities to write guest posts on your blog and offer to write posts for other blogs you follow (and ALWAYS include a link back to your own blog when posting on other blogs).
- Consider having multiple authors providing content for a single blog to ease the workload. Regular posting keeps subscribed readers interested but is sometimes difficult for individual authors to provide.
- Write several posts at once, but don't feel obligated to post them together. Rather, dole them out one at a time. It is not uncommon to have between 10 and 20 posts in varying stages of development (drafts).

## Additional Resources

These guidelines were composed based on some of the following references. We suggest you spend a few minutes reviewing the following pages as they provide additional detail that was left out of the guidelines above and will make your blogging experience more productive:

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/weblogs.html>

By Jacob Nielsen, THE reference on web site usability. These are his views on common mistakes made by bloggers.

<http://deyalexander.com/publications/page-titles.html>

By Dey Alexander, Writing usable titles for web pages.

<http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com/2006/10/how-to-write-well.html>

By Greg Mankiw, this page provides some rules of thumb on writing clearly and succinctly, which is very important on the web.

<http://www.goarticles.com/cgi-bin/showa.cgi?C=933597>

By Cindy Thomas, Top 10 list of DOs and DON'Ts of blogging.

<http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writebetter>

By Dennis A. Mahoney, another article on how to compose articles for blogs.

<http://www.positivityblog.com/index.php/2007/09/24/how-to-build-a-somewhat-successful-blog-16-lessons-i-have-learned/>

By Henrik Edberg, somewhat longer list of generic DOs and DON'Ts for bloggers.

[http://www.consultwebs.com/articlesdt/law\\_firm\\_blogs.htm](http://www.consultwebs.com/articlesdt/law_firm_blogs.htm)

By Dale Tincher, Insights on producing successful blogs for law firms.

<http://kevin.lexblog.com/>

By Kevin O'Keefe, an entire blog on blogging for lawyers.

[http://3lepiphany.typepad.com/3lepiphany/taxonomy\\_law\\_firm\\_blogs/](http://3lepiphany.typepad.com/3lepiphany/taxonomy_law_firm_blogs/)

By ?, An extensive list of law firm blogs