

BUILD BETTER BLOGS

Be Your Own Publisher.



Why Blog?

Sixty-four percent of nonprofits run at least one blog, and there are several reasons why that number is growing. Blogs are a great tool for nonprofits to engage and inform supporters about the organization and its priorities. An active blog that regularly publishes program updates can help give your organization a greater sense of transparency and relevance. By providing a space for staff to present their work and respond to current events in your field, a blog can help your organization identify and connect with audiences on a deeper level than your social media profiles, bypassing traditional media.

What's the Difference?

Keep in mind that a blog is not a substitute for social media. Instead, your organization's blog should complement your larger online presence and provide content to promote on other channels. Blog posts offer you the ability to go in depth about your organization's work and perspective on current news cycles in ways most social media platforms do not. With the right structure, keywords and content, a blog can be a critical part of your organization's digital strategy.

Craft

There is no formula for writing a perfect blog post, but there are several best practices to keep in mind.

+Headlines

First, choose your title. Good blog headlines are descriptive, clear and concise. Titles between 8-12 words work best to grab readers' attention and make it easier to share posts on social media outlets with character limits. Consider ways to create a sense of urgency when crafting a title for your post. If your organization works on time-sensitive issues, make sure your title reflects any relevant timing.

Choose a title for your posts that incorporates numbers or statistics. The American Civil Liberties Union's Speak Freely blog does this especially well. Headlines such as "Big Corporations Make Millions by Selling People a Chance to Get Out of Jail" and "How Poor Health Care Turned Walter Jordan's Prison Sentence Into a Death Sentence" are informative and attention-grabbing.

Don't be afraid to be edgy with your title, especially if you're writing about something topical or newsworthy. Spitfire's blog post about Gwyneth Paltrow's failed Supplemental Nutrition Application Program (SNAP) offers a good example. We used the headline: "Oh, Gwyneth...When Celebrity Spokespeople Go Bad." If you're not forming any bright ideas on your own, try brainstorming with a colleague.

+Length

Research shows that the most engaging posts keep readers on the page for seven minutes. This time translates to about 2100 words. If you're writing a longer piece, you might want to use bullet points and lists to break up blocks of text. Also consider bolding the most important points or using bullets or lists to focus readers' skimming eyes on your priority points.

+Keywords

While you're writing, keep one or two keywords or phrases (including long-tail keywords) in mind for search engine optimization (SEO) or to help your blog post appear higher in search engine results. Place keywords in the body of your post as well as in the title. Also use these words as tags to help categorize your post within your blog and help visitors find your post by searching through categories.

+Visualize

Images and infographics are excellent tools for helping your readers connect with your content. Adding photos, videos or charts to a blog post will help break up any long sections of text and help people visualize the facts that you're sharing. Choose graphics and images that complement your post's content and contribute to the narrative that you are trying to create. If you're writing about an event that your organization hosted or participated in, make sure to take photos and share them on your blog. This will help humanize your organization and give your post more depth.

Blog posts are also a great place to share visual representations of any compelling data or research that you've found. Readers are far more likely to share data presented in a user-friendly way and your blog can be the perfect vehicle for presenting these sources. Remember to caption photos that you use with relevant keywords to allow search engines to find your content easily.

Share

Promoting your posts starts within your own blog. If you're writing regularly about an issue or providing program updates, include links and references to previous posts on the topic. Internal linking will help give your blog a sense of continuity and boost your internal pageviews, while also lowering your overall bounce rate.



+Choosing a Platform

While many organizations host their blogs on their websites, you may wish to post your content directly to a social media outlet with a blogging feature. LinkedIn, Tumblr and Medium are potential platforms that you can use. These sites offer preset structures, a built-in audience and an internal tagging system to make your content easier to find. Consider the nature of your content, your intended audiences and any time or capacity constraints when choosing your platform. If you hope to reach a professional audience, LinkedIn is the right platform to use. Microblogging sites such as Tumblr are better for short, shareable posts while long-form content works best on Medium.



+Plan

Next, think about which posts that you would like to share on social media. If you're blogging regularly, be selective about which posts that you share to avoid spamming your followers. To do this, take a look at your Google Analytics to determine which posts are getting the most pageviews and clicks. When sharing links to your blog, such as in your email or on a social media profile, add a brief one- or two-sentence description or pull a quote from your post to hook your readers. Social media is ideal for creating a discussion, so be thoughtful about your captions and how you respond to negative commenters.

Network

To expand the reach of your blog, ask staff members to share blog posts to their personal social media profiles, if they feel comfortable. Also consider sharing posts and content from other organizations' blogs to your own page. Sharing peer organizations' content will encourage them to do the same with yours.



+Email

Email is another essential tool for distributing blog posts and communicating with supporters. Promoting important blog content through email gives you an opportunity to target specific audiences. Consider geography, demographics and past levels of engagement when choosing blog posts to share with your audience by email.



+Listen

Your blog's performance can help you determine the issues and topics that are most important to your audiences. Look at the number of pageviews and comments on your posts for an indication of which issues are the most popular. Your email and social media strategies can also help you evaluate your blog's impact. Use the metrics from your social media profiles and email platforms, such as click-through rates and subscription numbers, to measure your blog's reach.