

What are Blogs?

Written by **Joe Varlack**

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Blogs are **web logs** that are updated on a regular basis by their author. They can contain information related to a specific topic. In some cases blogs are used as daily diaries about people's personal lives, political views, or even as social commentaries. The truth of the matter is that blogs can be shaped into whatever you, the author, want them to be.

Blogs give you an opportunity to write content that is unique to you and your practice. While some people are uncomfortable with self promotion, your blog gives you an occasion to interact with your visitors while promoting who you are and what you do.

Today blogs are being used for all sorts of purposes. You have companies that use blogs to communicate and interact with customers and other stakeholders. Newspapers incorporate blogs to their main website to offer a new channel for their writers. Individuals also create blogs to share with the world their expertise on specific topics. And so on.

How do you get people to read your blog?

One of the ways to attract readers to your blog is to title your postings so that you can get their attention and draw them in to your blog. Take into consideration the basics of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), when you are writing in your blog, so that you can bring in traffic not only to your blog but to your site. A prime example is the December 10th blog entry for sbplasticsurgeon.com entitled "Botox Safety". Dr. Lowenstein has placed tags such as Botox, Plastic Surgery, Plastic Surgery in Santa Barbara on his blog thereby boosting his SEO presence.

Where Did Blogs Come From?

The roots of blogging can be traced back to the mid 1990's. Who the very first blogger was is actually unclear, as the art of blogging did not really take hold until 1999. The original "weblogs" were link-driven sites with personal commentaries. The very first blogs were human guided Internet web tours. While initially thought of as diaries or online journals, blogs have evolved into the latest fresh web content.

Why is Blogging Helpful to Businesses or Individuals?

Just as having an animated image was once cool, blogging has become the trendy thing to do. That does not mean that it is not beneficial to businesses. Businesses struggling to keep fresh, attractive content on their websites to lure visitors back, have found blogs the answer. Content is a necessity for online businesses, both for purposes of being found by search engines but also because it gives visitors a reason to come back.

Blogs & Your Business

You need to determine how a blog will benefit your practice. Establish a schedule to keep your blog current and adhere to it. Let your readers know what to expect and when to expect it. Blogs provide great supplemental content and direct attention to areas of your practice that you may want to showcase by letting you direct the content and having your readers guide you.

The Future of Blogs

While trendy, "blogging" is the wave of the future. Whether it's a fad, or proves to be a new way to communicate with existing and potential customers it deserves a serious look at the very least.

What are the differences between the blogs we create for our clients and external blog companies?

- **Look and feel** – you can customize an external blog to a certain extent. MedNet's blogs are integrated seamlessly into your site so that it follows the same design as the rest of your site. |
- **Domain** – the external blog company domain is specific to their hosting. This is a means to direct visitor's to their site with your blog as an afterthought.

For example, the domain you would establish with them would be: <http://externalcompanydomain.blogspot.com/>

The blog you have with MedNet would be:

<http://yourdomainname.com/blog>

- **Limitations of external blog** –There is no real method of tracking the traffic to your blog or a means of submitting your blog to search engines. Remember, with the blog hosted on their site, you would really be tracking the traffic to their main site.
MedNet can track the activity to your blog in the same way the traffic is monitored to the rest of your site. MedNet can install a plugin to the blog so that will automatically notify Google to visit your site each time you post to it.
- **SEO** – a blog that has been established on your main site, will give your site more credence with Google. Each post you create adds a page to your site. An external blog that sits outside of your MedNet site loses the benefit of all the new content you are posting.

How does blogging effect SEO?

January 31, 2012 - [mRELEVANCE](#)

Often referred to as social media, blogs exist on every topic imaginable, and in every industry. Anyone with an Internet connection can set up their own cyber-soapbox in a few minutes — and for free on sites like Google-owned Blogger or Word Press.

But the question in the minds of many business owners: What possible return on investment can my company receive from launching a blog? There are numerous reasons why it makes sense to blog for your business, whether on your own site or on an industry specific site. Here are the top five:

1. Establish your expertise. By writing about what your business does and how you do it on a regular basis, you “show” that you’re an expert in your field.
2. Establish “real” credibility. Your blog allows you to be a real human and share your knowledge and opinions with the world (just be careful what you say — kids’ MySpace rants are keeping them out of college). Think of your blog as the online equivalent of casual Fridays. Show the world that your business is run by real people — and cares about real people — and that you’re not another Enron hiding behind a slick corporate web site.
3. Build a professional community. The best blogs create a network of people interested in similar topics. They comment on each other’s posts, and though they may disagree at times, the controversy increases the “buzz,” attracting more readers to the blog community. This community can serve as a source of referrals as well as a way to test new products or ideas and get feedback. Smart bloggers share their business secrets with this community — and whomever else might be following the discussion — increasing their perceived expertise and credibility, advancing their entire industry while sky-rocketing their own reputation.
4. Create relationships with your prospective clients. Your blog can invite prospective buyers “behind the curtain” and create a personal relationship with them long before they step foot in the sales center or visit the next open house. They can ask you questions in the comments section of your blog posts, which you should answer. Others will join in. Eventually your blog starts to act like a fishing trawler, hauling in prequalified traffic that is looking for your product or service.
5. Drive targeted traffic to your main web site. This is the biggest reason to blog. After all, the more traffic your site attract, the more potential sales. How does it work? Well, I’m sure by now you’ve heard of SEO (search engine optimization). Basically, SEO boils down to making your site rank higher for certain words or phrases on search-engine results pages.

In other words, you want your web site to show up when someone types words related to your business into a Google, Yahoo or MSN search. The higher you rank in the search engine results pages (SERPs), the more traffic you get. The more traffic, the more potential sales.

16 Top Tips from Blogging Experts for Beginners



By Belle Beth Cooper JULY 30, 2013

I've heard blogging referred to a couple of times recently as a mixture between an art and a science. If this is true (and I think it is), there's no 'right way' to approach blogging if you want to be successful. There are plenty of people who've done a great job of it though, and I thought it would be useful to learn from them.

These 16 bloggers shared one important tip each for blogging beginners. No doubt, even if you're not a beginner these tips will probably prove to be useful.

1. Get ideas from your audience

Create blog posts that answer the most interesting questions from people you engage with on social media.

Dave Larson, founder of @tweetsmarter

This can be a great way to gather ideas of what topics people would most like to read about, which will help your blog grow! One of the best ways I've seen this in action is through blog comments or Tweets. In one example, here on FastCompany a lot of people requested a post that features more women entrepreneurs:

Now, a few weeks later adding such an article where just women contributed and built great businesses was a big hit:

11 LITTLE-KNOWN APPS THAT ENTREPRENEURS CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

WANT TO GET MORE PRODUCTIVE? FAST COMPANY ASKED AMAZING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS--LIKE RACHEL SKLAR, WHITNEY JOHNSON, CINDY GALLOP, LEANDRA MEDINE, AND STACY LONDON--TO SHARE THEIR FAVORITE APPS.

BY: MEREDITH FINEMAN



271



1.0k



906

2. Understand your audience

Understand your audience better than they understand themselves. It takes a lot of upfront research, and often means being a member of the very tribe you're trying to lead – but it pays off.

Brian Clark, founder and CEO, [Copyblogger](#)

Understanding your audience better means you'll have a better idea of what blog content will resonate with them, which is a good start when you get to writing blog posts.

A great technique for doing this is to simply ask your readers first on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn with an engaging quote. If people respond well to it, than this is probably a great topic to write about. An example for this comes from Andrew Chen who famously “tests” his blogpost ideas on Twitter first.

And so does Joel here at Buffer. Take this example from a recent Twitter post of his, where he simply tweeted one quote to see how well people liked a topic before he blogged about it:



3. Write for yourself first

Write for yourself first & foremost. Ignore the fact that anyone else will read what you write; just focus on your thoughts, ideas, opinions and figure out how to put those into words. Write it and they will come.

Aadi Pienaar, founder of [PublicBeta](#)

Aadi's experience in writing for himself firstly has made a difference to his blog in ways he didn't expect: *Yes, since I've been writing for myself, I've found that I write more and I publish more often. I think though that the main reason for that is that I don't decide whether to publishing something based on the traction / reception that the post will receive within my audience; instead if I want to publish something, I do so. For myself.*

4. Build your email list

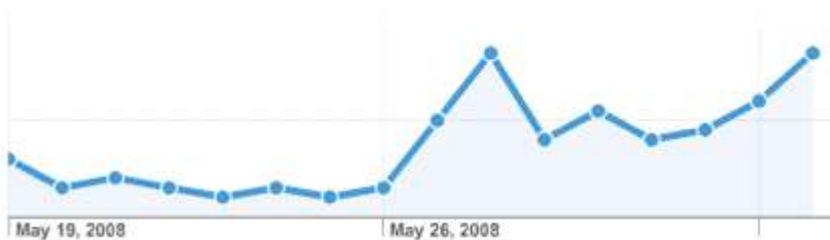
Start building your email list from day one. Even if you don't plan on selling anything, having an email list allows you to promote your new content to your audience directly without worrying about search rankings, Facebook EdgeRank, or other online roadblocks in communications.

Kristi Hines, freelance writer and professional blogger

When you're asking readers to sign up for your email list, you might want to try experimenting with different language. Willy Franzen found that his subscription rate jumped 254% higher when he changed his call-to-action from "subscribe by email" to "get jobs by email":

Most of my subscribers use one of the two large buttons on my site. The buttons used to include the text "Subscribe by E-mail" and "Subscribe by RSS" along with appropriate graphics. After I had my epiphany, I switched the text to "Get Jobs by E-mail" and "Get Jobs by RSS."

I instantly saw results.



The above graph shows the trend in clicks to my RSS feed and e-mail subscription buttons for the 8 days prior to the change and the 8 days after the change. My subscription rate has increased 254% since I made the change, and 66% of the new subscribers are e-mail subscribers.

Using this phrase more clearly tells Willy's readers what they're signing up for, which clearly worked well!

5. Love your existing readers

Love the readers you already have. A lot of bloggers get quite obsessed with finding new readers – to the point that they ignore the ones they already have. Yes – do try to find new readers but spend time each day showing your current readers that you value them too and you'll find that they will help you grow your blog.

Darren Rowse, founder of ProBlogger

Focusing on your readers is a great way to get to know them better (see tip #2). I love the way Daniel Burstein describes blog readers' expectations of you as a blogger:

A blog is really two things. One, simply a piece of technology, a platform. But, two, it is a promise in the minds of most readers, who expect that the blog should have actual content with some elements of value that is hyper-targeted to their needs. Much like with a newspaper. Readers don't just look at a newspaper as newsprint that is delivered on their driveway every morning. They look at it as valuable information about their city, where they live, and the things that they do.

6. Focus on building an amazing call-to-action

I screwed up for years. I'd blog and blog. Some of my posts were doing very well on places like Hacker News, but I had such hard time getting return visitors. And very few people bothered to follow me on Twitter.

Don't rely on people to do the work to find your Twitter account. Don't rely on them to do the work to find your details in a sidebar. People are blind to sidebars. Thanks banner ads!

Finish your blog post with some kind of call to action to signup for an email list or follow you on Twitter. When I started doing this, I immediately increased my Twitter followers by 335% in the first 7 days.

Nate Kontny, founder of Draft

Nate uses a simple call-to-action on his blog now, that looks like this:

P.S. I'd love to meet you on Twitter: here.

Read other perspectives on this topic from an awesome group of entrepreneurs at **Startup Edition**.

And if you enjoyed this post, please consider sharing it on Facebook or Twitter below.

This particular technique we've also tested here on the Buffer blog and found it to work amazingly well to bring attention to other blog posts we've written, like this:

As a 6th point, we also looked at **the science behind writing great headlines for Twitter, Facebook and your blog** recently, which I believe is another really important factor of how your content will perform and spread.

or to Buffer product features, like this:

7. Give stuff away

Give away free content that adds value to people's lives "until it hurts" and they will love you and become loyal fans.

Jeff Bullas, blogger and author of Bloggging the Smart Way

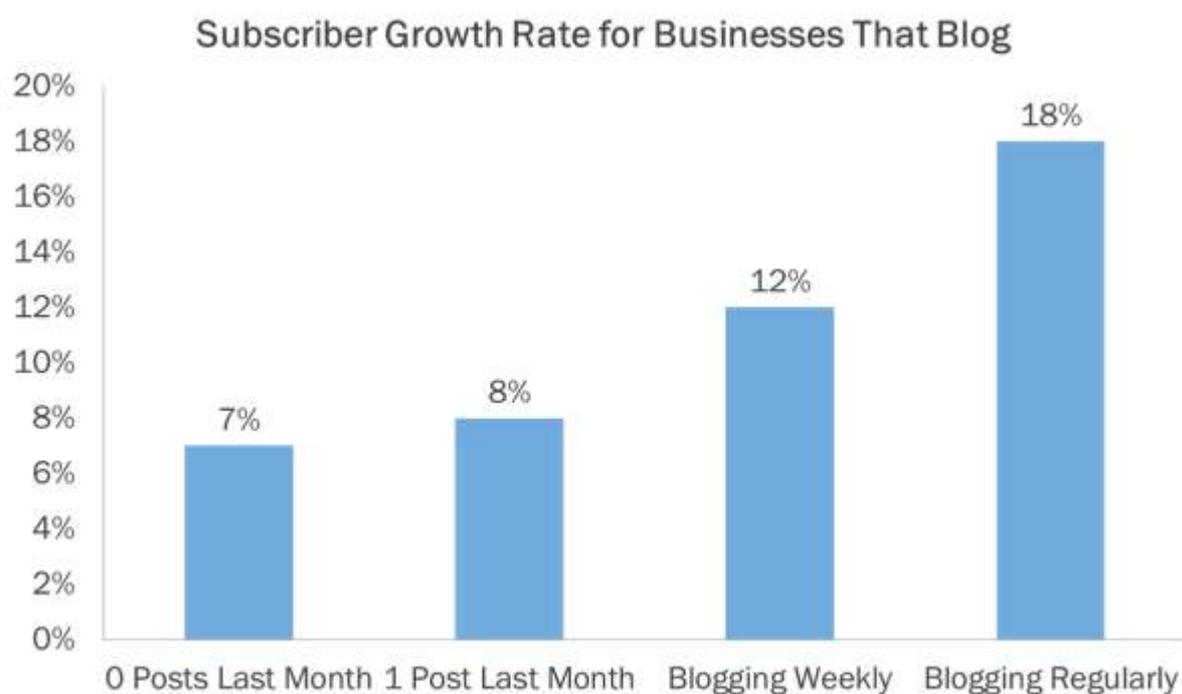
A great example of this is the research done by Incentivibe, who found that adding a giveaway contest pop-up to the bottom-right of their website led to 125% more email subscribers.

8. Be consistent

Consistency is one of the most important things that bloggers tend to forget. It's much easier to lose your traffic than it is to build it up, so make sure you consistently blog.

Neil Patel, founder of [KISSmetrics](#)

A study by [Hubspot](#) showed that consistent blogging actually leads to higher subscriber growth rates: Over a two-month span, businesses that published blog entries on a regular basis (more than once a week) added subscribers over twice as fast as those companies that added content once a month.



9. Give away your knowledge

Don't be afraid to showcase what you know. Too many bloggers hold back the good stuff out of fear of giving away the "secret sauce." There is no secret sauce in a world where everyone has high speed Internet access at all times. Today, you want to give away information snacks to sell knowledge meals.

Jay Baer, author of [Youtility](#)

Jay's advice is to share the knowledge you have, rather than keeping it tucked away for a rainy day. Chris Guillebeau follows this advice by offering [two](#) free, downloadable [PDFs](#) to his readers. Chris also does what Jay calls giving away "information snacks to sell knowledge meals." On both of the free PDF download pages, Chris markets his book on the right-hand side.

10. Be true to your voice

Stay true to yourself and your voice. People don't care to follow sites so much as they care to follow people.

Chris Pirillo, founder and CEO, [LockerGnome](#)

Another blogger who advocates the importance of the writer's voice is [Jeff Goins](#). He says that your voice is the most important, yet over-looked part of blogging:

Writing isn't about picking the right topic; it's about finding the right voice. What matters, what readers really resonate with, isn't so much what you say, but how.

11. Give it time – This is why

Plan to invest in blogging for a long time before you see a return. The web is a big, noisy place and unless you're willing to invest more over a greater period of time than others, you'll find success nearly impossible. If you're seeking short-term ROI, or a quick path to recognition, blogging is the wrong path. But if you can stick it out for years without results and constantly learn, iterate, and improve, you can achieve something remarkable.

Rand Fishkin, CEO of [Moz](#)

Rand shared these great images with us from his wife's travel blog, [Everywhereist](#), which shows just how long it can take to see a return on your efforts:

#1: Be Willing to Fail for a Long Time

Visitors Overview

Aug 1, 2009 - May 30, 2012

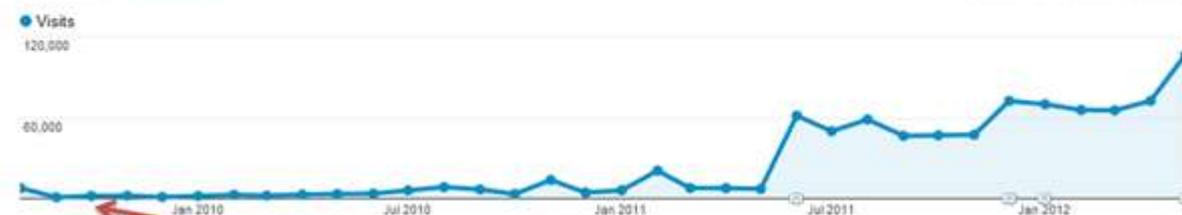
Advanced Segments | Email | Export | Add to Dashboard

% of visits: 100.00%

Overview

Visits vs. Select a metric

Hourly | Day | Week | Month



Where Geraldine Started Her Blog

#1: Be Willing to Fail for a Long Time



12. Give your email list priority

If you're blogging to create a business, a movement, or to support a cause, then you need to build an email list. It's not an option. I don't even consider my blog to be my community, my email list is my community. Caring about these people, writing for them, and delivering value to them should be your number one goal.

James Clear, entrepreneur, weightlifter and travel photographer

When the [New York Public Library](#) focused on growing email subscription rates, this simple home page design with information about what readers could expect to receive boosted numbers by 52.8% over a more complicated version with less information about the actual newsletter:

13. Write catchy headlines

No matter how great your content is, it won't matter unless you have an amazing headline. People have a split second to decide if they should click on your post, and your headline will make them decide. The headline is also essential in making it easy and desirable for people to share your post. Keep your headlines SPUB: simple, powerful, useful and bold.

Dave Kerpen, author and CEO of Likeable Local

Something we do at Buffer is to test several different headlines for each of our blog posts to determine which ones works best. Here's an example of what that might look like:

Here is how we learnt which headline to use for our [recent blogpost](#) with this method.

First Tweet:

	"How many hours should we work every day? The science of mental strength" http://bit.ly/1bseOu2 9:15 AM			
6 Retweets	4 Favorites	1 Mention	40 Clicks	15.3k Potential

Second Tweet:

	★ TOP TWEET "The origin of the 8 hour work day and why we should rethink it" http://bit.ly/17ERoVb 10:12 AM			
8 Retweets	12 Favorites	1 Mention	81 Clicks	32.6k Potential

The second Tweet clearly performed better as we found out through our [social analytics](#) and Buffer's algorithm also identified it as a top Tweet. In fact, you can clearly **see that the second headline got double the number of clicks**.

You can read more about this particular approach in more depth here: [A scientific guide to writing great headlines on Twitter, Facebook and your Blog](#)

14. Be Yourself

There isn't one specific set of rules to be successful in blogging. When I started blogging, I had the opportunity to learn from experienced and successful bloggers in the industry. One of the best lessons I've learned from them is to simply be me. I didn't have to be too "professional" or use "big words" to impress others. I had to simply be me.

By being me, I enjoyed writing and the process more. It had me writing more than I usually would too. If you look at the the most successful writers like Seth Godin and Chris Brogan you'll notice that they are different and unique in their own ways.

[Aaron Lee](#), social media manager, entrepreneur and [blogger](#)

Moz CEO Rand Fishkin [agrees](#) that telling your company's story is important, as opposed to following a formula for successful blogging:

Emotion and storytelling have been part of how we communicate with each other and inspire action for thousands of years.

15. Keep it short

Biggest lesson I learned in my past year of blogging. Keep it in the 1–2 minutes read-time length.

Derek Sivers, founder of [Wood Egg](#)

Working out the best length for your blog posts can be tricky. You generally need about 300 words minimum to get indexed by search engines, but otherwise the length of your post is up to what you think feels best.

Derek Sivers noticed recently that his shorter posts were much better received by readers and seemed to be shared more, unlike his longer posts:

When I've written articles that were too long or had too many ideas, they didn't get much of a reaction.

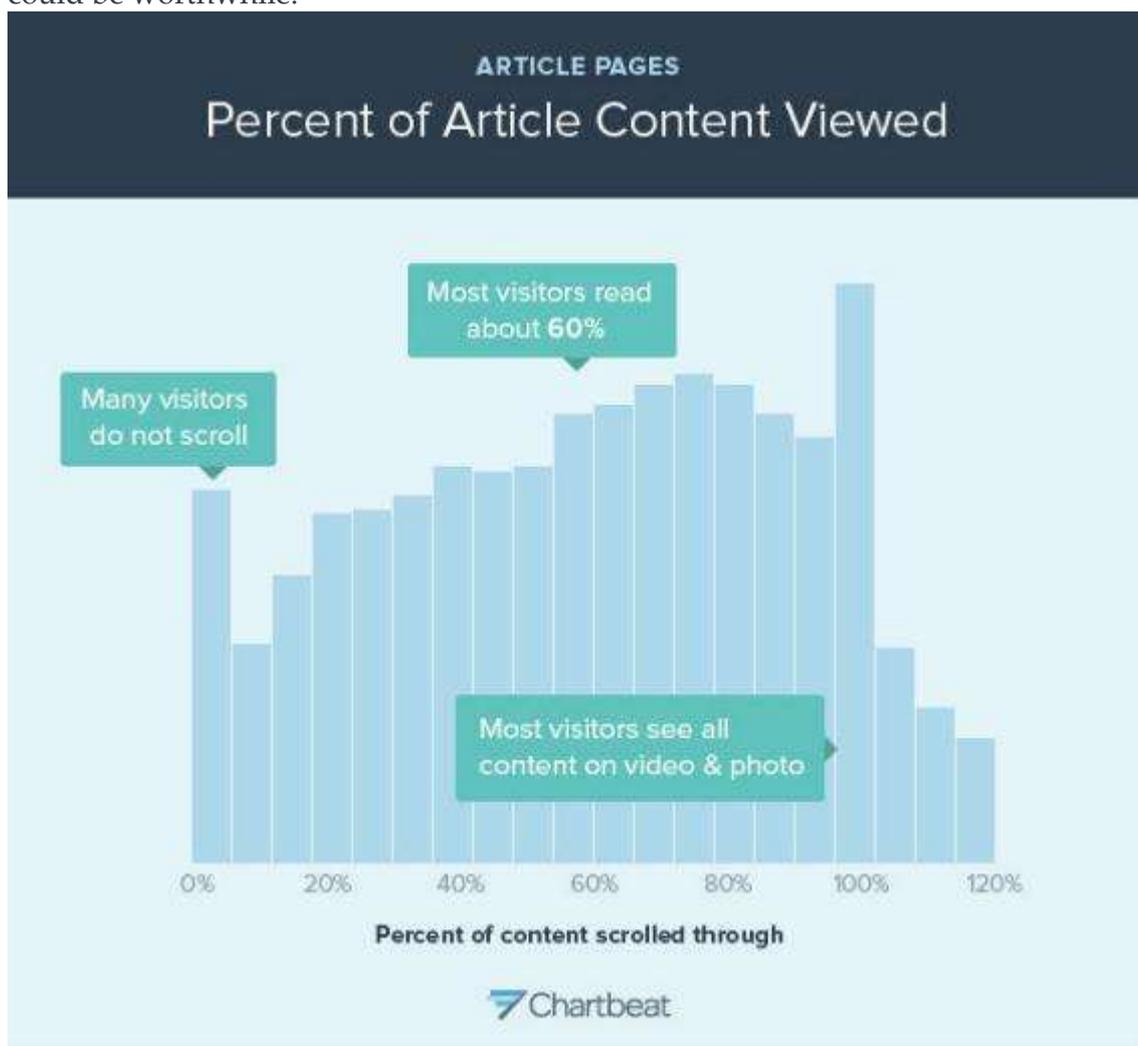
When I read books, I often feel bad for the brilliant idea buried on page 217. Who will hear it?

Stop the orchestra. Solo that motif. Repeat it. Let the other instruments build upon it.

The web is such a great way to do this.

Present a single idea, one at a time, and let others build upon it.

According to this [Chartbeat graph below](#), many visitors to your site won't bother scrolling, and most visitors won't read more than about 60% of what you've written. Keeping it short and sharp then, could be worthwhile.



If you're looking for a general guide to blog post length, Joe Pulizzi's blog post, "[A blog post is like a miniskirt](#)" might be useful:

A blog post is like a miniskirt.

It has to be short enough to be interesting, but long enough to cover the subject.

16. Make it worth referencing – here is how:

One thing I always try to keep in mind before publishing a post is would anyone want to “cite” this for any reason? Just like interesting research is great because it leaves you with a fascinating finding or an idea, I like for my posts to be the same. That doesn’t mean relying on research, but simply making sure each post has an original lesson or actionable item, making it “citable” on the web.

Gregory Ciotti, marketing strategist at [Help Scout](#)

Our very own Buffer co-founder Leo has [written about a similar thing](#) before:

When writing a post, I get into a mindset to answer just this 1 question with a Yes: “Would anyone email this article to a friend?”

It’s an extremely simple proposition. Yet, it has changed my writing completely. If I put myself into a reader’s head going through a post and seeing whether someone will say “Oh, this is interesting, John will really like this”, then I go ahead and publish it. It’s almost like an invisible threshold to pass. I need to improve the post until this level is reached. I will iterate, find more research, get more examples, until I can truly imagine this happening.

I’m sure there are lots more great tips out there about building a blog. What’s your favorite?