

Writing to Engage

A Re:word Content Co. White Paper Series

PART 2: How to blog better and faster

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choose your words wisely

Introduction

A consistent and well-written blog can do more for business growth than just about any other form of promotion.

Keeping an active blog seems easy enough until you start doing it and realize that it's actually quite challenging to get the results you want. It's not the task itself that presents the difficulty, but rather the time it takes to do it right.

Two hours is the average time it takes a North American brand manager to write a 500-word post.¹ But today, the average length of a well-ranked web page (on the first page of Google) is close to 2,000 words.

If we extrapolate those two hours to account for 4x the words, and account for a bit more research, you're looking at an easy six hours per piece.

The moment brand and marketing managers figure this out is about the time they seek out help for blog writing. But the time required to do it right translates into quite a bill at the end of every month, especially since companies that publish 16+ blog posts per month get almost 3.5x more traffic than companies that published 0–4 monthly posts.²

But what if you could keep control of the blog and the budget by speeding up the blog-writing process?

This paper will explore nine ways to write effective blog posts faster.

It will go through the steps you should be taking at the pre-writing, writing and post-writing stages of blog content creation. It will break the steps down easily so you can follow them even if you're "not a writer." And it will improve the quality of your content, making it a more effective lead generator.

Most importantly, it will give you the time to contribute meaningfully to your own content creation and rely less on external resources.

PRE-WRITING

Preparation is the key to success in anything. Preparing yourself to move through the content creation process faster is all about setting yourself up to spend less time looking for inspiration and more time translating that inspiration into quality content.

This inspiration will come from three sources: research, imagery and a solid roadmap.

Research

Quality content is well-researched. When people make the decision to consume your content, they're going to want credibility. But research takes time to do — we find upwards of 35 percent of content creation is spent researching, and a large part of that is looking for sources.

To speed up this process, you should think about **bookmarking web pages full of comprehensive stats** for quick reference.

The benefit of easy access to these statistics from a time perspective is two-fold. On the one hand, you won't have to go digging around for what you need to substantiate the points you're trying to make or go back into past pieces of content to find them. On the other hand, you can quickly shut down an unsubstantiated idea before wasting too much time on it.

Most browsers let you create folders of saved web pages or even save them as tabs on the top of your windows. We'd suggest the latter, only because it will take you even less time to refer to your statistics.

When you're referencing stats, cite them correctly to maintain your credibility and the credibility of the piece. Some resources will publish stats from other sources, so make sure to attribute the stat to the original source.

Imagery

Blogs with images get 94 percent more total views than articles without images.³ So it's definitely in your best interest to load up your post with images. But every minute you spend searching for that perfect image is time spent not writing. And

if you've ever gone searching for that perfect image, you know how quickly two minutes can turn into 20, with all the image banks available.

That's why we recommend **starting an image file on your phone that syncs to your computer**. Any time you come across an image you like, just save it to the file. This will save you a ton of time as you're writing because you won't have to go searching. And more than that, your image bank will serve as inspiration for new topic ideas and directions.

If you don't know how to synch your folders, save the pictures to your phone and email them to yourself. Then drop them into your image bank when you get back on your computer.

Roadmap

One of the more common wastes of writing time is veering off topic. It happens to everyone: you start writing, you get on a wavelength and you pursue a direction that does nothing to support your claim. The problem is that you only realize it once you're well down that direction, and you've wasted valuable minutes.

To avoid this we'd strongly recommend that you **create a brief template** that you can use over and over again. This will lay out your thoughts clearly and give you a simple document you can evaluate your post against.

This is an example of a simple briefing template:

Keywords: How to write faster (140 searches/month)

Problem you're solving: Word counts are going up. So is time spent writing — time most people don't have.

Key message: Quality content takes time to write, but there are things you can do to write faster.

Support point 1: Prewriting (resources, folders and templates).

Support point 2: Writing (plain language, shortcuts, first person).

Support point 3: Post writing (editing, next up, social posts).

Desired action: Download our writing timer app.

A few things to note about each section of the template:

Keywords: SEO is a big reason for blogging in the first place. You're offering up a specific answer to a specific question someone might be asking. You can find out what those questions are and how often people are asking them using Google's Keyword Planner (note: you'll need an AdWords account to use the Keyword Planner, but it's free to set one up). And what's great about the Keyword Planner is that you can type in a general word or phrase and the platform will spit out ideas related to that general word.

Problem you're solving: This is why your reader is reading in the first place. And if they don't find answers to their problem, they're going to see the time they invested in your piece as a waste. The good thing about clearly articulating this up front is that it will help guide your research. If you come across a resource that isn't on point, you can quickly abandon it and move on.

Key message: This is your answer to the reader's problem — it's the value you're bringing to their day. You could say that this is your North Star. This will probably take the most time to articulate clearly, but be sure that you do. Everything you write in your piece should ladder back to this one assertion.

Support points: This is proof of your key message. You can be somewhat general in your template, but you should also be clear. As you do your research, you'll flesh these out more. This part of the template is also the most malleable. As you dig into your sources, you may move things around or even jettison a few of them if you can't substantiate. But if you do that, be sure to update the template so you can refer to it when you're done.

Desired action: You've written this piece to help your reader, and you should have every expectation that they'll help you in return. But you have to be very clear as to what kind of help you want because while your audience are blog readers, they're not mind readers.

Lead with a verb for your desired action: download, share, call, email. The more directive you are, the more likely your audience will be to follow your direction.

WRITING

Now you're ready to start writing. And the best advice any writer will tell you about how to start writing is to start writing. Seems easy enough, but many writers get in their own way and actually impede their own process. This leads to stalling, humming and hawing, and losing valuable time.

To keep your fingers moving, consider the words you're using, the way your keyboard is set up and how you're presenting your thoughts.

Plain Language

Depending on the industry you're in and the audience you're writing for, you may feel inclined to use industry speak and spend way too much time trying to get it right.

So, as you write your first draft, **use your own words**. Pretend you're trying to teach your mother (this advice is inspired by legendary ad man David Ogilvy who said, "your consumer isn't an idiot, she's your mother." How's that for hard-hitting advice?).

If you find yourself struggling for the one word, use many words, highlight it and come back to it. What you don't want to do is kill your momentum over word choice.

The other benefit of writing in plain language is reader appreciation. No one wants to be bored into submission by jargon, nor will they be impressed with a five-dollar word when a five-cent word will do. They'll thank you for writing simply by reading your piece all the way through.

[When you're done writing, read your post aloud. If you stumble on words or thoughts, chances are that other people will too.](#)

Keyboard shortcuts

Four seconds. That's how long it will take you to shift focus away from your keyboard to your mouse, scroll up to the toolbar, find the command you want, choose that command and return your focus back to what you were writing.

It doesn't seem like such a huge investment, until you compare it to the 0.25 seconds it would take if you **set up keyboard commands**. And if you add up all the 3.75 seconds of time you'd be wasting doing it the "old" way, you're looking at significant time savings for a minimal amount of setup.

Any command your word processor has can be assigned a shortcut. To do that in Microsoft Word, go to Tools/Customize Keyboard. Everything you need is there.

Some of the commands we'd recommend would be adding footnotes, bulleting text and inserting comments.

You have a limited number of key combinations to choose from, so not every command can have a shortcut. Think about the commands you use the most and assign shortcuts to those.

Paragraphing

About 30 percent of your writing time will be spent re-reading what you've already written. You'll review your thoughts, jump around your thoughts to see what you've conveyed and what you still need to convey, and look to the tone you've established so you can continue to follow suit.

You'll have a much easier time doing this with **more whitespace breaking up your content**.

Consider the following:

Version 1

When building Lego with your kid, it's important to remember that while they may not have the manual dexterity you have, their minds are far less cluttered. This does wonders for imagination, so it's important to follow their lead. Don't force them to follow the instructions given if they don't want to. You can always suggest that another time.

Version 2

When building Lego with your kid, it's important to remember that while they may not have the manual dexterity you have, their minds are far less cluttered.

This does wonders for imagination, so it's important to follow their lead.

Don't force them to follow the instructions given if they don't want to. You can always suggest that another time.

It's the same copy in both, but the second one is so much easier (and faster) to read back. This is because our brains are naturally intimidated by large tasks. By paragraphing often, you essentially trick your brain into seeing your content as a series of small tasks. This helps you get through it easier (and faster).

The added benefit of doing this is that your readers will have an easier time reading your post as well: they're equally intimidated by large copy blocks.

Another good trick for reading back is to set your margins at around 5.5 inches. The more your eyes have to scan across a page, the more likely you'll have to read a second or third time. This is why the newspaper is arranged as columns and not lines.

POST-WRITING

Before you share your blog with the world, consider quality, amplification and how it fits into the bigger picture of your business.

Editing

Ernest Hemingway said, "the first draft of anything is shit." He was bang on, which is why writing and immediately posting is not the best idea. But neither is editing your own work. You're too close to your ideas and you're too prone to "scanning" to spot errors.

If you wrote it and didn't delete it, you must believe in what you're saying and how you're saying it. It makes perfect sense to you. But it might not make sense to anyone else. Of course, your bias won't be able to see that, which is why an objective set of eyes is so key. An editor will be able to verify that, yes, you're saying what you think you're saying, and, yes, you're saying it clearly.

Scanning

When you (the royal "you") re-read your own work, you'll have a tendency to scan it versus reading it thoroughly because you already know what it says. You'll miss

extra words, double words, misspelled words and incorrect words. A fresh set of eyes will spot these mistakes.

Editing a 1,500-word piece will cost you about \$50. But when you consider (a) how quickly you'll damage your credibility if there's a mistake in your content, (b) how ineffective you'll be editing your own work and (c) the time it takes to edit, that \$50 might be the best money you spend.

Relying on a friend or colleague to edit your work is not the best idea because their eyes aren't trained the way a professional editor's are to find the little things that make a big difference. Also, editors are trained to give constructive, helpful feedback, which you might not get from someone else.

Amplification

The time you spend on a blog will be wasted time if no one can find it.

Meta copy (the words Google uses to find and display your post) and social posts (the words that will drive your friends, followers, colleagues, prospects and clients to your post) act as beacons for Google to find your blog and display it to the right searchers. This copy is just as important as your blog copy. Think of it like the copy on an envelope: if no one rips it open, it doesn't matter what's inside.

It takes about 25 minutes to get into the writing "zone" (to shake out the bad concepts and push through to the good ones). So when you're in a groove, take full advantage: **write all your meta data and social posts while you're still warm.**

The added benefit to doing it all in one shot is that the material will be fresh in your mind. So you'll spend even less time having to re-review your copy.

As you're writing your blog copy, keep another doc open and copy/paste over any particularly social-worthy phrases you come up with.

Tracking

Every blog you write for your business is part of a larger content strategy — and that strategy is about telling your story. Think of your content like a soap opera: every day is another chance to move your story forward and get your audience more and more hooked on you.

To save time, keep a simple tracking XLS of the blogs you've done, the dates you did them and the CTAs you used, as well as the keywords you've hit, and any other relevant information. This will save you a ton of time when it comes time to write the next blog piece because you won't have to delve back into your files to see where you're short on content and where you're good (for now).

It would be smart to save a few columns in your XLS for results. This way, you can gauge what topics are moving the needle and what you can probably cut.

IN SUMMARY...

You have to be writing blogs on a regular basis. They'll be the cornerstone of your inbound marketing strategy, and the easiest way to humanize your company.

Search engines favour longer, well-researched content that is interesting and easy to read.³ This takes time to write. But you can be more efficient by doing these nine things:

- Bookmarking stats pages
- Starting an image file
- Creating a brief template
- Sticking to plain language
- Using keyboard shortcuts
- Paragraphing more regularly
- Investing in editing
- Writing your meta and social content concurrently
- Tracking your efforts

Even if you're not perfect in every area listed above, you'll notice an immediate difference in the speed at which you're writing, the amount of content you produce, the quality of your social content and hopefully the number of leads you're getting.

1. <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/blogging-time-benchmark>

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2. https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/blogging-frequency-benchmarks?_ga=2.226273946.1048022765.1520396256-414505517.1475779542#sm.001o6d3zv162ceoascb2o9l50lh3z
 3. <https://optinmonster.com/blogging-statistics/>