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BLOGGING

WHAT IS BLOGGING

With the introduction of hypertext mark-up language (HTML) in the 1990s, the internet became open to people from all walks of life. People published their thoughts and opinions about different things online. Such expressions of opinions could be about music, books, movies, recommendations etc. Among the many ways people use the web, blogging has gradually crept into the fore. Blogging started in the very early 1990s but only acquired the name by which it is now commonly known in the late 1990s. The Encarta Encyclopaedia claims "blogging" arose from the phrase 'web logging'. Today, blogging has transcended being used by individuals to share their personal thoughts; corporations and businesses now tap into it.

These days, blogging is done for many reasons ranging from personal ones through academic ones to economic ones. More importantly, as it concerns this book, blogging is now widely used in the business world for a variety of reasons, chief amongst which is marketing – i.e. to drive sales of products and services. As far as this usage is concerned, it requires the business to own a website of its own or a blog through which it will publish information to its customers and potential customers.

Indeed, a good many businesses are doing just fine using blogs to aid the good performance of their businesses. But, there is much more to what blogging can do to help a business; this explains why virtually all businesses, small or large, with online presence, have invested in and are still continuing to invest in blogging. In fact, with blogging, a customer can be well-armed with enough information about the product to help him make a subconscious decision to buy it. This is due to the information explosion which the internet has birthed; the information being produced on a daily basis is almost the exact amount the world had produced from the dawn of civilisation till the very beginning of the new millennium.

Unfortunately, with too much information comes a higher price to pay: dearth of attention; there is just too much to pay attention to. How does one make sure their information reaches the right person in the information explosion and amidst all the noise brought on by the internet? How do you make sure the right customers tune onto your frequency amidst the noise being made online? Lead generation is the answer to this; it involves targeting those who want to hear you, collecting their contact details and sending your message to them directly.

Blogging is one of the means by which a business not only keeps its customers or clientele updated about the products and services it offers but also collect useful information from such customers to help the business serve them much better. This process of collecting useful information about the customer, usually contact information, is known as lead generation. And blogging can be the perfect way of generating leads; a lead is the customer's information so collected by a business for sales pipeline.

It should be noted quickly here that while there are traditional ways of generating leads (a system where salespersons do the muscle lifting or the business pays some other company to do it), blogging is not just one of the many digital means of doing or achieving the exact same thing but is in fact a much easier and faster way. But how does one use blogging for lead generation work? The next section will address this in some greater details.

HOW BLOGGING IS USED AS A LEAD GENERATION TOOL

Virtually every online user interacts with at least a blog post on a daily basis. If this is true, the user has probably seen or even been involved in lead generation through blogging without knowing it. Let us consider a blog with a detailed piece on the efficacy of a body cream; such a blog post about the body cream may at the end contain a form asking the user to supply their email address in order to get even more information about how to use some other related products to some uncommon, legitimate ends; this is simply how lead generation through blogging works.

In order to create a blog for lead generation, the following must be in place: one, a business with a website or blog and a goal i.e. to market a product or service; a business owner or a team or an individual hired by the business; a blogging platform; and, possibly, some social media accounts in the name of the business. All of these work hand-in-hand to achieve the goal of blogging to generate leads. The role of each will now be explored.

The business needs an online presence such as a website, blog or some social networking accounts on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. If the business has only the last type of presence, then it needs to get a website or a blog in order to generate leads online through blogging. Such a business must have a goal which in this case should be targeting those who are interested in their products and services to the extent that such people are turned into customers of the business. How does the business do this? The website or blog is the answer. The business designs blog contents for their products and services in a specialised way. This specialised way helps ensure the readers of such content is in the end convinced to give their contact information to the business. By generating a presence through captivating content, more people become willing to supply their contact details.

The business owner can themselves create the blog post themselves. This of course requires knowing the nitty-gritty of blogging. Thanks to the internet, one can quickly and much easily acquire this knowledge online either for free or for a token. If the business owner cannot themselves develop the blog content and there is enough capital, they can hire a dedicated team of experts for the business to do just this. A dedicated team of experts can in fact fully utilise every available feature in the process to their advantage but such a team of experts can be quite expensive to sustain. In that case, the business owner is not left without options; he can outsource the tasks: both the technical aspect of publishing a blog post and the aspect of actually developing the content.

A blogging platform can be the website of the business; most websites support blogging. The platform can also be those offered by standard blogging service providers like Google's Blogger or Wordpress. In fact, it will be better to go for the specialised blogging services as they are designed and optimised for just that purpose. This means they come with all the things one needs to create a successful blog for a business and use such for lead generation. Wordpress now powers over 25% of websites; this speaks of its efficiency but that does not mean Blogger too is not doing just as fine.

A social media platform helps the business share the blog posts with followers thereby creating more awareness and generating more traffic to the website or blog post. There is an advantage to this and it will be discussed in the next section. Social media accounts in the name of the business will complement the importance or advantages of the blog post and can in fact be a good place to start directing people to the blog post owing to the large number of persons on them.

How do all the above work? The business, desirous of making sure it gets just those who are genuinely interested in the products or services it offers, publishes a piece about one or all of its products and services. While creating the content, certain keywords and phrases which describe the product or services are used in the title of the piece and its content, in an optimized manner to ensure search engines display the page in organic search results. If more than 80% of online sales or business transactions start with searching the internet, then why not tap into this by making your site visible to search engines and suggestible to searchers in search results?

Such a blog post or content needs to be written in a very engaging way that ends up convincing the user that there is a very good reason to share their contact information with the business. For example, a blog post detailing how to set up a pay per click advertising may say at the end, ‘Give us your email address that we may send you the first volume of our more detailed free eBook guide on setting up your pay per click advertising’. No doubt, such a call-to-action like this will attract the user who happily trades their contact details with the business. Such a user can use a SHARE button at the end of the page to direct their friends on social networking sites like Facebook to the same blog post thereby leading to more traffic and more leads. Then, the business can tailor specialised emails, new content alerts etc. and send such to those who have traded their email addresses with the business.

WHY BLOGGING IS IMPORTANT FOR LEAD GENERATION

The reasons why blogging is a viable tool for lead generation are numerous and are equally similar to why we need to generate leads in the first place. Some of the advantages of lead generation through blogging are discussed below;

It Boosts Trust

Blogging boosts the trust of the customer in the business generally and in a product or service specifically. Since it provides more detailed explanation about the product or services, the user feels much more connected to what is being offered already; their full knowledge of the product and service delivered through the business itself reassures them they are in safe hands and hence, the goodwill of the business grows. This means more people will be willing to remain informed of further and new developments.

It Can Drive Sales

Since the aim of blogging to generate leads is to target users genuinely interested in the products and services being offered by the business, then if it is successful, the end result is that it drives sales. In other words, it leads to higher returns on investments.

It Can Help Retain Existing Customers

Blogging helps retain existing customers as it serves as a platform to continue to update customers about the products and services of the business. Once a customer is on the hook owing to your good services, they will always look forward to hearing from you and blogging is the best way to in fact give them the information to satiate their yearning for more.

It Helps Attract New Customers

Since most business transactions online start from searching the internet, then a blog optimised for lead generation will very likely come up when a user searches the internet for a product or service related to contents on the blog. This way, new leads can be generated. A properly optimized blog can serve as a source of numerous, fresh leads.

It Helps a Business Compete

With a properly optimised blog, a small business may easily compete with even large businesses that can afford pay per click advertising which ensures their websites appear at the top of organic search results. Blogging with the best SEO practices can make a small business's website turn up more frequently in organic search results.

It is Cost-effective

Since blogging can make a business always appear in organic search results, then a business may not need paid advertising at some point in time in the business. This way, it saves cost or money and you can channel such resources into some other things to help the business grow.

An Edge over Other Lead Generation Tools

There are other lead generation platforms, some of which involve payment. If blogging can help a business save cost very effectively, then it has given the business an edge over other forms of lead generation systems such as purchasing contacts from other companies. Some of these contacts may have been gotten through some fraudulent tactics or may even identify people who may not be interested in your business at all.

It Can Be Easily Integrated With Other Digital Marketing Strategies

Blogging can be easily integrated with other digital marketing ways such as pay per click advertising and video marketing. The landing page of pay per click advertising may contain a link as a related content to the blog post and in the said post, a video clip giving some details about how the product is used may be embedded to further convince the user they have something to gain by trading their contact details with the business.

It Can Boost Site Popularity with Search Engines

When for instance, a video is embedded in a blog post so that a single user spends more time on the site or blog, or where a Facebook share of the post generates more traffic to it, the algorithm of search engines like Google will read such to mean that the site is soaring in popularity and will rank it higher so that the possibility of it coming up in organic search results becomes higher.

THINGS TO AVOID USING BLOGGING FOR LEAD GENERATION

In this section, some common mistakes made by people while setting up blogs and publishing posts for the purpose of lead generation are explored. Some of these are technical while others are non-technical. While setting up a blog for lead generation, you should try as much as possible to avoid doing any of the following;

Not Determining Your Audience – the right platform

Before setting out to publish a blog post about a product and service, the audience for which it is meant for should be determined. Many people just publish content without paying attention to the question: Whose attention am I trying to attract? This in turn leads to the problem of eventually choosing the wrong platform or technique for achieving the set goals.

Focusing on Subscription and Not Conversion

Many businesses, while designing blog contents, focus too much on getting the user to supply their information rather than making sure such a user is in fact the type that will convert immediately or much sooner. Hence, the business ends up with a large list of email addresses and little ROI from them. The essence of lead generation is to boost sales ad any user that will not purchase is actually just dead weight

Writing too Long Posts

With our attention span not lasting much longer as usual, users do not find obscenely long posts interesting. In fact, just a post of not more than 500 words can work more wonders than a post of 3000 words as some bloggers tend to write. The focus which should be on precision and conciseness of the information is sacrificed on the altar of wordiness and hence, no leads are gotten as users find their way out quickly.

Forgetting the CTAs

Call-to-actions ensures the essence of lead generation is fulfilled; they politely prompt the user for their information. Sadly, some people miss them out or ruin them in their blog post. This is the most unfortunate thing that can happen to you in lead generation through blogging.

Not Creating Giveaways – Quid Pro Quo

Some businesses think it is easy to get people to do things for you when nothing is being offered to them. Any blog meant to generate leads which does not have giveaways or freebies only seeks an unhealthy business-to-customer relationship. You must be prepared to give something for something and freebies are a good way to start. It could be tips or a promo on some of your serviesc. Just make people glad they visited your blog.

Asking Too Much

When generating leads, users are much more reluctant or will in fact refuse outright to give their contact details if too much information is being asked for. This mistake should be avoided as it gets users suspicious about your motives.

Wasting Time on the Wrong Pages

It is very easy to know which pages on the blog are generating more leads than the rest. In that case, time should not be wasted on other pages. Any optimisation should be focused on those pages working wonders for the business.

Over-using features

Overusing the features used for generating leads such as call-to-actions, pop-ups, hello banners etc. can be very annoying and piss users off. These things should be used moderately as overuse drives users away, in search of your competitor's alternatives.

Not Using Tags and Keywords

Tags and keywords are important considerations for blogging. Do keyword research and incorporate the relevant keywords you wish to target in your blogs. They give you more visibility through organic search results.

Deactivating Comment Feature

This is a very big mistake committed by some lazy business owners. Since they do not want to engage users, they deactivate the comment feature and in so doing block the opportunity of generating more leads directly or indirectly. Comment features are easy feedback points in blogs.

HOW TO STRUCTURE A BLOG FOR LEAD GENERATION

The focus of this section is guiding the reader through a seamless process of structuring a blog for lead generation.

Create a Goal and Objectives

A business goal is the first and most important thing you need to have before setting up to create blogs for lead generation. Such a goal should be something precise, understandable and measurable. Measurability is what helps one determine whether the goal has been achieved or not. An example of a measurable goal can be 'to generate more than 20 leads on a daily basis for the next six months'. If this goal is achieved, then the essence of blogging, to provide information, is presupposed to have been equally achieved.

Determine Why and What to Write About

Since blogging by a business can be for a number of reasons which may include simply providing the customer, existing and potential, with details in the industry to which the business belongs, then the next thing after setting a goal is to answer why a blog is being set up and what is being written about. The Why and What, like the goals must be definite, too.

Determine Whom You are Writing for

Next, determine your audience. Doing this helps ensure your information, which needs to feed on the right attention, in fact gets the very right attention to feed on. You can be writing for existing customers with a Why to retain them or for new customers with a Why to convince them to be part of your business.

Collect More Information about What You Write

Ignorance is no bliss; it mars businesses. It is important to have all the correct facts and figures or else the blog may end up misinforming the public or its users who when they find out will lose their trust in the business. It is therefore necessary that more information and facts be collected. There is no excuse for misinforming your readers

Research Similar Blogs

Before proceeding to put pen to paper, it will do you tremendous good to research other similar blogs as the one being set up. There is hardly anything you want to do that someone has not been doing in the exact way. Researching other similar blogs offers some practical learning that can be used in setting up your own blog for lead generation.

Choose Platform

Different blogging platforms have their relative advantages, especially cost. From what has been discussed so far, choosing the right platform should not be much work as the goal. The "why" and the examples you have seen in other blogs will dictate which platforms offer what you have in mind. There are a number of them out there; Blogger and Wordpress are two of the most popular ones out there. Explore!

Create an Outline

Next, create an outline for your blog post or content. This should flow from the topic chosen and should involve a breakdown of how you intend to write the post. Utilise headings and subheadings and add gimmicks to help you remember what to write. An outline makes your work tidier, easier and faster.

Write or Get Someone to Write for You

After the outline, the writing proper comes next. If you as the business owner cannot write well enough, as everyone is not crafty with words, you can easily outsource the task. All you need do is provide whoever is writing for you with materials and ideas to help make the write-up fit for purpose.

Use Visuals; Pictures and Videos Help You Convert More

To make the write-up more engaging, it should contain visual and auditory stimulation materials i.e. graphics and media. They ensure the user has an alternative and further clarification while reading. We love watching videos and getting information from pictures. This can equally get you the lead in the end. Besides, graphic can provide further understanding of the post.

Optimize Write-up

While writing, keywords which are related to the topic are important. SEO is very important. This makes indexing of a blog post by search engines easy and in turn makes it comes up in organic search results. To reach the level where Google sees a blog, it must contain about 20-50 posts. So, the writing (quality of course), should be kept going; slow and steady wins the race. SEO tools are a must.

Post Write-up or Publish Blog post

Once the write-up is ready, then it should be published on the blog or chosen platform. You should preview the blog post after formatting it for public consumption before publishing it. Here, a number of things need to be implemented to ensure lead generation. They are discussed next.

Creating CTAs and Forms

Creating call-to-actions (CTAs) is the real essence of blogging for lead generation. Omitting CTAs in such blogs is a marketing abomination! CTAs move the users to act and do your bidding. CTAs are structured as polite requests or commands like, 'Click here to find more', 'won't you rather know more from our free eBook or whitepaper?' etc. Forms contain fields where the user can input their contact information once they are satisfied they need more from your business. They are essential in the blog.

Creating Hello Banners

A Hello Banner is a type of blog design feature that appears at the beginning of the page and continues to follow the users as they scroll down. They are a form for CTAs (they can be annoying though) which will not leave the user be until they supply their information. A variation of this are banners which appear once a user gets to the end of the page, usually offering them much more than what they have already obtained should they be generous enough to supply their contact information to the business.

Create Exclusive Offers

To make CTAs, Pop-ups, Hello Banners etc. land the need leads, exclusive offers must be made to users who are willing to give more or go extra miles. For example, a video tutorial can be offered to them if they supply their email or a free eBook or a discount on purchases or even bonuses for referrals made etc. These will turn customers into active sales reps bringing in more leads for you through referral systems.

Monitor Post – Engage Comments, Analyse Results

Publishing a post is not the end; there is more. You need to monitor the post or posts to see how they are doing. You should also monitor which CTAs or method of generating lead is working and which is not so that you can easily dispense with the ones that are not working and focus on the ones that are. Equally, it is part of monitoring the blog to engage comments; they can be used to request leads directly for further clarifications.