STONE WARD

Blogging Best Practices
by Emily Reeves
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Overview
A company with leaders who blog consistently and write well can build respect, expert status and site traffic, as well as goodwill *within* the company. As competition for products and services continues to swell and a Google search can determine instantly whether someone buys or not, a blog that positions your company as knowledgeable, experts and interested in your customer needs can land you at the top of customers' minds when it comes time to make a purchase decision.

The biggest benefit of blogging, however, is the learning that starts after you press publish and readers chime in via the comments section.

CONTENT

The *most important* component of your blog is the content. The way it looks is important, but what you say is what makes a reader come back again and again. Here are some tips for approaching the content on your blog:

- **Use your own voice and personality as the tone of your writing.** This is your blog, own it. While you are representing your company, it is the people behind the company that your customers want to connect with and hear from.
- **Content can be entertaining.** Increasingly blogs are being used as entertainment. People are going to them for laughs, for gossip and for fun conversation.
- **Content can be educational.** Some blog readers are primarily interested in learning something about a given topic.
- **Content can be informational.** Many successful blogs are built on the thirst that some have to be informed on an issue, product or topic
- **Content can be controversial and inspire debate.** Some blog readers want a place that they can have a good old fashioned dialogue, debate or discussion over an issue.
- **Content can be simply news updates.** Many blog readers just want to be kept up to date in a field.
- **Content can foster community.** Some very successful blogs that tap into the need that people have to connect and belong. Quite often, the topic is secondary to these connections.
- **Be sure to cover only one topic per post.** This facilitates ease of use. People don't stay long on websites and have short attention spans. Granular posts help with this. They are

shorter and punchy and go directly to the point. This also facilitates ease of writing. It easier to concentrate on one topic at a time.

- **Only 16% of people read word for word** when they are online and another found that the average person only comprehends about 60% of what they read. Rather than read word for word – web users "scan" pages for information – looking for key words, phrases and visual cues.
- **Use lists.**
- **Use formatting tools.** Use bold, CAPITALS, italics, underlining, teletext and to emphasize points. Don't go overboard as you run the risk of frustrating your reader. Also consider changing font size, color and style to draw your readers eyes to your main points.
- **Use headings and sub-headings.** Using headings midway through posts helps with post structure but they also are great for drawing your readers eyes down the page and helping them find the parts of your article that will interest them most.
- **Use pictures.** Clever use of pictures in your posts can grab attention, emphasize points and draw people down into your post.
- **Use borders/blockquotes.** Boxes around quotes and key points can similarly get the attention of readers.
- **Use space.** Don't feel you have to fill up every inch of your screen – rather create spaces because they help readers not to feel overwhelmed and again tend to draw readers eyes to what is inside such space.
- **Use short paragraphs.** Web users tend to get lost in large blocks of text – break it into smaller bites and they'll stick with it for longer.
- **Don't bury your points.** Make your main points as clear as you can. One technique to ensure this is to get your main point across in the first few sentences rather than burying it in your conclusion.
- **Be interactive** with the readers you have.
- **Don't be scared of a long blog post, or a short one.** There's no word count police. However, brevity is the soul of wit. If you can say something more succinctly, you should. Consider posts that are 200-500 words.

POST TITLES

Keep it Simple
The most effective titles are short, simple and easy to understand. While breaking these rules can help grab attention (see below), they can also confuse, frustrate and put a glazed look in the eyes of potential readers.

Grab Attention
Good titles set your posts apart from the clutter around them and then draw readers into your post. Grabbing attention might happen using tactics of "shock," "big claims," "controversy" or even "confusion." While these tactics do work at getting people in – it should also be said that they can do more damage than good if the rest of your post doesn't live up to the promises your title makes. By all means, try to grab attention – just don't "trick" your readers into thinking you'll provide them with something you can't give them.

Meet a Need
An effective title draws people into reading more because they feel you've got something to say that they NEED to hear.

Describe
Some readers will be drawn into a post by a cryptic title that doesn't tell them much about what they'll be reading — but the majority of readers need to know something about what they'll find if they read further. Titles should describe (in a word or few) what readers will get in the main post.

Treat your title as an mini advertisement for your work.

FREQUENCY

Frequency really depends on what you have time to do and have to share. The recommended frequency is three times per week.

If you're going to post every day:
- Keep your posts short and to the point.
- Plan ahead, so you don't end up publishing sub-standard content in a rush.
- Vary your post types: try video posts, or image-heavy ones, for instance.

If you're only going to post twice a week:
- Look at which content on your blog is most popular, so you can make every single post a successful one.
- Experiment with longer posts, perhaps 1,000+ words.
- Focus on evergreen content, so that each post will stay relevant for years.

RESPONDING

Blogging is a form of social media. Which means that readers expect conversation from the author. Allow your readers to comment on the blog posts, then use the comment area to reply within — at most — a day.

Interested in learning more?
Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Innovation & Insight Planning
As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

About Stone Ward
Stone Ward is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding $40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.