



Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority

GUIDE TO BLOGGING

Using blogging to promote your business

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Introduction

This guide is an overview of blogging which can be used to promote your business with your customers.

Skill Level

Basic **Inter** The majority of the topics in this guide are suitable for anyone who has basic PC knowledge. Towards the end of the guide there are a few more advanced topics that are more suitable for intermediate users.

Terminology

You will come across the following terminology in this guide which you need to be familiar with:

Term	Explanation
Blog	An online journal of articles.
Blogger	A person who blogs.
RSS	Real Simple Syndication – A standard format that many blogs provide all their content in. If your blog is in this format when you write a new blog post it gets delivered to any subscribers rather than them having to come to your website to read it. If you read a lot of blogs you will want to subscribe using RSS so that it will make it easier for you to read lots of blog posts from many authors. If you provide your blog in this format it means that people don't have to come to your website to read your blog. This, however, is an advantage, because people that read a lot of blogs which allows RSS readers to consume and display this content.
RSS Reader	An application that allows you to view blog posts from various blogs all in one location. It saves you having to go to each website to find out if they have new blog posts. A real time saver.
Blogging application	Ideally when you want to blog you use a piece of software which is created for blogging. With this piece of software you get the standard facilities available for blogging including

Video Tutorials



Indicates a video tutorial. Click on the icon to watch the video. These videos demonstrate how to carry out a particular task. In order to watch the video tutorials in this guide, you will need to have Adobe Flash Player v9.0.28 or above installed on your computer.

Note: *When you go to watch the video, a check is done to make sure you have the correct software installed. If you do not have the correct version installed you will be provided with a prompt to download and install the correct version.*

What is Blogging?

A blog is basically an article that you write online. Typically you add a blog onto your website, create the article and then publish it and it's available immediately on your website for everyone to read.

The person who writes the blog is known as a blogger and updating the blog is known as blogging. The content of the blog could be text, images, videos or voice. The vast majority of blogs are written by one person but there are some blogs which are run on large websites and have a large team of editors.

Why do people blog? This is generally for a number of reasons:

- The statistics show you get more leads if you blog on your website. Google get lots more web pages to index with each blog post and you get more traffic.
- Generally with blogging software there is a content management system which just means you can add content to your website very easily without any technical help so some people using blogging software to allow them to easily add articles to their website.
- By blogging you attract interest from many people and it helps build up your network.
- You can demonstrate your expertise and knowledge in a particular area. For example, if you run an award winning restaurant you could write a blog with recipe items and people will start following your blog and sharing out your content.
- Blogging is a way of keeping in contact with your current or potential customers. They can subscribe to what you write and this helps you to keep in contact.
- A blog can be provide a lot more interesting content on your website. So for example, if you blog about what's going on in the area then tourists coming to your website will find this helpful and will be more likely to book with you.

Your Questions Answered

Where do you see my blog on my website?

Normally on your website you might have a blog section (e.g. www.websitename.com/blog) and underneath there you will see a list of the latest blog posts. All older blog posts stay on your website but you generally have a page which shows the most recent ones.

How do people know that I have written a new blog post?

There are various ways. First of all Google is always searching the web for new content so when it finds your blog post it will index it and people may start finding it when they are doing searches. If they already know that you blog and enjoy your posts they may subscribe to these posts if you provide that facility on your website.

There are 2 options you should provide.

- The first is e-mail, if I subscribe to your blog posts by e-mail then every time you write a post I'll automatically get an e-mail.
- For people that read many blogs they can use an application called a 'reader' which allows them to view blog posts from many people in one location. So you should also provide an option to view your posts in one of these reader applications.

People do not appreciate getting unsolicited email so make sure to only send your blog posts to people that have specifically subscribed to your mailing list.

What do I write about?

Write about things that will be interesting to your current or future customers. If I run a hotel and I'm trying to attract new customers I may write about events that are in the area, attractions in the area, interesting stories from the Hotel, information about other businesses in the area etc. We came across a business recently that got their guests to provide information on what they did when they were on holiday. This was turned into blog posts and put onto the website and it was a great way of passing on stories that people will love to read. Of course it will also help you promote your business and location.

Benefits of Blogging

The role of the website in your business is changing. People are used to going to a website and reading about how good your company is and are now starting to ignore this. They don't really have much time on their hands so listening to you telling them how great your service is, is not that interesting.

So you need to make your website more interesting and engaging and this is done through providing good content. When we are talking about good content we are talking about text but also pictures and videos.

If you put some thought into what type of content your customers are going to be interested in this will help to make your website more interesting.

The key benefits of blogging are outlined below:

- **Website Traffic** — Generally every blog post you write is a new page on your website which is another page for Google to index. When Google has indexed your page then this is available through Google's search engine and therefore you are more likely to get more visitors to your website.

- **Awareness** — If you blog and people subscribe to the blog that's another way of building up awareness of what you do.
- **Keeping in contact** — Blogging is a good way of keeping in contact with current or potential customers. By keeping in contact through your blog you can promote any good offers or deals that you may have in the future.
- **Networking** — By having a blog it is easier to link in with other bloggers and form a relationship which could be beneficial. For example, there are plenty of very influential bloggers that may have very high traffic and by forming a relationship with them you could get them to mention your blog/deals etc that you are offering.
- **Sharing things** – There are times when you have some great information that you want to share with current or potential customers. The blog is an easy and quick way of adding this useful content in a structured format and sharing it out to your followers.
- **Listening** – When you blog you are inclined to read more. As well as potential clients you will end up networking with similar minded people and through this network you will pick up some great ideas that you may introduce to your business.

The Blogging Workflow

So if I've decided to blog what to I do? Assuming that you have all the relevant software up and running here's what you should be thinking about.

- **Listening** – Keep your ears open for stories that would be interesting to tourists coming to visit. What are your guests saying, what's going on in the area that is interesting?
- **Reading** – You should always be on the look out for new content. That could be reading online, reading newspapers, following what's going on in the community. But keep your eyes open for new and interesting content.
- **Collecting** – If you find useful information you should collect it. You may not want to blog about it now but when you do at least you have access to some ideas for content. There are various ways of keeping information on the web. For example, you can bookmark web addresses on your browser.
- **Writing** – Writing does not have to be as difficult as it may seem. With a blog you generally write what you are thinking and most people will expect a nice casual tone so no need to put too much thought into it. Set out a writing schedule, for example, write a blog post once a week. Set aside time to read some content and then write the blog post.
- **Commenting** – When you publish your post you should try to end it with a question to encourage some interaction. When people do post comments you should try to respond to the comments as soon as possible. See section on moderating your blog.

How do I get started?

To get started you ideally need to have some blogging software.

Blogging Software

There are many different blogging platforms available for you to choose from, such as, WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr and Joomla. However, for the purposes of this guide we will use WordPress to demonstrate how to create and use blogs as it's the most popular and widely used.

Before you get started with blogging you have 3 options:

Creating a New Website with a Blog

If you don't have a website already you can create your website using some blogging software. It will look like a normal website but you'll have the option to also create blog posts. One big advantage of creating a website based on blogging software is that you have a full content management system which means you can easily add content onto the website without any technical help from anyone.

The following screen shows the typical form you use for creating a new page on your website using WordPress. When you click Publish the content is available immediately on the website.



So if you don't already have a website you can get a WordPress based website up and running very quickly. It will require some technical help but it's generally a more cost effective approach than creating a full website from scratch.

Adding a Blog to your Existing Website

If you already have a website you can add some blogging software to your existing site. When you go to your site to access the articles for the blog generally this is displayed under a separate section within your website. For example: www.websitename.com/blog. This is a relatively straight forward process but you will need some technical help.

Creating your Blog on a Blogging Platform

A lot of the blogging software providers provide websites where you can easily add a blog directly on their site. For example, on WordPress I can create a blog called 'dublinhotel.wordpress.com'.

It will be up and running in minutes and I can start posting straight away. That is the big advantage.

The disadvantage is that any content you write is not on your website so you don't get the benefit of Google having more pages on your website to index. So this option is not as good as having the blog on your website but it is a quick and easy way to get up and running. You can even use this just to get familiar with blogging and get a feel for it before you invest any time or money in getting it up and running on your website.

Setting Up a Blog on WordPress

WordPress is the most popular and widely used blogging application. As discussed above it's better to have WordPress up and running on your website, however, to try out this software before investing any money it's useful to try to set up a blog directly on Wordpress.com. The following shows you how to set up this blog and goes through the process and typical functionality of a blog which would generally be available when you use this type of software.

Registering with WordPress

To set up your blog the first thing you need to do is register it and create the installation (automatically created for you after you fill out your basic details). The following outlines the steps involving in setting this up.

1. Go to www.wordpress.com and click on the option to create the blog. This is typically a button which has text such as 'Get Started here'.
2. Enter in the name you want to give your blog which will also be used as part of your blog address, for example, **theplazahotel**.wordpress.com.
3. Next enter a username, password and e-mail address.
4. Click on Sign Up. An email is then sent to your email address to confirm your registration.
5. Go to this email in your Inbox and click the activate link. You are then brought to a page showing you that your blog is active.
6. Click on the login option and enter in your username and password.



VIDEO: Create a Blog on Wordpress

This video takes you step by step through the process of setting up a blog on Wordpress.com and then changing the appearance of the blog to match your business or brand.

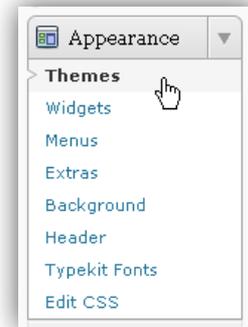
While you may want to eventually have a blog on your own website, this at least allows you to test it all out.

When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.

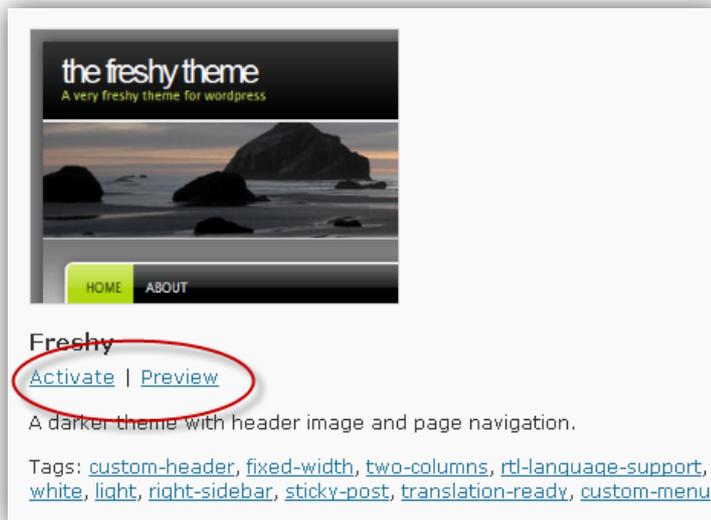
Change the Appearance of your Blog

The look and feel of your blog is controlled by a WordPress Theme. You can easily change the theme used by your blog from a catalog of nearly 100 themes. Once you have applied a new theme you can also customise it further.

1. Go to your dashboard on WordPress.
2. Click on the Appearance menu on the left and then select Themes.
3. At the top of the screen you will see the Current Theme being used by your blog and under this you can Browse the directory of available themes.
4. For each theme you can see a Preview image and under this Activate and Preview option. Click on the Preview option to see how your blog will look with this theme.

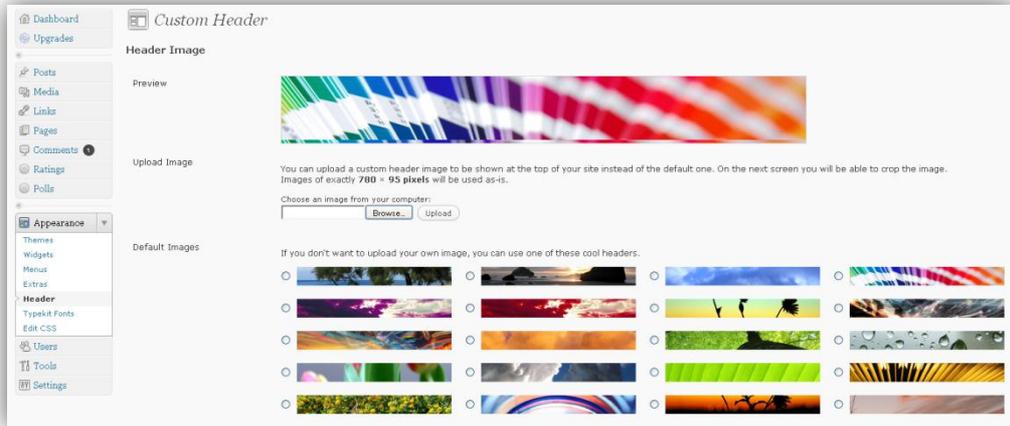


an



5. Once you have found the theme that you want to use, click on the Activate link. The current theme at the top of the screen should now change to the new one you selected.
6. To see how your blog now looks go to your blog address.
7. Each theme also has some additional customisations that you can make to the standard layout. Any settings that can be changed are available under the Appearance menu on the left.

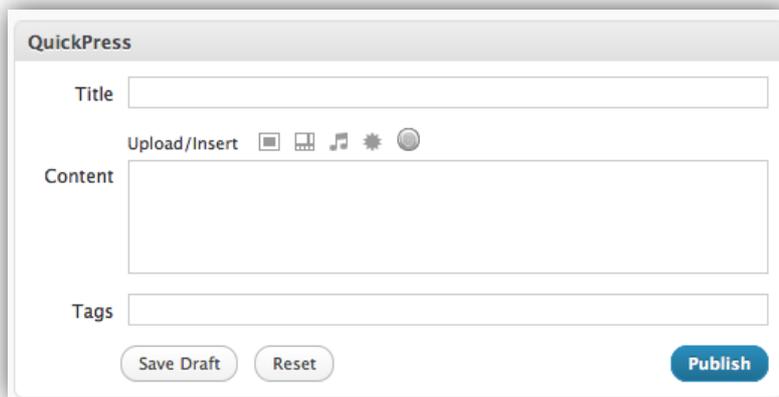
For example, the Freshy theme shown here lets you change the header image used by the theme. You can either select from a range of default images or you can upload your own.



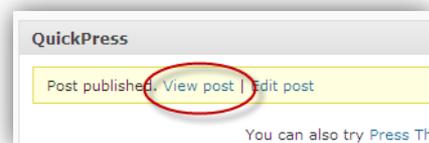
Creating Blog Posts

Once you have your blog up and running you can now create your first blog post.

1. Login to WordPress using the username and password you registered with.
2. Select Dashboard from the menu on the top left of the screen.
3. On the right hand side of the page you'll see an option called 'Quickpress'. This allows you to quickly create a blog post.



4. Enter in your title of your post and add in some content.
5. A tag is a way of identifying what type of content you are writing about so put in some keywords that identify the subject of your blog post.
6. Click on the Publish button when you are finished and then click on the View Post option that appears at the top of the QuickPress box, as shown.



Congratulations, you have created your first blog post.



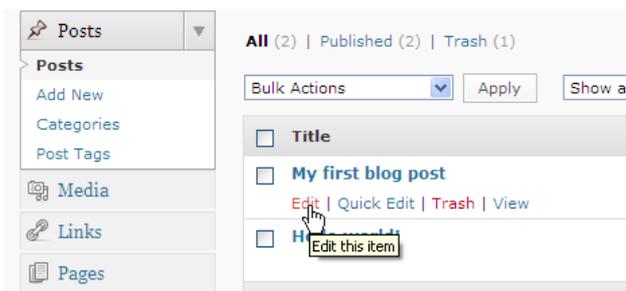
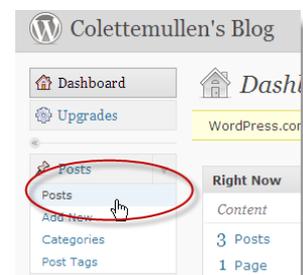
VIDEO: *Creating a Blog Post*

This video demonstrates how you can easily create and format a blog post and how you can add images and video content from YouTube to your blog post to make it more appealing.

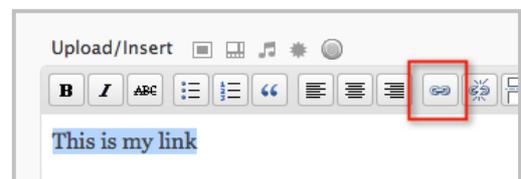
When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.

Editing a Blog Post and Inserting a Link

1. Login and go to your Dashboard.
2. On the left menu open the Posts section and select the Posts menu option as shown. A list of all your current blog posts will appear to the right.
3. Hover over the title of the blog post you want to edit, and click on the Edit option that appears under the title. You can also just click on the title itself.



4. The details of your post then appear and you can start to edit your post. For example, you could insert a link or an image in your post.
5. To add a web link to your blog post, write some text, highlight it and then select the link option, as shown.



A box appears, as shown, where you can enter

in the web address for the website you want to link to e.g. www.google.com.

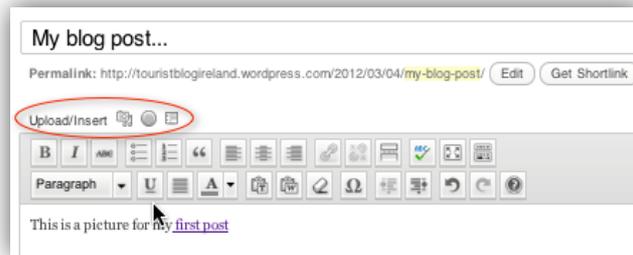
6. Click update. You are then returned to the Edit Post screen where you will now see the text you highlighted appear as a link (highlighted in a different colour and underlined).



7. Click on the Preview Changes button in the Publish box at the top right corner of the screen. Your blog post will appear in the new window. If you are happy with how it looks then return to the Edit Post screen and click on the Update button to save your changes.

Inserting Images

1. Either create a new blog post or edit an existing post.
2. On the Edit Post screen, put the cursor wherever you want the image to appear.
3. Click on the option to add media, as shown. A window appears where you specify the image that you want to insert.
4. At this point you can choose to either upload the file for the image from your PC or if the image is already available on another website (e.g. Flickr) you can simply insert the web address for the image by selecting the From URL tab at the top.
5. To insert an image from your computer click on the Select Files button, browse to the file on your machine and click OK. The file is then uploaded. You can then define the various properties for the image, such as the Title (text that appears when you hover over the image) or the Link URL (the website you want to link to if someone clicks on the image).
6. One you are happy with all the settings, click Insert into Post at the bottom. You are then returned to the Edit Post screen where you will now see the image.

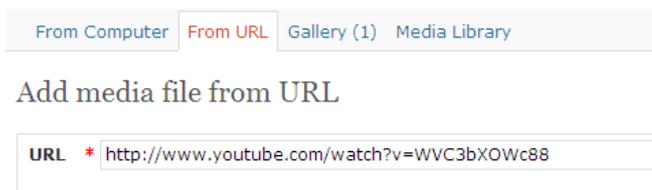


Insert a Link to a YouTube Video

1. If you want to link to a YouTube video, select the From URL tab on the Add Media screen (as above).
2. Go to the video on YouTube that you want to insert in your post and click on the “Share” button underneath the video. Copy the web address from the window that pops up.



3. Paste the web address in to the URL field on the Add Video screen in WordPress, and click the Insert into Post button.



4. You are returned to the Edit Post screen where you will see the YouTube code inserted in to your post.
5. To see the video, click on the Preview Changes button or click Update to save the changes.

Structure of a Blog Post

Without any blog posts you don't have a blog. Each blog post typically is set up on one page of your website and generally you see them displayed in chronological order with the most recent displayed first. Also quite often you see a summary of the top x most recent blog posts and sometimes you may also see links to the most popular posts. The following breaks down the typical structure of a blog post.

Blog Post Title

A blog title is the headline that captures peoples attention so it's very important. The same as a headline in a newspaper catches your attention you need to ensure that this blog post title is equally as stimulating and interesting. You should also consider the keywords in your title to ensure that Google gets a good idea of what the content of the post is about so it has a chance to index it correctly.

Blog Content

The blog content section is where you write the article. It is typically 300 to 500 words but really it can be any size. You could write a couple of lines of text and put a link in to a video or you could write a really long blog post. The key is to make sure that the content is interesting. Always remember that people tend to skim through content rather than reading it all so make sure to break the content down into main and sub headings if it's long. Let visitors to your blog easily pick out the areas that are interesting to them.

At the end of a blog post it is a good idea to ask a question as with a question you are much more likely to get a response. It's hard to get people to comment because most people just read the content but to give you a chance of getting a comment ask a question at the end.

If your idea for the blog post came from another article on the web it is good to link to this content. Also, if there is additional material that makes your article better then link to this content also. When you link to an article that article generally shows what is called a 'trackback' which is really a link back to websites that linked to the article. So this may also generate additional traffic.

You will also want people to link to your content so linking out encourages this. Remember you are part of a community and try to contribute to the development of this community. Linking out helps to promote other blogs and websites and that is good for the community which ultimately will be good for your blog.

Blog Author

For every blog post you should have a piece of information, and preferably a picture, about the author of the blog post. This blog post is written by an individual and people will generally want to know who the individual is and will be more likely to respond with comments to the individual. If there are many different authors provide information on the author that wrote each particular post.

Images/Videos

A blog with just text is not as inviting as a blog with images and/or videos. Typically bloggers start off the blog post with a good captivating image that draws your attention to a blog post and makes you want to read it. Without the image the blog post is just a lot of text. So consider always including an image.

***Note:** If you don't have a relevant image go to the photo sharing site www.flickr.com and go to search. Go to the advanced search and select the option 'creative commons licensing'. When you do a search here you will find images that people put up and allow you to use on your blog as long as you reference them.*

Make sure you also name your images correctly because when people search on the web they may find the images you use and this will lead them back to the blog post.

Comments

Blog comments are an important part of your blog post. You have 3 options for comments:

- **Switch them off** – If you want you can disable comments. But a blog post is not as effective without the ability for people to comment on them.
- **Display them automatically** – You can set up your blog so that all your comments are automatically displayed. You can then monitor for comments and respond accordingly.
- **Display with moderation** – You can generally set up your blog so that comments are only displayed after you approve them. You may want to start up your blog like this to gauge the type of comments you receive and make sure they are all relevant.

***TIP:** Most blogging software provides the capability for adding monitoring spam in blog posts. For example, on WordPress you can install a piece of software called Akismet which will catch a lot of the spam.*

Useful Formats for Blog Posts

For a blog posts ideally you have some variety and you're not always blogging the same type of items. Here are some useful types of blog posts to consider:

- Video blog – Why not just have a couple of lines of text and reference a video which contains more information. This could be your own video or another one that you have found on YouTube.
- Useful Links – Maybe you don't have all the information on your blog but you can provide useful links to other sites. For example, here is a list of all the events coming up in the area.
- Top five, top ten, top anything – Why not provide a list of the top 10 things to do in the area, top 5 local attractions etc. This is valuable content that potential customers will enjoy and other websites may link to you. The more links you get from external websites the better.

Promoting your Blog

When you have your blog up and running there are many ways to promote it, the following gives some examples:

- **Comment on other blogs** – When you comment on other blogs you get a link back to your site so when people read your blog comment they can click on the link and this will bring them back to your blog. So comment on lots of relevant blogs but make sure to put in good comments that add value to the blog post.
- **Social Media Channels** – You can send a link to your blog post on your Facebook business page, twitter account etc. You can also set up your blog to automatically post details to Facebook, Twitter etc.
- **Write great content** – When you write great content lots of people will link to this content and this will drive additional traffic.

***TIP:** Check out twitterfeed.com which allows you to automatically update Facebook and Twitter when you have a new blog post.*

Researching other Blogs

To be really successful with blogging you should really be following other relevant blogs and commenting with those blogs so you can build up relationships with the bloggers and then they will start promoting your content. So you want to research blogs and see which ones are popular and which ones are relevant. For example, you may want to follow journalist bloggers that write about the leisure/travel industry or follow blogs written on travel sites. To find relevant blogs there are a couple of ways, for example:

- [Blogsearch.google.com](https://blogsearch.google.com) – If you go to Google you can search any information that is provided in a standard format called RSS. So most of the search results will be from blogs.
- [Technorati.com](https://technorati.com) – This is a blog search engine so lots of blogs here.
- [Irishblogs.com](https://irishblogs.com) – A directory of many Irish blogs

Creating Content

Before you start blogging you really need to consider what you are going to blog about and what is your plan. Without a plan in place it's likely that you write very frequently initially and then over time you will stop. A blog needs to be fed and watered regularly so it's a commitment you need to make before starting to put in content.

So what type of content should you deliver? Well this depends on the type of business you operate. For example, if you own a hotel here are some examples of the type of content you could include in your blog.

- Events that are coming up in the area – People in the area will be interested in events coming up and international people visiting the area may also hear about the event and start searching for it online.
- Local attractions – useful information on local attractions in the area.
- Things to do – A weekly blog post on events, activities coming up in the area. If there are local companies providing complimentary services make sure to promote them.
- Activities in your premises– If you have something interesting going on in your premises try to cover details of these events. Use a video camera and provide some interesting and maybe entertaining information. If you have a band playing take a video (subject to permission of course).
- Restaurant Menu items – If you are running a restaurant within your premises how about providing details of the menu item of the week. Show how the chef has made it with all the delicious ingredients. If you can videotape the chef all the better. Most people that like food will enjoy watching it and a lot will come to your restaurant to try it out. Release the video a couple of days before it's actually on the menu.
- Stories – People love to read stories. How about stories about visitors to your premises, stories about your staff, stories about history etc.

When you are writing content on your blog try to think about what is valuable and interesting to your current and potential customers.

Optimising your Content for Google

This is more of an advanced topic so feel free to skip over it. When you are creating content on the blog it is useful to consider what people are searching on that is related to what you are writing about and then make sure to use these keywords (or something similar) within your post.

The best way of explaining this is through an example. There is a sailing event coming up in your area in 4 weeks time and there are many people coming from abroad for this sailing event. So you know there will be lots of people looking for information on the web about what is happening during the event. You also know that a lot of people will be looking for accommodation, places to eat, and so on. So you decide to write a collection of blog posts around the event. But there is no point in writing a blog post with excellent information if a lot of people won't find the content so it's important to consider what people are searching on.

Luckily Google provides a tool called 'Google Keyword Tool' which allows you to see what people are searching on. For more information, take a look at the "Google Keyword" guide which is part of this series of guides.

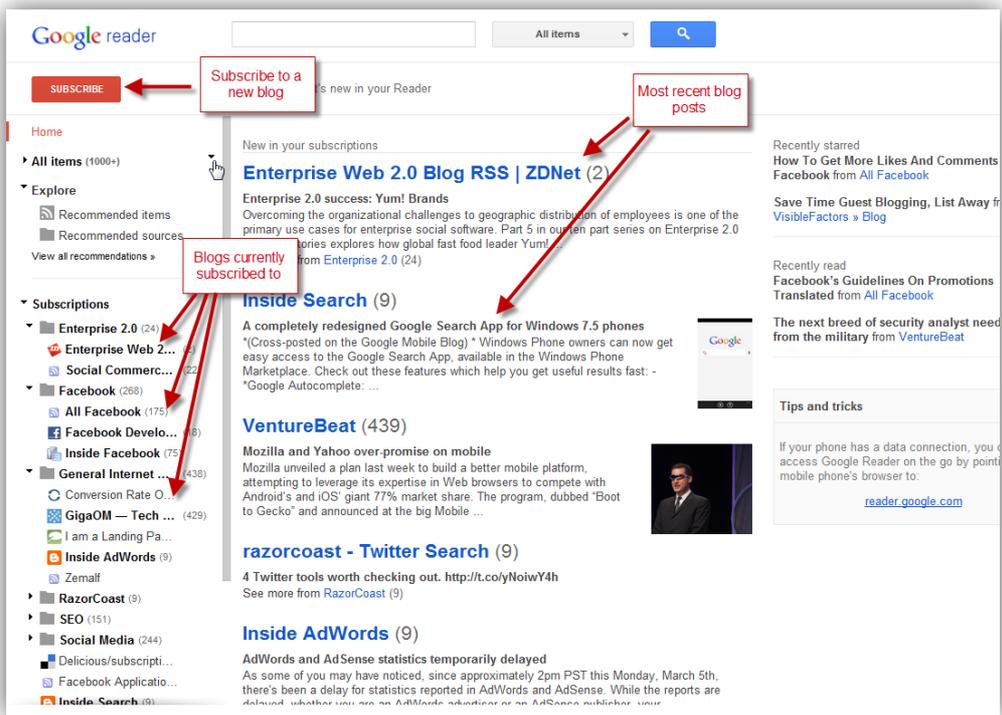
Blog Reader Applications

There are generally 3 ways of reading your blogs posts:

- **Website** — anyone can go to your website and read your blog post. They find it by searching on Google or when they are on your website they may go directly to your blog.
- **E-mail** — it is advisable to provide an option to subscribe by e-mail to your blog. So when you write a new blog post anyone that subscribes by e-mail will automatically get the blog post.
- **Blog Reader** — when your blog is provided in a standard format called RSS (Real Simply Syndication) then people can read your blog in a blog reader application. See details below.

A blog reader application is generally a web based application that allows people interested in reading blog posts from various sites to read them all from one application. So instead of going to individual websites to see who has new blogs posts you open up a reader application and see if there are any new posts from the websites you subscribe to.

One of these applications is Google Reader and this is free. If, for example, I subscribe to 20 different websites that have blogs it would be far too time consuming to go off to 20 different websites to check out to see if there were new blog posts.



How do I know if people are reading it?

There are various ways to figure out if people are reading your blog.

- **Comments** — Ask for feedback in your blog and see if you can get people to comment on it. The more feedback you get the more you will know how many people are actually reading it.
- **Feedburner** — When you create your blog post it is normal to provide the information in a standard format so many applications can read your blog post and people don't always have to go directly to your website to get the latest blog post. The standard format is RSS (Real Simple Syndication). Feedburner is an application from Google that ensures your blog post is in a format that the majority of RSS readers can understand. So you need to register your blog with Feedburner. When it is registered visitors to your blog will be able to subscribe to the blog using RSS and then view it in many different types of blog applications such as Google Reader. As part of Feedburner there is also an analytics module so once somebody subscribes to your blog you can see a list of all their e-mail addresses (if e-mail subscribers). You can also see stats about who has viewed your blog.
- **Google Analytics** – This is a free tool that is provided by Google and it will show you how many visitors you have to your blog and how long they are spending on the page where your blog posts are. If, for example, they arrive on your page and leave 3 seconds later you know that they are not reading the article unless it's extremely short!!!



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