

PART 3: START A BLOG

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS

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OVERVIEW

Once companies have taken the time to listen to the online conversation and build relationships with digital influencers, they often find that starting their own blog is the most effective way to participate in that conversation and engage key audiences.

You may ask, “What is a blog anyway?” A [blog](#) is a Web site with entries, or “posts,” displayed in reverse chronological order (i.e., most recent at the top), which may contain a combination of text, photos and videos. Importantly, people can subscribe to blogs via [RSS](#) or email, and in most cases, they can have a conversation with the blogger by leaving comments on posts.

Blogging can be a powerful communications channel for small businesses. According to a [new study](#) published by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research, the [Inc. 500](#) are rapidly adopting social media, with 39 percent reporting they have a company blog versus 11.6 percent of the [Fortune 500](#). Small business could actually teach big business a thing or two when it comes to social media adoption and success! In this section, we will share tools, techniques and best practices to help you get started.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Through blogging, you can engage key audiences directly in fast, honest, two-way conversations. More specifically, a blog might be used to:

- Share new information quickly with customers, prospects and employees.
- Demonstrate passion and authority on your business and industry.
- Market a new product or service.
- Effectively manage an issue or crisis situation.
- Influence traditional media coverage.
- Put a human voice and face on your brand.
- Improve search results.

As with any social media strategy, blogging isn't right for every company, so it's important to consider your objectives and your target audiences carefully before launching your own. If you have interesting information to share, passionate employees to contribute, and customers and prospects who want to talk with you, then maybe it's time to give blogging a try.

GETTING STARTED

Before launching a blog, you will need to develop a plan that addresses the content, the technology and internal processes for keeping it going. Here are basic steps for getting started:

- Agree on the objectives and target audience. As with any social media program, this is an important first step. What are you trying to achieve? Who is the audience? How will you measure success? Check out “Social Media for Small Business Part 8: Measure Success Online” for additional tips on this topic.
- Identify a blogger or team of bloggers. This could be anyone from the owner of the company to a communications manager or product engineer. The important thing is that they are knowledgeable and passionate about the company, its products and its services, and they can devote adequate time to the blog.
- Develop the content strategy. Determine the subject matter focus and create an editorial calendar that looks out at least 30 days to ensure that the blog is updated regularly. Ideally, a blog should have three to five new posts per week to keep people coming back.

GETTING STARTED (continued)

- Name the blog and secure the URL. Naming a blog can be tricky, particularly since many URLs could be registered with someone else. Be sure to pick a name that is unique and memorable, but still reflects the subject matter of the blog. It should also be optimized for search engines. For helpful tips, check out a recent Inc.com article on "[SEO for Blogs](#)."
- Determine a process for posting and comment moderation. You should aim to respond to all reader comments within 24 hours. Conversations move quickly in the blogosphere, and you will lose relevancy if you don't respond quickly.
- Design and program the blog. Two great blogging software options are [WordPress](#) and [Blogger](#). They are both open-source and free to use.
- Launch the blog. Introduce the blog to your key audiences as a new source of information, and start posting! Leverage existing communications vehicles - like your email newsletter or your Web site - to let people know about your new blog and invite them to join the conversation.

BEST PRACTICES

Based on our experience at Dell and conversations with small- and medium-size business owners, we've identified several best practices for starting a blog:

- Feature a link to the blog on your company home page.
- Employ a team of bloggers to divide the work and produce lots of fresh content, but identify a lead editor to coordinate the editorial calendar and maintain the tonality and focus of the blog.
- Provide simple guidelines to bloggers and allow them to publish with no (or light) approvals required.
- Share company news and thought leadership, but also respond quickly to major issues and problems your customers care about.
- Post at least three times per week with about 150-300 words per post. The more frequent you post, the more likely your blog will have repeat readers.
- Utilize a combination of written word, photos and video. Video blog posts are frequently referred to as [vlogs](#), and they are a great way to [demonstrate new products and services](#) or to present an interview with a company employee or industry expert. Wordpress and Blogger make it easy to add photos and videos to blog posts.
- Link generously to other digital influencers in your posts to join the broader online conversation on the topic. This makes you more relevant in the blogosphere and encourages other bloggers to link back to you. These "inbound links" are an important measure of influence and can improve your search performance over time, as well.
- Allow moderated comments to foster a two-way conversation.

CASE

Darryl Ohrt, founder of [Plaid](#), a design and branding firm based in Connecticut, started a blog called [Brand Flakes for Breakfast](#) in 2005. Initially, he saw the blog as an easy way to share articles with prospects, rather than clip and mail the hard copies. He decided early on that he wouldn't use the blog for a hard sales pitch. Instead, Ohrt and his fellow contributors talk about industry trends, creative inspiration, great advertising and the latest gossip at Plaid. It worked, and the blog became one of Plaid's best lead generation tools. Today, the blog is read by 100,000 people a month and ranked #85 on the [AdvertisingAge Power 150](#) list of top media and marketing blogs.

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Visit www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia to read all eight guides written by Dell's Small Business and Communities & Conversations teams:

- Part 1: Learn to Listen
- Part 2: Join the Conversation
- Part 3: Start a Blog
- Part 4: Tap into Twitter
- Part 5: Crowdfund Your Next Big Idea
- Part 6: Harness the Power of Facebook
- Part 7: Share Photos and Videos Online
- Part 8: Measure Your Success Online

We hope you will join this Facebook community, share your own ideas, and continue the conversation with Dell and small businesses around the world.