

The Unspoken Rules of Blogging

Bloggging went mainstream some time ago, but how do you make your library blogg sing rather than sag?

A common misapprehension is that blogs are simply online diary pages, equivalent to a library's news page. As regular readers of Blog Spotlight will be aware the truth of the matter is a little broader than that. Like a lot of social media blog posts are not just a way to broadcast opinions, news and insight they're about establishing a dialogue with your customers, community or profession. It's all about becoming part of a community, but like every group uncovering the often unspoken rules of conduct can be a tricky proposition. So to make it easier here are some simple steps that you can take to make your blog informative, readable, and valuable but above all generate a conversation.

- **Readership:** Who is the blog for, is one of the most regularly ignored initial considerations. Defining who your target audience is, be they customers or fellow professionals, will shape the kind of posts you make and the language you use. It'll also help in determining the places where you'll promote the blog. Be up front about who you're writing for. Other people may well read it too, but so long as you keep posting entries aimed at your defined readership you'll find your posts make a more positive impact.
- **Message:** It almost goes without saying that you want people to read your posts. However, with so many blogs out there you need to be able to stand out, by occupying a particular niche or centring on a particular theme. It might simply be your library service, but a better idea is to focus on particular arena in which you have an especial interest. Try and keep the post topics loosely associated within this, to satisfy your readership. If you find a rash of ideas for posts that are outside these topics, don't be afraid to set up another blog to deal with them.
- **Tone:** Blogs are by nature less formal than say a library webpage and this should be reflected in the more casual prose style employed. You should be aiming to draw the reader in, encouraging a feeling of intimacy that increases the likelihood of comments. It doesn't mean you need to pepper it with street argot or l33t lingo. An informative, generally relaxed professional style, akin to Gazette's, will usually straddle the tricky divide between too cold and too casual. I try and imagine explaining things to my parents-in-law when I post, and that seems to hit the mark. If more than one person will be posting on the blog, try and make sure everyone agrees to use the same level of informality from the start.
- **Length:** Readable *isn't* the same as interesting. Blogging and the seemingly endless length of the digital format can all too easily lead the creative and enthusiastic writer to pontificate at great length. Certainly there does exist an

audience for the occasional longer post, but on the whole blog posts suit a shorter format prose length. On the other hand you might want to use the blog to post longer, more thoughtful pieces. Try using the longer format once a week or less, and intersperse these with shorter, punchier posts lasting only a few paragraphs. That way you can satisfy the tastes of a broad readership and keep them all coming back for more.

- **Regular:** As the number of posts grow, so too should your active readership. A good way to keep people engaged is to make sure you have regular flow of content. Too many blogs start with good intentions and a flurry of posts, but then dwindle away. It's best not to create expectations you can't match; generally short and often is better than seldom and wordy. Be upfront if you are only going to post occasionally, and be prepared to take a hit in readership as a result. Conversely, people's time is limited so try not to post more than a few times each week unless it really is important as your readership may well become jaded and drift away.
- **Conversation:** In many respects you'll get out of blogging as much as you're prepared to put in. If you're willing to engage with other blogs, making comments and becoming involved in discussions then you'll benefit from the insight and your blog will benefit from increased exposure. It's a win/win scenario.
- **Linkage:** Blogs are a great place to share links to papers, articles, information or even other blogs that you've happened across. Make it a rule to only link to quality and always amplify the content, explaining why a site it is interesting enough for someone else to read. It will help to prompt the conversation and generate useful feedback on the link.
- **Beautify:** Today, there's no excuse for posts to comprise only blocks of text. Use images (within copyright) from around the Web or better yet upload your own. Illustrate with care though, too many pictures, and you'd be better off linking to a Flickr photostream.
- **Promote:** Make sure you promote posts in newsletters, on websites, in tweets, on Facebook, at conferences or wherever people might find them. In time blog traffic will certainly come to you, but you want to make sure they are discovered as readily as possible. Commenting on other people's blogs, linking back to your own, is another good promotional tactic.
- **Reinvent:** Finally once in a while it's worth shaking things up. It creates an impact, it can be a stimulus for new traffic. Try to coincide this with an event or an especially important announcement for maximum effect. So break some of your normal house rules, and see what happens!

Hopefully, through using these tips then you should find that your blog will become be a worthy addition to blogosphere, generating comment, publicising your service and promoting insightful discussion with likeminded readers. Best of all you should will find it a satisfying engagement with the global digital community. And maybe even you'll find yourself featured on Blog Spotlight as well...

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