Guide to Blogging for Business

Make your blog work harder for your business.

Chapters

Blogging for Business pillar page – section 1

Beginning a business blog is a commitment that needs to be taken seriously. You might be keen to get started, and it's common for inexperienced bloggers to get stuck right in, but there are things you need to do first to ensure the longevity and success of your blog. Likewise, if you already have a blog but it isn't performing as well as you'd like, we hope the tips offered on this page act as a fresh start for you.
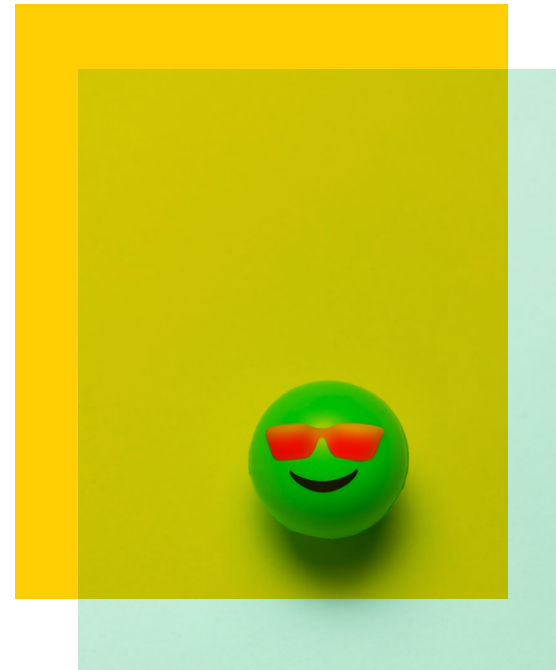
Chapter 1
Before starting a blog

The first thing to decide is: what is your blog's purpose – why are you creating a blog? The 'why' is so much more important than the 'what' in blogging:

- Why is your content important?
- Why should people listen to you?
- Why should they subscribe to your blog over others in your industry?

Align your blog's goals with your overarching business goals. Tell people the purpose of your blog at the top of the blog: make it crystal clear what you're setting out to do. Tell people what to expect and what kind of content you'll be releasing from the word go.

From the very top of the page, we pledge that our blog is a place to 'Teach yourself the processes required to master business growth with inbound and HubSpot.' If I was in an exam right now and this was on my exam paper, I'd be circling 'Teach yourself', 'master business growth', 'inbound' and 'HubSpot.' These are our keywords and if your business is interested in any of these areas, you know from the second you arrive on our page that this is the place for you.

Once you've defined your purpose, you need to define **your audience.**

Empathy is really important for successful blogging; you need to put yourself in your reader's shoes and think about what their struggles are, and how you can help them be better with your content. Everything needs to be about the audience: put them at the centre of everything you create. But until you've made and become familiar with your **buyer personas**, it's nearly impossible to progress with your blog – ensure you build them now, before proceeding.

What should your blog goals be?

Organic traffic from search engines is the most common goal for most business blogs. This is especially true if you're in the early stages when still building your readership. Let your content build a relationship with them; this is important at the start so they become a lead, a customer, then a promoter of your business.
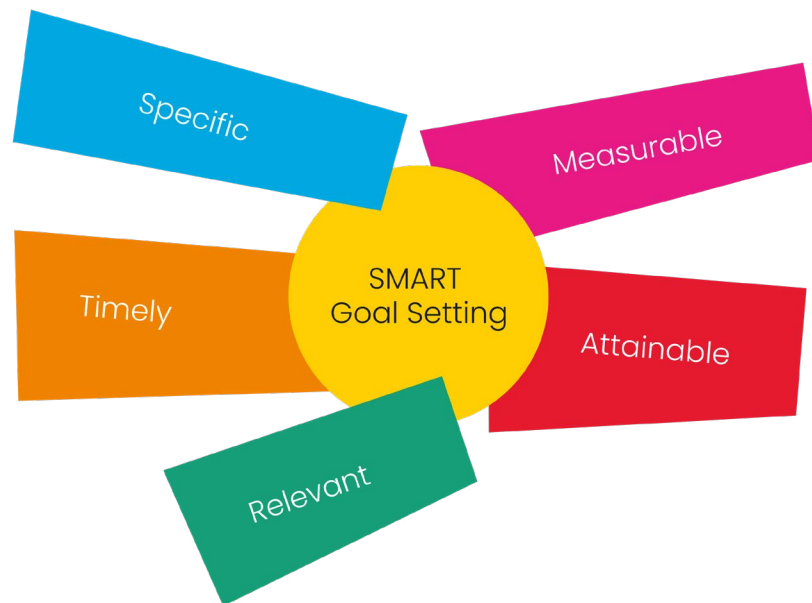
What are realistic targets for your business blog?

1. To increase the organic traffic to your blog by 6% each month (this equals 100% over a year).

2. To increase your email opt-in rate: strive to convert 20% of incoming traffic to your email newsletter. Conversion like this won't happen overnight, but over time with high quality, consistent content. This target will pay off later in generating ongoing traffic to your blog.

3. Create one new blog post every other week, or one blog post per week, if you can manage it. Quality not quantity is the focus – there's more value in this. Even if you're creating one post every other week, that's still 26 in a year; there's so much potential with that!

4. Publish a new content offer every three months: repurpose blog content into other formats, such as a guide or a checklist. Create a new offer every three months: blog posts are a great way to support this content – create at least 4-5 posts to promote each offer.

5. Reach out to one new industry influencer per month: this is a big part of your strategy. Who are the people that show up most often when you Google your blog topics? Reach out to them to form a symbiotic relationship. Tell them about a piece of content you're working on and ask for a quote from them. If you're able to incorporate others' opinions into your content, they'll be more likely to share it on their channels once it's published.

Some additional tips for your blogging goals might be:

Do your research online; don't start from scratch. Chances are that people have already written about your content. Google your keywords or topic and notice what is already ranking highly. Google is trying to match the very best pieces of content to what you're looking for. By typing in keywords that your buyer personas are searching for – mostly pain-point based – discover what is ranking best for this searcher's intent.

Research what already exists and try to find gaps in what hasn't been written before. There's no point in creating something that's already out there – it's just noise and noise isn't helpful. Remember, your mantra is to always be helping. If you're just borrowing ideas from what's already out there, then you aren't helping anyone. Find a new slant, a brand new idea or missed opportunities.

When doing research for targeted keywords, **build a spreadsheet** and look closer at the first 10 listings for that keyword that appear on page 1 of Google. Include the following columns in your spreadsheet: rank, page title, URL, and a list of things you like about the content. If you spot any gaps on page 1, this is where you can build unique content.

Allocate resources to your blog: it's a good idea to start with a person who is half a writer, half a strategist. This person needs to create the guidelines which will then be followed by all content, marketing and strategy specialists in your team as it grows, so it's important they get it right from the start. They will need to:

- Set up metrics
- Build a strategy
- Think about purpose
- Establish audience
- Have strong editorial skills.

As Emma Brudner, Director of Marketing at HubSpot explains:

"You need someone who cares deeply about the quality of their content but also has that strategist aspect of their brain, too."

Use your blog to fuel a topic-driven content strategy. Blogging is just one part of strategy, if you want people to find your website organically then you need to consider the cluster content model and pillar pages.

Chapter 2
Choose a style and template

When you establish your blog, you need to create consistency from the start. Using the same style and template every single time you create a blog post, with your logo, brand colours, fonts and layout presented in a standard format, build an image of reliability with your audience. Not only do readers appreciate consistency, but using an expected format creates a better user experience for readers to navigate your site more easily.

When selecting a template, consider including the following:

- **Use a responsive template** so that it responds to users' behaviour and environment, based on screen size, platform and orientation. There's nothing worse than a blog that looks beautiful on desktop but can't translate to a mobile phone screen (especially when 70% of web traffic happens on a mobile device).
- **Put social and email sharing buttons on your post** – 94% of people share a post because they think it will be helpful to others. If sharing options are incorporated into the body of your blog template, you're making it extra easy for readers to share, and ensuring you don't have to remember to add them on each time.
- **Offer a table of contents** with jump-to links that lead to specific sections. These anchors through the page help to enhance the reader's experience as it allows them to navigate content more easily and find the sections that really pique their interest.
- **Create image CTAs** in a free tool like Canva – once you've chosen an image design for your CTAs, stick to it for consistency. You can change the actual wording and destination of the CTA, but by keeping the look and feel of the button consistent, it helps your reader to build trust with your brand. You're delivering what they expect to find each time they open your blog.

Most readers don't come to a blog because of the fancy design and the beautiful script you use; they're coming for the educational, helpful and entertaining content you've created. Don't choose style over substance — opt for a simple design to help readers focus without distractions.

The page where all your posts are housed is called your **blog-listing page**.

It offers a summary view of all your blog content, including such information for each post as:

- Blog title
- Blog Author
- Feature image
- Preview text (of around 100 words).

Additional best practices for this page include:

1. **A 'subscribe to blog' CTA** at top of page to encourage visitors to sign up to your mailing list, grow your following and increase leads.

2. **An image which is descriptive**, easily illustrating what the article is going to be about in a snapshot.

3. **How long the article will take to read** – most blogs include this in the body of the post, but including it on the listing page means you're letting your audience know how much commitment they need to make ahead of clicking through.

4. **Category tags** – these set a precedent for blog posts to come, so you can better categorise your content. But don't create hundreds of tags on your blog, even if you feel you have hundreds of topics to cover. Choose the least number of tags possible to cover your bases; you can always add more in the future.

5. **Include tags that you want to become renowned for** and that build you as a thought leader in your space; make sure they aren't too obscure so that a.) people are actually searching for them and b.) you can create plenty of helpful content on these topics into the future. As a rule, keep your blog tags under 15 to help you focus.

6. **Blog-author bios**, whether in-house or guest bloggers, are great to build a picture of the person who's written the post and add a short piece of copy about them. This helps build relationships, but is also good for SEO benefits because you can include links to other key educational content on your website. Offer a few sentences about the author, and a helpful link, for example, a video course they've created, and how to find them on social media.

7. **Create pages for each author bio**, then you can even show the other posts which that author has written – if a reader enjoys a particular style or topic, this makes it really easy for them to find the author's wider work.

8. **Decide how you want to manage comments** – there are different ways to do this:

- **Allow comments on all blog posts** – this means anyone can comment on your blog without being moderated first and without filling in a capture of any kind: captures are used to see if a user is a human or a robot and prevent spam submissions. You can still delete comments once they're posted on 'allow all comments' blogs though, if any spammy ones are posted.

- **Approve comments before publishing blog posts** – this setting gives the author a chance to read and approve any comments before they go live under the post. This offers greater control over what is posted under your posts but means you have to keep track of comments, checking in to read and approve new comments.

- **Set a level of comments**; if you have threaded comments available on your blog, you'll be able to directly reply and interact with users. If you're just starting out then 'implement approval of all blog comments' before they go public, – it's better to be safe than sorry. Also you'll get alerts, so you can respond quickly, which users will appreciate.

- **Enable comment notifications** – this setting makes sure you don't miss a comment, and the author will be alerted as soon as a new one is posted. You can decide to be responsible for your own posts and alerts attributed to each writer individually, or select one team member to be aligned with all notifications as part of their job role.

- **Decide on a timeframe** – not only do you need to ensure everyone knows who is responsible for replying to comments, but you need to have a set system in place for how long your goal time is to respond to comments; have a company policy that you stick to in order to consistently achieve excellent customer satisfaction.

9. **Set up options for people to subscribe to your blog**: using forms and email. Put a quick form at the bottom of your blog for people to submit their email address and start receiving your email newsletter. If you're new to blogging, create a monthly round-up newsletter, sending your list of that month's blog posts in one email.

10. **Create emails that will be sent to users once they subscribe to your blog**: two types of email need to be created:

- Firstly, an automatic welcome email template for anyone who subscribes. Make it from a real person at your business and use the recipient's name. Thank them for their interest, remind them what they signed up for, and, by law, you must include an 'unsubscribe' option. Beyond this, offer helpful links to content they may have missed as a new subscriber.

- Secondly, set up an ongoing subscriber email template: include the title of the blog post and turn the title into a hyperlink. Don't use the entire blog post in the email; show a preview to entice the reader, use a featured image to make content more appealing, use CTAs to entice the recipient to click, and again allow them to manage their subscription.

Chapter 3
How to choose a topic and a title

The purpose must always be to write content that will educate and help your reader. You need to answer the questions and problems that your audience is researching; you need to provide the answers they seek so that you become indispensable to them, building a trusting relationship.
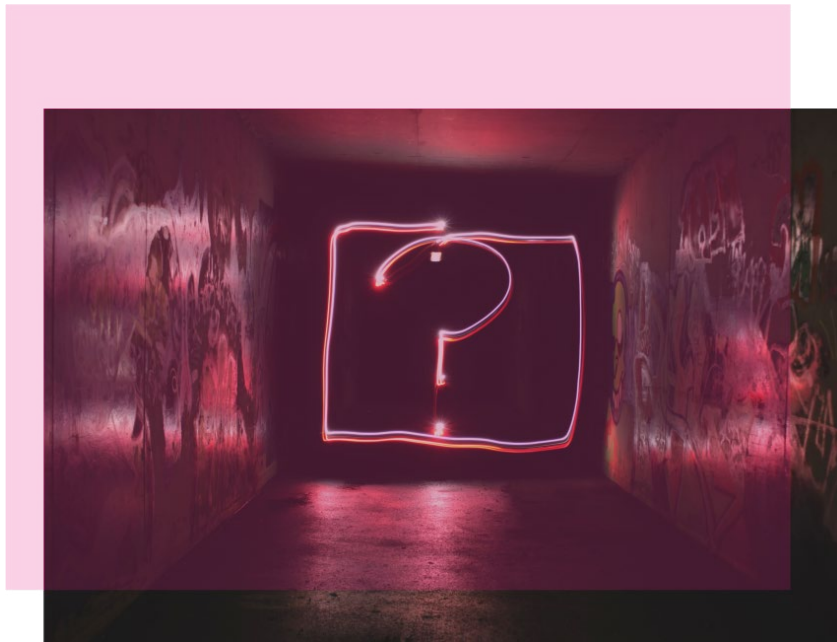
Choosing your topic

Here are some tips to help you choose your blog topics:

Write about your industry, not yourself. You're trying to attract readers who haven't heard of you before, so they aren't going to find you through search engines if you're just blogging about yourself. Instead, write about topics they're interested in, and show through your content how well aligned your values are with theirs.

Make your reader your number one priority. Imagine one person when you are writing and write as if you are speaking to that single person. Use your audience's language, speak to them as if they're in the room with you. If you are friendly, use industry-related terms they understand, and show you really know their specialism inside out, you'll earn their trust and respect.

Ask your teams, such as sales and services, for ideas about content.

- What are the most frequently questions they get asked?
- What do your prospects and customers need help with?
- What do you wish people knew about your industry?
- What are your competitors and industry leaders talking about?

If you have chatbots, a shared inbox or FAQs page, create content around the frequently asked topics from visitors. These sources are key to discovering more about the questions your buyer persona wants answers to, so use them as an 'mine of inspiration'.

Pick a topic by coming up with a general idea first. For example, 'holiday homes', then narrow it down to 'best holiday homes in UK' or 'holiday home investment'. Try to think of as many sub topics as you can within your idea.

Do your keyword research – these are the words and phrases your audience types into search engines. What are the options that come up when you type in your keyword? You can also do this through the HubSpot SEO feature. But don't overuse these words and phrases throughout your post, Google sees this as 'keyword stuffing' and will penalise you by not ranking your post highly.
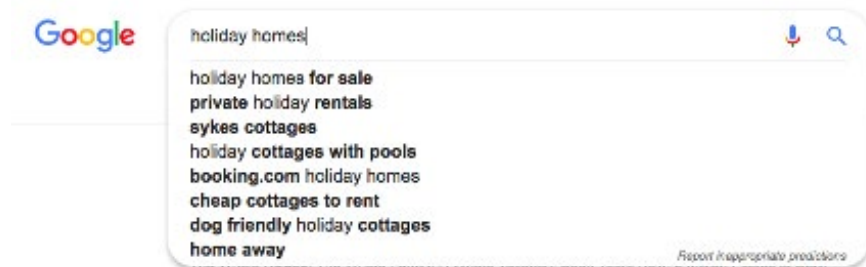
Focus on one long-tail keyword per post – a very targeted search phrase of three or more words, for example 'holiday homes for sale UK'. They include a head term – 'holiday homes' – which is one or two words, followed by a more descriptive term 'for sale UK'.

Make a list of topics that support a particular conversion. Plan a content offer, such as a great downloadable checklist, then think of blog posts that could support that content's topic. Then, if someone finds the blog post and finds the content helpful, it increases the chances of them clicking on the offer CTA.
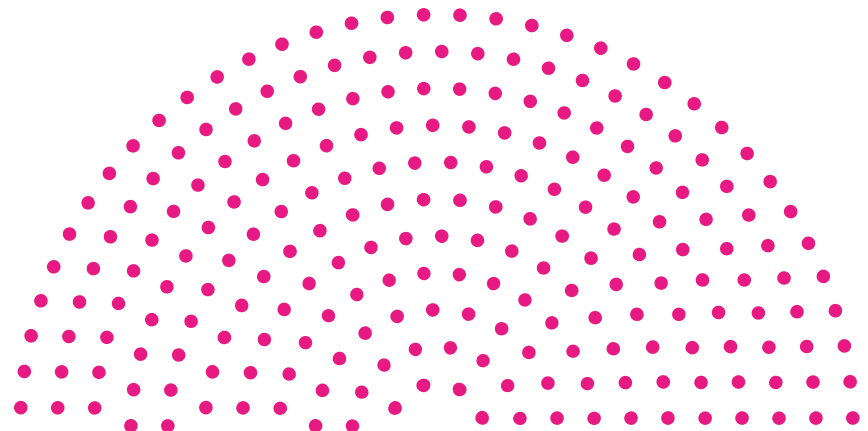
Choosing your title

HubSpot has created a fantastic Blog Ideas Generator Tool which gives you five free blog titles to write when you type a noun into the generator. Alternatively, you can upgrade and get a year's worth of blog title ideas. This is an ideal tool for when you're feeling stuck, or think you might have used up all your ideas for a certain topic.

Here are some further tips about picking your blog title:

It needs to pique interest – it's the first thing that will capture a reader's attention and if they don't like the title, they won't read the post.

Create a working title for your post – this is just something to work off as you write. Come back to it and refine it at the end to ensure it better supports the direction you ended up taking in the post. It's impossible to know the exact route your post will take at the beginning so free yourself up to write, and don't get too precious about the title at first.

For every content offer you create, find 5-10 blog post titles. Spend at least five minutes brainstorming your ideas, then send the titles to a colleague for their opinion. This will help you decide which 3-4 titles out of the 10 you are going to actually write.

Make the value of the post clear in the title – it should help readers, as well as search engines, understand what the post is about and what they're getting out of it. Set the right expectations from the start; what is the reader going to gain from reading the post? If there's no value or perceived benefit for them, then they simply won't click.

The ideal blog post title is 60 characters – this comes from HubSpot's own research. That's not many letters and spaces at all, so be concise and only use words that are absolutely necessary.

HubSpot also found that headlines between 8-12 words are shared most on Twitter. If your target audience uses this social channel most widely, you need to consider this statistic when creating blog titles that will capture your reader.

Perhaps your target audience is more likely to frequent Facebook as their social channel? **Headlines between 12-14 words are shared most on Facebook**, so if your targeted readership gathers here, you've got a few more words to play with.

Headlines that end with a bracketed clarification perform 38% better than titles without. This is interesting; readers evidently like having that extra bit of information, almost like a secretive afterthought, at the end of their post. If you haven't already, this statistic suggests it might be worth experimenting with this format for higher engagement.

Moz has created a Title Tag Preview Tool to use **if your title feels like it's getting too long**. The last thing you want is for your carefully crafted blog-post title to be cut off when search engines present it on their results pages – this can put prospects off reading it. Google typically displays the first 50-60 characters of a title tag. If you keep titles below this, around 90% of them will display properly on SERPs.

Put your head term or primary keyword at the start of the blog title so that it's never the part that gets cut off in search engines. This sounds so obvious, but I bet if we all look back through our catalogue of blog-post titles, we'd see plenty of examples where we've put the crux of the post right at the end of the title: engineer it so that the most important bit goes first.

Try to have some fun with your blog-post titles. **Try creating listicles**, for example, '11 ways to spring clean your house' or '7 tips when buying your first car.' Readers love knowing they're receiving a quantifiable amount of information from the title (especially if it's an odd number – don't ask us why!)

Likewise, 'How to…' articles are a popular format, where you can take a reader, step by step, through a process – wikiHow uses this format to great effect, including informative images about how to do everyday tasks most effectively. Readers love following a guide in this way, so if your product or service lends itself to these walk-through articles, give them a try:
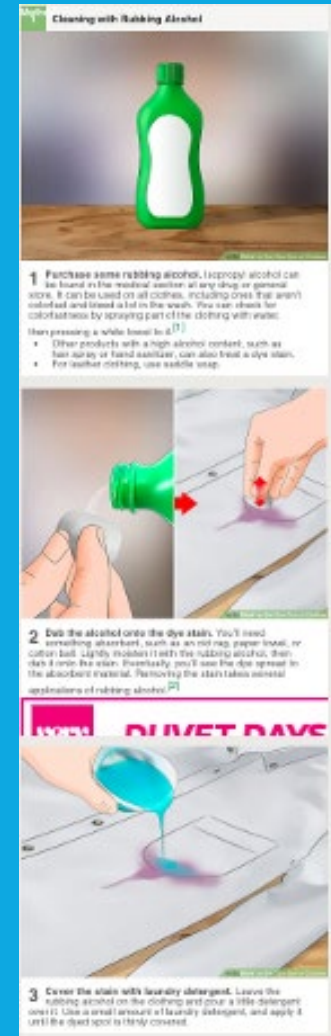
Whatever you do, experiment with titles and formats – if you're analysing your blog posts, tracking their successes and failures, you'll soon see what your readership enjoys most.

Chapter 4
How to structure your blog post

All successful blog posts have a blueprint they follow. It's there to help the reader make a well-informed decision and the structure helps the reader navigate and find direction in your content. There are other advantages to creating a blueprint for your posts:

- It makes content-**creation time more effective and efficient** for your team writers – using a template creates useful guard rails to stop writers "falling over the side" into their idiosyncratic style. A blueprint offers consistency, no matter who is creating content.

- **You want readers to easily understand** and follow what it is you're trying to communicate. An agreed-upon structure helps deliver the overall message to your audience; if it's too complicated and unengaging, readers won't stick with your post.

- **You want your readers to remember what you've talked about**, not just finish the post and walk away. Using a blueprint creates a way for readers to remember your content and to act upon what they've read.

- **A blueprint allows you to attract, engage and delight readers** – this is the inbound methodology and should be applied to everything you create. The aim is for your audience to become prospects, leads, customers and then promoters. But in order to do this, content needs a structure to tell a story.

Creating and structuring a blog post

As mentioned previously, you need to choose a format which people AND search engines can easily read and understand. It's no good having the best, most educational post in the world, but Google can't tell what it's about: no-one will find it. Use straightforward, honest language and an easy, familiar structure.

What tone do you want to be known for? Are you quirky and witty? Authoritative and serious? Formal and academic? Friendly and informal? Depending on your product, purpose and audience, your tone of voice will be different and personal to you. Generally speaking, a positive, informal and friendly tone works best, no matter how serious your topic might be.

Top Tip

Include some quotations by notable people in your industry throughout the post, perhaps highlighting these in a different colour or larger font for credibility.

Use a structure that's easy to follow and predictable:

- For example, the listicle: a short introduction of around 200 words, followed by listed bullet points, and a short conclusion of around 200 words.
- The 'How to...' formula might be a short 200 word introduction, a section on why this topic matters to the reader, followed by details about how to do it yourself in a numbered list, and a 200 word conclusion.

Top Tip

Leave the introduction and conclusion until the end. No-one knows the certain direction of their post at the start, but once you've written the body of the text, you'll be much more confident about how to start and end the post.

Make the introduction captivating – it's so important that it grabs the reader. They've already committed to reading your post based on your title, now they want to find evidence they made the right decision to click; this is the job of your introduction. Use humour or empathy. Interest the reader with a little-known fact or statistic. Use a recent story from the news to engage them.

HubSpot found that the ideal blog length was 2100 words, but of course it varies depending on topic. When you take this length into account, it soon becomes clear that quality over quantity is going to be your business blogging tactic.

Unless you have a large team of writers, turning out well-written content of this length isn't going to be possible on a daily basis. Focus on creating lengthy, useful and engaging content once or twice a week, instead of multiple shorter posts daily – better to do it right on a less frequent basis than doing it wrong regularly.

When it comes to formatting, mention your keyword throughout post. Give your post subheadings as mini 'breathers' for your reader, to help them navigate themselves and use your keyword in these if it feels natural.

Top Tip

Create a list of synonyms for the word you might be in danger of overusing – you don't want to be accused of 'content stuffing' so if you can mix up your language choices it'll benefit both the reader and Google.

Whitespace is your friend. Allow readers to focus on the content, not the clutter. Don't use overly long paragraphs and include whitespace down the margins of the post, under the title, between the images and paragraphs. Don't be tempted to fill this space with CTAs, images and other content – it's precious.

Use numbers and bullet points as much as possible to give the illusion of space and to make content really easy to skim and digest.

Subheadings should be in H2 or smaller to signal they are an extra point, not a whole new heading or subject.

Use bold on keywords or certain sentences you really want to emphasise, but don't overdo it; one sentence every few paragraphs is enough or it loses its effect.

Use visuals: your featured image sits at the top of a post and is visible along with the post when it is shared on social media. It also shows on your blog listing page. It needs to reflect what the story is about in a very explicit, clear way, and also needs to intrigue or provoke readers.

Use multimedia content wherever possible: images, videos, audio clips and screenshots of social-media posts. These help readers digest the content by mixing up the format.

Don't forget about mobile: twice as many mobile users consume blogs online than desktop users. So what's the mobile experience going to be like? Check the format on different screen types when you upload your post – HubSpot has a tool to allow you to do this ahead of setting the post live, as do most other content uploading tools:

Chapter 5
How to manage a growing blog

You need to optimise your content for conversions. After a while spent preparing and interviewing your personas, it's time to take the plunge and start creating and publishing content to see what sticks.

In the early days of your blog, don't be afraid to experiment. Get comfortable with analytics and see what is performing best. Try every format and style of post that you can think of; mimic what other businesses are doing with their content and see if it works for your readers, too. Your core focus at this stage should be to figure out what your audience responds to, growing your following and catering to them. Really get them interested and subscribing to your blog to build a loyal list of readers.

Once you have enjoyed some growth – traffic and subscribers are the biggest metric to focus on at first – then consider how to convert your audience. You can do this by:

- **Deciding what you want from readers**: do you want to have someone directly chat to a sales rep, book a demo, or download an ebook? Think about optimising your content for that specific conversion.

- The more you grow, the more intentional you want to be about **optimising that audience in a cycle** that repeats. Identify where readers are in their buyer's journey; this helps you keep their needs and problems central to your content.

- Your content is ever evolving so **look at ways to improve the user experience** and fill gaps in the buyer's journey as they emerge.

- Is there a particular blog post that is performing well and could be converting prospects into leads? **Consider linking this post to a relevant or high-performing offer**. If they're already converting, update the content into a live webinar or training offer – if they like the post, getting a more tempting offer could increase conversions.

Top Tip

Document any adjustments you make to posts and the offers they point at – this will help you keep track of what works, what doesn't and why. As you grow, you can look back at what actions have shown you previously.

Something people are realising more and more is that you **don't need to create brand new content all the time**. In fact, that's not the best strategy most of the time. If you've got evergreen content from two years ago, make a few tweaks to it and resurface it to a new audience. As Emma Brudner, Director of Marketing at HubSpot says:

> "Just because you've already created it doesn't mean it doesn't have value any more."

You could bring someone onto your team who specialises in optimisation as their main role; if so, make sure they have an SEO background as well. Or you could work it into the role of an existing team member who is interested. Either way, optimisation needs to be a specific part of the job role for someone on your team.

Top Tip

Scale down new content production and increase optimisation.

Unpublish underperforming blog content. Not all the content you produce will be a top performer; this is only to be expected. If you don't manage your content library, this unsuccessful content could damage your SEO in the long run.

Apply the 80/20 rule

1. **Perform an audit** by setting a date range, for example, six months. Sort your traffic based on unique page views in this time frame.
2. Next, **implement the 80/20 rule** by identifying the blog posts that account for 80% of your site's traffic so you can remove the 20% of underperforming pages.
3. **Multiply your unique page views by .8** to give you your 80% total.
4. **Sort your pages by most unique page views in descending order** and mark which pages account for 80% of your website traffic.
5. Once you identify the lowest performing 20% of your site and blog pages, **remove them**.

Top Tip

Apply a 303 redirect to more useful content related to the original topic on your site so readers aren't just left with a blank screen that offers them no value.

Archive the bottom 20% content so you can access it in the future, don't just delete it. Pruning your site in this way can actually increase traffic but wait until you have a high amount of blog and site content – around 50 pages – before removing any of it from your website.
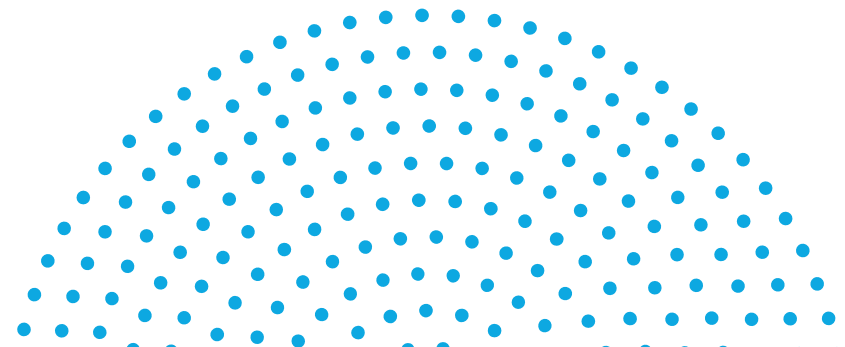
Chapter 6
How to optimise your blog

Is your blog working as hard as possible for your business? If you put in the ground work to aid optimisation – not only creating fabulous content but looking at the architecture of your posts – you'll increase the effectiveness of your content in driving traffic to your website and converting leads into customers. Here are some of the small changes you can make to optimise your blog:

Check your URL: the URL doesn't have to match the title of the blog post exactly. Make it a regular best practice to shorten the automatic URL that is created when you upload a post, but without losing the context of what the page is about.

Top Tip

Don't include numbers in your URL, such as a year or the number of tips you're offering – if you update the content in the future, you won't have to update the URL as it'll still be relevant.

Rewrite your image alt text: Search engines don't just look for images, they look for images with alt text. The alt text tells Google what the image is, as search engines can't see images in the way humans do.

Alt text helps images rank in the 'images' section of Google, decoding the image for search engines. Use long-tail keywords in your image descriptions to give as much detail as possible about what is in the image, therefore helping the image – and your post – appear in more relevant searches.

Keep your meta description to 150-160 characters, because anything longer will be cut off. The purpose of a meta is to give information about the blog post content to readers and search engines. The more engaging, concise, relevant and helpful the better. Again, include long-tail keywords to keep the text really focused and to encourage the search engine to display your full meta description.

Insert links strategically throughout post. Link to external content when it's helpful, but only link to great stuff or you're sending readers away from your site for nothing. Because of this, always set links to open in a new window.

Link to other blog posts on your site – these should make up the majority of your links; if you're going to take a reader away from the current page, at least make it to some really useful, directed content on your own site.

Link to content on your site that supports conversion: likewise, don't only link to your blog content, but to other content on your site that will encourage conversion: product pages, landing pages, pillar pages and forms will all support conversion – just make sure you keep it relevant to the post's topic.

Add a CTA after the first few paragraphs: you want to avoid looking too pushy too soon. Make it a passive CTA near the top through hyperlinked text, rather than an image or button CTA. You can't rely on your reader reaching the bottom, so you need to include one near the top of the post, where they're most likely to still be engaged.

Experiment with your placement of CTAs – find out what works best for your audience: image CTAs or text CTAs? A sliding side-bar CTA or a bottom banner? Make sure you monitor which placement and appearance gets the best click-through rate (CTR).

CTAs near top of a post get the highest CTR, so link to pillar pages with your CTAs at the top of the page. This content isn't gated so you aren't forcing someone to give their details too quickly, as you would by linking to a landing page. Instead, you are leading with educational content — and a pillar page can still lead to conversions.

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Include an image CTA near the most relevant paragraph in the main body of the blog post. Whatever action you want the reader to take – downloading a guide, or trying out a tool – put the CTA that points at this resource near a paragraph which explains more about this content offer and its topic. This helps maintain the flow of the post and doesn't seem like you're being pushy, forcing a reader off in a different direction when it doesn't fit the content.

At the end of each post, use an image CTA. This offers a helpful next step, and can be different to the one you've used higher up in the post. Make the one at the bottom a direct landing-page form CTA – if a reader has stayed with you until the very end of your post, they're likely to be ready to commit.

Try a pop-up CTA that a reader sees as they scroll down the page. Or, alternatively, offer a live chatbot that flashes up as a visitor reads: you need to provide an exit from these tools, as you don't want to annoy users if all they want to do is read your post, but offering a scrolling or interactive option can be a great way to engage.

5 blog-writing tips to optimise content

Even for professional writers, writing is hard. It's a difficult thing to consistently do, and do well – writing and publishing thousands of words that people actually want to read is tricky. Creating well-written and precise copy, while also ensuring it's optimising your site and driving conversions, is a tall order, even for an experienced content team. So go easy on yourself and focus on quality, not quantity with these tips:

1. Know where your post will fit in relation to your wider content strategy. Which pillar page can it be aligned to? Which campaign does it fit within? Try not to create content which will 'float' unanchored to anything else in your collection.

2. First drafts are sloppy – they're supposed to be. You might jump around, leave sections unfinished, cut and paste elements and move things around: all of this is okay – it's getting you closer to the finished article.

3. Editing is as important as writing. It helps you cut out irrelevant content, errors and helps to show you care. Never send anything off to your sub editor or editor without first having self edited.

4. Between the writing and editing, move onto something else, take a break from the words. Even making a cup of tea or checking your inbox can be beneficial, but ideally leave it overnight and come back to it the next day.

5. Send your copy to a team member for review: once you've looked at something enough times, you become blind to tiny errors, spelling mistakes or turns of phrase that might be improved. We also get very invested in our own writing; giving it to an unrelated party means a more honest review can occur.

Chapter 7
Why guest blogging is a critical part of your strategy

Reaching out to like-minded, industry-related experts, asking to contribute to their content is a valuable task. It helps you build authority as a thought leader in your field and adds weight to the points you're already making, especially if their following is already developed and if they have a better domain authority than you.

Guest writers help optimise your website for searching. They expand your audience, enabling content to be shared with a new, wider readership, and increases referral traffic to your website. This helps:

- Improve your website's SEO
- Build inbound links back to your website
- Increase your own domain authority
- Improve your search-engine ranking.

So what is guest blogging?

Definition: Writing and publishing an article on someone else's website or blog. It's that simple!

First, you need to outline a strategy:

Write for websites that have higher domain authority than you so you're getting SEO value. Moz has created a tool that allows you to check any website's domain authority, to help you decide whether it's worth investing time and effort into creating a post for this business.

So how do you know what a good domain authority looks like? The tiers are generally structured like this:

0-20 (a new or not active site): Don't count them out, they'll be easy to get a slot for, and could pay off in the long run once their site is more established.

21-70 (generally a healthy, dedicated audience and enough authority to justify your time writing for them): There's likely to be more writing guidelines to follow and it'll be harder to get a slot as there will be other competitors pitching their ideas.

71+ (these are top industry blogs): Unless you're already an authority in your space, you're unlikely to collaborate with these brands in your early days – set yourself up for success and leave approaching these businesses until you're more established.

Once you reach out and are accepted to feature as a guest blogger on another site (more on this in Chapter 8), how do you put content together? You don't want to end up using all your resources on a blog post for someone else – yes, it's a great way to reach a new audience, but that doesn't mean you have to dedicate the same time and resources as you would to one of your own posts. There are plenty of ways to provide value without compromising your wider workload.

Here are some tips for putting together your first guest post:

1. **Syndicate your educational content** and decide what you already have that would be of use to your collaborator's site. Repurpose an existing well-performing post, personalising it for them and their audience. Use snippets from the original post but don't copy and paste from it.

2. **Think critically about your link-building efforts** – link the guest post to specific pages on your own website. In particular, link to educational content, such as your pillar pages.

3. **Include your most valuable inbound link at the top** of the guest post. This makes it the most findable link for Google and means that if readers don't make it all the way down the post, they might at least access one of your links at the top.

4. **Use anchor text (the words you hyperlink from in a post) to add a link to your website near the top**; not only are you offering educational content, but a more direct link to what you do and who you are.

5. **Link to other guest posts you've written for other sites**. This builds your authority as a voice in your industry, while also not appearing pushy, as you aren't technically linking to your own content. It also shows the past company you worked with to create the original guest post, that you are still supporting their content and are invested in them.

6. **Expand your guest-blogging portfolio** to help you increase domain authority. Try to write blog posts for multiple sites, not just the same partnership over and over again. It's great to get repeat work and nurture those relationships, but adding a new readership from fresh sources is what it's all about.

7. **Once the content is published, engage with people in the comments**. Be professional and engage, either directly under the post or on social media. This shows you haven't just submitted and forgotten about them, you're investing – and these readers might become your customers in time.

8 **Nurture the relationship with your contact at the company you guest posted for**. It can take time to build trust so they'll let you feature on their blog, so once you do nurture the relationship and earn the reputation with them, check in with them regularly – it might lead to future collaborations.
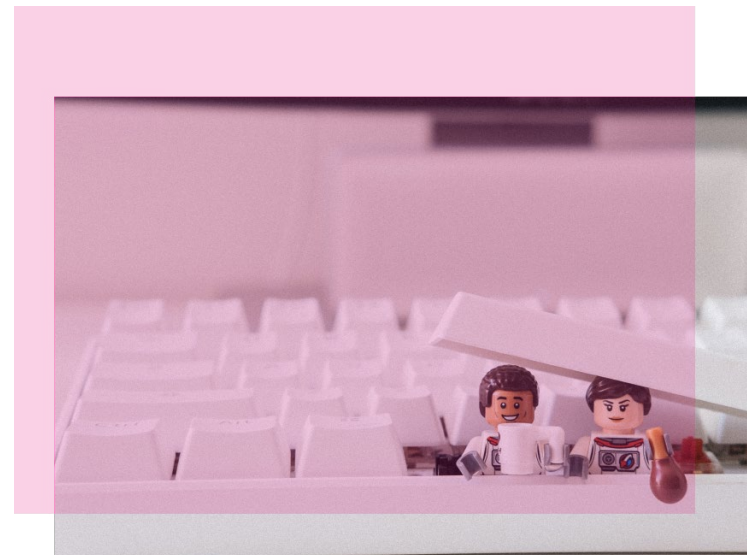
Chapter 8
Finding guest-blogging opportunities

First you need to define your niche. What is it you want to be known for? Being the best Japanese restaurant in your city? Offering the wildest outdoor activities in your region? Or providing the greatest customer service in your industry? Whatever it is, define it and only seek opportunities which are going to help you enhance this reputation.

Top tips for finding guest-blogging opportunities include:

Write for industry-specific sites. This means you're getting in front of an audience that is relevant to you, and also makes the links back to your website more valuable.

It *is* possible to find relevant crossovers between two industries that don't automatically line up, for example, financial advice and fashion. But don't stray too far off the path in most cases. For SEO purposes, the more relevant the topic the better so try not to get excited and just say "yes" to everything.

Find out which sites actually allow guest bloggers. Research a business in Google and see if they've prior history of guest bloggers. Search for:

- [your market] + guest post
- [your market] + writers wanted
- [your market] + contributing writers.

Research potential influencers: anyone whose blog you already follow, type in [their name] + blog.

Don't forget to use social media: conduct research on Twitter by searching for [your market] + guest blog to see what comes up.

Consider your audience's watering holes: which blogs are your audience already reading frequently? That's where you need to appear.

Prioritise outreach to websites based on domain authority (as explored in chapter 7).

Aim for domains up to 70 when you start, then once you become more established and experienced, build up to approaching 71+ companies with your portfolio of work.

Make a list of sites you want to pitch with a blog-post idea. Keep track of who you've approached with what ideas so you don't repeat the same content to the same prospective collaborators and annoy them.

Here's a super-helpful list of existing businesses who welcome guest bloggers – if any of these 200 examples are related to your industry then reach out to them.

How to secure a guest-blogging spot

This is a game of persistence and patience! It's rare that reaching out to a prospective guest host will result in a guest blog post overnight; sometimes it takes days, weeks and months to build a rapport with another business, working up to them trusting and approving your ideas. It is worth it though. Here's how to gradually work up to securing a spot on someone else's blog:

Consider this as building a lasting relationship. You wouldn't rush into a friendship or romantic relationship if you wanted it to last; you have to treat a working relationship of this nature in the same way.

2. You need them more than they need you so you're going to have to be flexible and make an effort with them. Try not to pester them, but if you're not getting a response, be friendly and reach out again – tell them something you loved about their latest blog post, be complementary and willing to work around them.

3. Take time to form a connection – without appearing nosey, try to find out a bit about them. Ask if they had a nice weekend, find out how their daughter did in her football game, ask if they're enjoying the good weather – show a genuine interest in their life, and remember little details that show you listen.

4. Do research on organisations you want to write for – review the last 2-3 months of their blog. Who is writing for them? Is one person writing more than others? Is anyone senior featured on their blog? Use LinkedIn to find out more about each writer and approach them, armed with this knowledge.

5. Engage with an organisation first before pitching an idea to them so you're on their radar. Find a recent blog post and share it on social – take the time to read it and write a personalised social post underneath. Tag the writer and company in the post so you register in their consciousness. Include a link and quote from the post explaining why you found it useful. This is one of the central tenets of the inbound philosophy — add value before you extract value.

6. Write a thoughtful comment on the actual blog post as well, so that you register with them directly. Give specific feedback and ask a question to encourage them to engage with you.

7. Do this once or twice before you then email someone from another organisation. Make it short and concise and focus on them, not yourself. Send this 1-2 weeks before you're going to pitch them so they're more likely to remember you.

Write a friendly email, something like this:

Hi [use their first name],

Your post about [include the blog title] was a really helpful read.

I found your point about [include a specific point from the article] particularly useful and interesting. I'm going to try [tell them something you learnt from the post and are now going to try].

I just wanted to drop you a line to say 'thank you'!

Best wishes,

[Your first name]

This post asks them to do nothing – you're merely reaching out to give them some positive feedback. Who wouldn't love to receive a message like this? Especially amongst all the other emails that land in their inbox daily, asking them to do things. A polite, positive email like this will really help start you on the track to a great relationship.

Once you've sent this, and hopefully received a friendly reply, leave it a couple of weeks where you engage with their content publicly before you reach out again. This time, with an email like this:

Hi there [first name],

I'm a big fan of your content; I especially liked your post about [mention a different blog post to your first email]. You may have noticed my comment.

I'm reaching out because I'd love to contribute to [blog name]. Below is a list of topics I think your readers would find helpful:

- Idea 1
- Idea 2
- Idea 3

Additionally, if you have need of it, I can also write content about [their popular blog topics] – it looks like these are really popular topics for your blog.

I've reviewed your guest author guidelines and will make sure to create a unique piece of content that aligns with your process.

If you'd like to review an article of mine, then check out this guest post about [guest post website].

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

[Your first name]

Only offer 2-3 ideas for new content – if they turn you away, they might go ahead and use these ideas themselves, so you don't want to give too much away for free! Again, this email is friendly, but offers a bit more value compared to the first email. There's loads of personalisation in here, making reference to specific things that affect this recipient – prove this isn't just a blanket email you've fired out to loads of people.
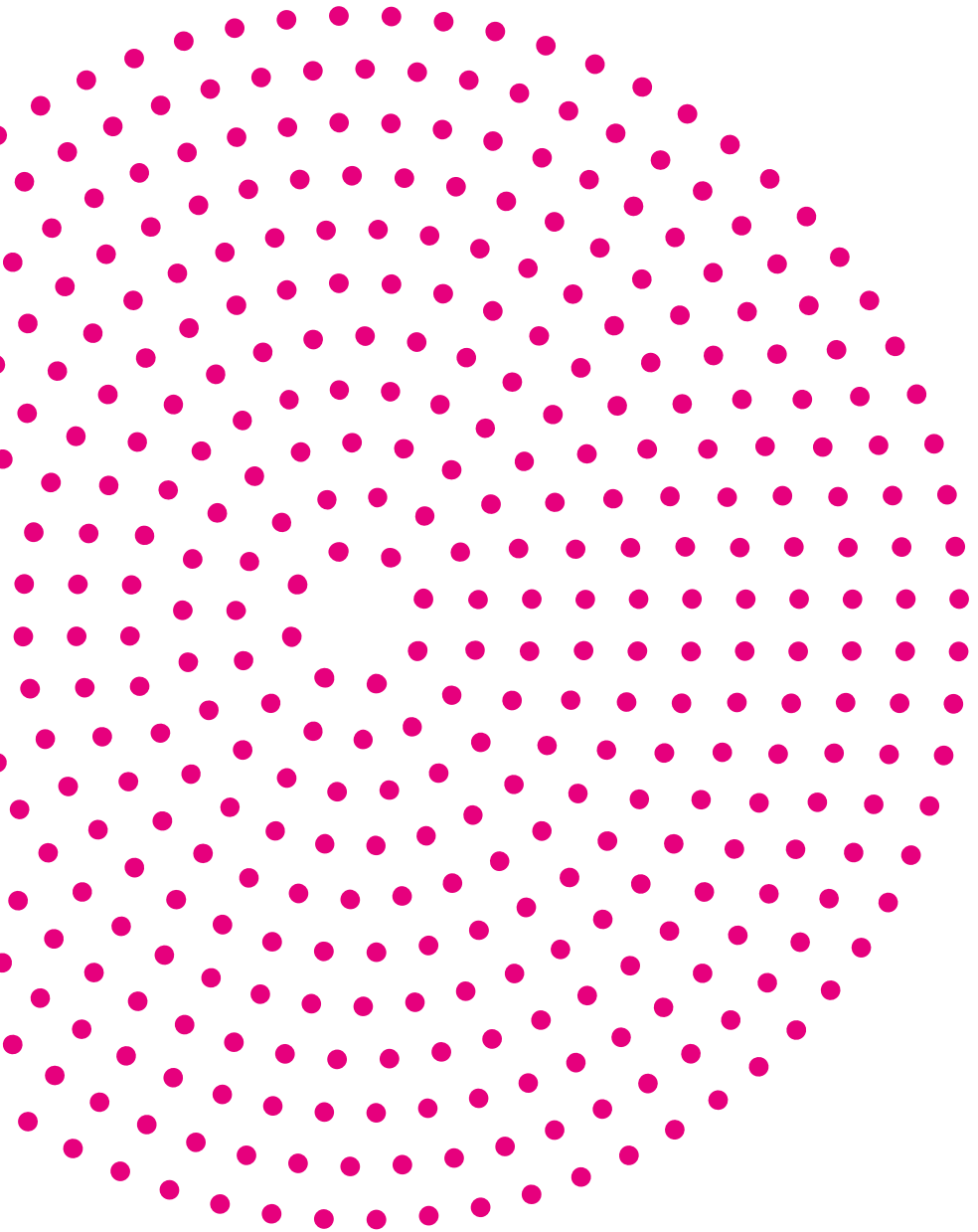
Remember:

- Don't look over-eager or they might ignore you.
- Take time to craft your pitch – as the saying goes, you only have one chance to make a first impression
- Know the author's guidelines (these should be published somewhere) so you can show you'll be able to cater to their style without obstacles.
- Make sure your topic offers unique value to them – what's hot right now? What is their current top-performing content? Ahrefs is a great tool that can tell you any blog's best performing posts.
- Make sure you're offering content they don't already have.
- Offer ideas that you can use some of your own content for – this saves time and resources.
- Send a personalised email with plenty of details from their own blog: don't make it look templated.
- Set an ongoing guest blog quota and stick to an outreach schedule; make this a weekly or monthly part of your content strategy.
- Don't give up. With each guest spot you complete, the stronger your portfolio will grow and the more guest blog posts will come your way.

It's difficult, but try to always be seeking new opportunities. Don't let a lack of responses frustrate you and make you give up – this is all part of the process and you need to develop a thick skin. The more you reach out, the more likely someone will reply favourably.

How to write a guest blog author bio

How you present your bio will depend on the format your content requests you to keep to. So to ensure you're providing them with a useful bio – while also presenting yourself in the best way – stick to these tricks:

This is a personal elevator pitch: a 30-second memorable description of what you do or sell. Make it snappy.

Lead with your strongest attributes, relevant to your audience – they aren't interested in where you graduated from or what you enjoy doing in your spare time. Tell them what you're an expert in and why they should listen.

Follow any instructions that are given to you from the contact: if they've got a particular way they want you to format your bio, make sure you follow them. For example, they might ask you to keep within 100 words, only use one link to your website, and to provide a high-resolution headshot.

Research the format, tone and style of other guest bloggers' bios who have written for them

Once you have your guest spot, **make a point of asking the contact you're working with for the guidelines**. Do this early on so there's less back and forth between you and them – you want to show them you're self sufficient.

Use the third person to explain what you do – this is the usual format for bios.

Include an element of validation – a video, book or webinar you might have created will prove that you're someone worth listening to who will offer value.

Offer social media channel links where these new readers can engage with you.