

B2B MARKETING eBOOK

Guidelines for Including Guest Bloggers



Introduction

Let's face it, as B2B marketers, we're all confronting the same challenge. We're resource constrained, and at the same time, we must find new ways to attract and engage customers in an increasingly attention starved world.

If you've started blogging as a way to accomplish those objectives, you have definitely made a great choice for the investment of your time, money, and energy.



Introduction

As you have begun blogging though, you've likely encountered some obstacles. This of course is normal; as with any new endeavor, there are many hurdles to overcome. You may be asking yourself:

- How can we make our blog more interesting?
- What kinds of things can we do that will help us earn the trust of our readers?
- This Fall we have four trade shows, John Writer will be on his honeymoon, I'll be at the shows, who's going to write for the blog over those six weeks!?
- These new regulations are really impacting the market, but we don't know them well enough to cover them. . .yet we need to cover them. How are we gonna do that?

Yikes, those can be tough questions to answer, if you consider yourself or even your company as the sole contributor to your blog. *Enter Guest Bloggers.*

Why use **guest bloggers?**

A guest blogger is just that: a guest, someone from outside your organization that acts as an author for your blog. Guest bloggers can be used in a variety of ways: one-time contributors, a special guest series, interviews, or even as regular ongoing columnists. Most importantly, when it comes to using guest bloggers, you are really limited only by your creativity and determination to try something new. You are now the publisher, editor in chief, and blogger all wrapped up into one.

The benefit: it's your publication, and you get to make the rules.

This ebook covers the Basics, Best Practices, and Blunders of B2B Guest Blogging and explains how to successfully find, invite, and work with guest bloggers for your B2B blog.



The basics

The use of guest bloggers is simply a win-win-win situation:

- The reader wins through exposure to a new perspective on a topic they care about.
- The blogger wins with increased exposure and the credibility of being presented as an expert.
- And you as the blog owner win with new content, a break from writing, and a nearly endless supply of new ideas.

What are the **benefits**?

If that is not enough to convince you, consider these additional benefits:

- 1** Adding a new dimension to your blog through the voice of a guest instantly begins the process of adding credibility and building trust with your readers. It demonstrates your willingness to expand the dialogue with new views and opinions. This is a clear statement of your commitment to becoming a trusted source of useful, helpful information – the number one reason your readers will continue to come back.
- 2** Finding and working with guest bloggers that are subject matter experts broadens your ability to cover topics or issues affecting your market. This is especially helpful when you may not have the expertise in house. An example would be to find an industry expert to explain newly announced regulations and the impact they will have on your market in the coming years. Again, your primary goal is to fulfill the needs of your readers.
- 3** As the social web is teaching us, building a community of brand advocates improves your ability to grow your business. Working with guest bloggers adds a new level of engagement and personalization that creates and strengthens relationships. And quite frequently, these relationships will blossom and lead to new and exciting business opportunities.

What are the **benefits?**

- 4 Many times guest bloggers will post an excerpt or summary of their post on their own blog or web site with a link back to your blog. This is known as back linking. In addition to the direct exposure you may gain through the guest blogger's site, the quantity and quality of inbound links to your blog (and web site) has a positive cumulative impact on your search engine rankings.
- 5 With the variety of options available to you from a content perspective, partnering with one or more guest bloggers for an extended period of time can fill large pieces of your editorial calendar, freeing you to focus on other initiatives (or even increase your own exposure by guest blogging somewhere else!).

The numerous benefits of partnering with guest bloggers are experienced almost immediately. While it does add a layer of effort and coordination, any additional work is far overshadowed by the many benefits mentioned above. And who wouldn't want to be the at the center of this win-win-win situation?



How do I choose a **guest blogger?**

Once you make the decision to open your blog to guest bloggers, your next questions are likely, “Whom should we ask?” and “What should we look for?” One way to think about whom to ask is by grouping potential guest bloggers into one of three categories based on their proximity to you and your business:

Inner Circle | **Market Circle** | **Thought Leaders**

Inner Circle group

This group has an intimate knowledge of your business, your products, and what it's like to work with you, and will present the least resistance when you approach them.

Market Circle group

This group knows less about your business than the Inner Circle, but does know who you are. Your Market Circle understands the dynamics of your market, the trends, the regulations, the associations, and the topics that interest your readers. Yes, competitors fall into this category, and yes, competitors are a viable option as guest bloggers. For example, there could be ground breaking research, pending legislation, or a new discovery on which you and your competitors share the same opinion of its positive or negative impact on your market. This is a perfect time to show your readers that you value a shared opinion to advance the market. It's not for everyone or for every situation, but under the right circumstances, this approach can certainly have its rewards.

Thought Leaders group

This group is the furthest removed from your business, and it's possible that they are either minimally aware of you or entirely unfamiliar with you at the time of introduction. That's okay; what they do understand are the benefits of extending their voice and sharing their thought leadership. When you approach them in the proper way, you may be surprised at how willing they are to participate.

Inner Circle group

Customers

Distributors

Board Members

Venture Capitalists / Investors

Blog Commenters

Market Circle group

Industry Experts

Industry Bloggers

Partners

Suppliers

Competitors

Thought Leaders group

Industry Analysts

Trade Association Leaders

Community and Local
Government Leaders

Fortune 500 Leaders/Execs

What do I look for in a **guest blogger?**

The most important characteristic of a guest blogger (whatever the category) is the desire and willingness to give more than one gets. Read that again: the most important characteristic to look for in a guest blogger is his or her desire and willingness to give more than they get.

That is not to say that you will not reciprocate and provide equal benefit back to the guest blogger, but be careful to choose wisely. Guest blogging should not feel like a burden on either party—especially you, since one of your goals is to reduce your workload. Be fair in your expectations, and work with others who share your values. Remember, the selection of a guest blogger is your choice, and it will ultimately be a reflection of you and your brand, so choose wisely.



How do I prepare for a **guest blogger?**

Assigning guest bloggers to these categories also makes it rather easy to understand where to recruit guest bloggers. But before doing so, there are some fundamental editorial questions you'll need to answer for your business. The most common questions are:

- 1 What will be your policy on original content?
 - Put another way, does the content of the post submitted to you need to be previously unpublished in any other media outlet, including the guest blogger's own blog?
- 2 Will you ask for exclusivity?
 - Once published on your blog, will the blogger be allowed to use the content in any other way?



How do I prepare for a **guest blogger?**

- 3** Will you ask the guest blogger to respond to comments? What type of response time would you prefer that the guest blogger have?
 - Posts get comments. It's typically best to have the post author respond. Be sure to coordinate their availability to do so with your planned publication date.
- 4** What are your post length requirements?
 - Having a set of editorial guidelines is extremely important for the overall consistency of your blog. Document and share them with all guest bloggers.
- 5** Are you willing to pay someone to write a guest post?
 - You may find there are some people (or topics) that are so important to you that you are willing to pay for their time. There is no right or wrong answer, just your answer. Having it ready ahead of time helps prevent awkward conversations.

Where do I recruit guest bloggers?

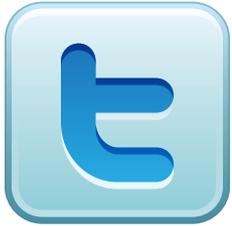
Once you have these questions answered, agreed upon, and ready to be shared, it's time to begin the recruitment process.

The recommended place to start is with your inner circle. It's in this group that you will find the most willingness to help.

So turn to your iPhone, Outlook, or rolodex (yes, they still exist, along with print advertising) and begin the process of outreach. As you move to the other categories, social networks (e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook – heard of them?) have made it far easier to make connections and forge working business relationships.



What about **twitter**?



Twitter is exceptionally good for this. The community by its nature shares a kindness and generosity that is difficult to comprehend until it is experienced. Once you do, you'll see it offers a window of opportunity to start relationships in minutes, whereas in the past the relationship may have never seemed possible.

An Example - This Exclusive Interview with Jeffrey Hayzlett



[Click to Read]



CREATIVE

We make **ideas** work.®

It never hurts to ask

Simply put, just ask, whatever the channel!

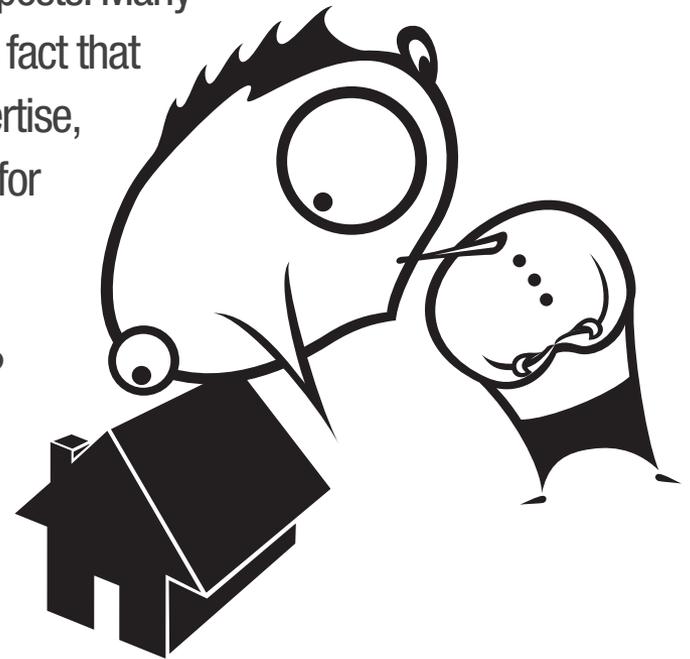
There really isn't any magic to it. Be kind. Be considerate. Be respectful of your guest bloggers' time and have a clear question. Obviously, there are both recruiting success and horror stories in all channels. The key is to explain the benefits, avoid making demands, and ease your way into the relationship. Sure, there will be times when a bit of persistence will be necessary. Just remember, everything in moderation, and follow your instincts (with only the best intent).



Looking **close to home**

An additional place to consider recruiting guest bloggers (that is often overlooked) is your very own blog.

That's right: as your blogging skills mature and your blog readership grows, you may begin seeing some readers that frequently comment on your posts. Many of these people may be industry experts in their own right. Add the fact that you already have insight into their writing abilities and level of expertise, and you can see how your comment section can be fertile ground for finding new guest bloggers. Keep this tip in mind, and every once in a while ask yourself, whose comments are adding value to our posts? Who broadens the conversation every time they contribute? It's these individuals you want to reach out to, and allow them to share their voice and expertise with your readership. So don't forget to take a look right in your own backyard.



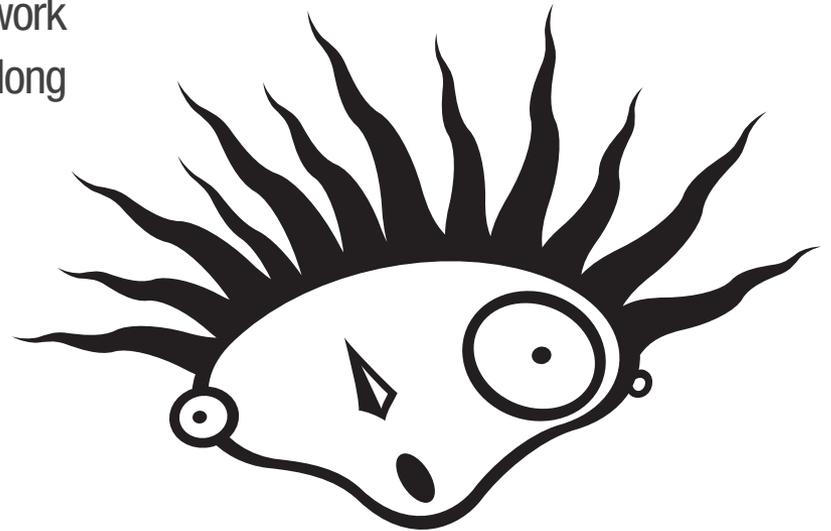
Blunders and Remedies

11 Blunders To Avoid When Working With Guest Bloggers (and 11 Best Practices to keep you on track!)

Once you begin working with guest bloggers, you may find that some aspects of the process come more easily than others. The following blunders – and their remedies – can help you avoid the rough spots and get your guest blogging efforts up and running in no time.

Blunder #1: Taking the whole process too seriously

Best Practice: If you plan to encourage ongoing submissions and build lasting relationships, be pleasant and FUN to work with! Making the experience an enjoyable one will go a long way toward helping you achieve your goals.



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Blunder #2: Failing to properly thank a guest for their time, effort, and willingness to help you. There is no quicker way to lose a guest blogger than failing to express your sincere gratitude for their efforts.

Best Practice: Be tactful, be responsive, and respect your contributors' time. Show your appreciation in your actions as well as your words. Make the experience mutually beneficial for your guest bloggers. You may not be able to pay them, but you can offer them additional exposure through a contributors' page and include a photo, a bio, and a link to the writer's own blog or web site at the end of each article.

Blunder #3: Asking too much. The moment you begin asking too much of your guest bloggers will be the moment they lose interest in working with you. Do your absolute best to work at their pace and on their schedule.

Best Practice: Make it as easy as possible for your guest bloggers to work with you. Give them the option of being a one-time contributor, an occasional contributor, or a regular contributor on a set schedule, then check in from time to time to make sure the frequency is still working for them.

Blunders and Remedies

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Blunder #4: Publishing an article that doesn't meet your quality standards

Best Practice: Provide editorial guidelines and blog post guidelines, and refer guest bloggers to them as needed. If the quality of a given guest blogger's contributions is consistently lacking, find a tactful way to cut ties sooner rather than later. Remember that the content on your site is ultimately a reflection on you and your brand. Never settle, enough said.

Blunder #5: Forgetting that the written article is only 1/2 the work

Best Practice: Allow time to add hyperlinks, optimize content (including meta data, keywords, title, description, etc.), format images, and post the content to your blog publishing platform. Be realistic – this part can take longer than you think!



Blunders and Remedies

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Blunder #6: Believing that everyone you work with will have good writing skills. (It's just not true. The sooner you realize it, the sooner you will properly plan for copy editing.)

Best Practice: Add proofing and copy editing to the list! The quality of content published on your blog is largely dependent on your copyediting skills. Each post will—at a minimum—require proofreading, so be sure to allow ample time for these steps, too.

Blunder #7: Allowing your guest bloggers' agenda to derail the direction of your site.

Best Practice: Stay committed to your blog focus. Presumably, you are seeking out certain bloggers because of their expertise in a particular topic, but if the conversation goes too far off track, it's a disservice to your readers. Provide your guest bloggers with a list of topics or categories, and ask them to submit posts that correspond to one or more of your core subjects.

Blunders and Remedies

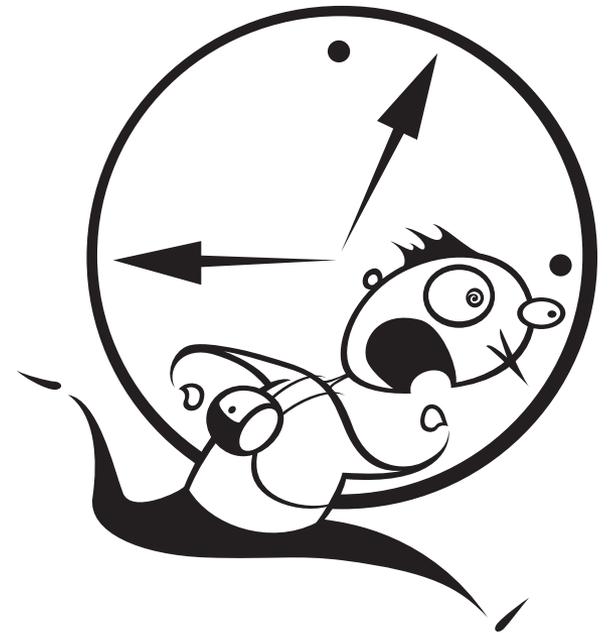
11 Blunders To Avoid When Working With Guest Bloggers (and 11 Best Practices to keep you on track!)

Blunder #8: Failing to communicate the tone of your blog

Best Practice: As part of your editorial guidelines, it is important to define the tone of your blog. Is it Professional? Casual? Free-Style (i.e. the blogger's choice)? Be clear about your preferences up front so that you don't waste either the guest bloggers' time or your own.

Blunder #9: Failing to set clear deadlines

Best Practice: When someone asks, "When do you need this?", it's best to take the lead and give them a deadline. If they don't ask, it's your job to ask them when they'll be able to deliver the post. In this case, your role is that of the managing editor, ensuring timely completion of all work.



Blunders and Remedies

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Blunder #10: Failing to have articles “in the hopper”

Best Practice: The “hopper” is a publishing term used to describe your pipeline of backup articles. (These are especially handy for the times when your guest blogger misses the deadline you so carefully set in #9!). Keep a posting schedule in a calendar or Excel spreadsheet, and have a few “evergreen” articles in the hopper for times when your content is spread a little thin.

Blunder #11: Thinking the guest blogger will know (or care) about keyword optimization

Best Practice: While many writers do have an understanding of the importance of SEO, there is no guarantee that all of them will, so this may be a step of the publishing process that you need to take on. Be prepared to edit posts to incorporate key terms and phrases, and allow time for adding titles, descriptions, and data when you add the post to your blog publishing platform. (See #5, above.)

Are you **ready** for it?

With that, you have the Basics for how to successfully find, recruit, and begin working with Guest Bloggers, the Blunders to avoid, and the Best Practices to keep things humming along. Remember, it's a win-win-win situation and you are limited only by your creativity and your determination to try something new. Are you ready? Your guest bloggers are (even if they don't know it yet!), and your readers certainly are too.



This B2B Blogging eBook has been provided to you by MLT Creative and prepared with the help of Jeremy Victor.



About MLT Creative:

MLT Creative, based on the east side of Atlanta, with a Northeast office in Rhode Island, was founded in 1984 by partners Billy Mitchell, Craig Lindberg and Glenn Taylor. Known as the Idea Launch Pad for B-to-B Marketers, MLT Creative's services include

strategic planning, positioning, brand development, advertising, direct marketing, inbound marketing and sales promotions.

Our tight-knit team may have taken different paths to get here, but the resulting blend is nothing short of seamless. At MLT Creative you'll find a seasoned staff of experts with decades in the business working alongside recent college grads with an eye for the future. This balance of perspectives converges in a collaborative environment that enables us to approach any project from multiple angles more effectively.

With our focus on business-to-business marketing, we bring an entrepreneurial edge, creative energy and strategic perspective to every project.



About Jeremy Victor:

Jeremy Victor founded Make Good Media, a publishing and new media marketing agency. The firm helps clients blend traditional marketing tactics with the new tools available

through the social web to attract, nurture, engage, and convert.

In November 2009, Make Good Media launched the online magazine B2Bbloggers.com, which provides B2B marketers with an easy-to-use web site that provides access to the growing amount of B2B marketing content on the web.

The site aggregates more than 1,500 blogs related to B2B marketing, and Jeremy manages relationships with over 50 contributing guest bloggers.

