



Blogs For Professionals

Blogging as a primary tool

Our first social media stop will be blogging. Author Malcolm Gladwell has hypothesised that it takes 10,000 hours of concentrated effort before we can become expert at our trade or profession.¹ Let me assure you, the basics of blogging are elementary compared to what you have had to learn to advance your profession, so you're already way out in front. A few simple rules assiduously applied will get you 90% of the way. The other 10% is just doing it.

One word of warning. At this stage we will not discuss the choice of blogging platform. Later, in our *MatureMedia Guide to WordPress*, we will look at WordPress. There are two reasons we will leave this till later:

¹ *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell

1. It re-emphasises our message that the name of the game is content, content, content. It's horse before cart, content before blogging platform.
2. I know from my own experience that you can get sidetracked in the minutiae of the development of the blogging platform and worse, lurch off to look at every angle of search engine optimisation. You can get lost in all of this and forget your primary content mission. From there you may never be heard from again. Really.

What is a blog?

Think a website that is updated with new articles (blogs or posts) on a regular basis. They are arranged last article first (i.e. reverse chronological order). That's it, really.





What's different about a blog compared to other social media?

- You own the media on your blog, which is not the case with Twitter or Facebook or LinkedIn. This is especially so if you have a self-hosted site (i.e. you own the domain name and house the blog on an external host or less often your own server). In that case you are in total control over the way your blog is presented. With a hosted blog (e.g. Blogger or Wordpress.com²) you don't control the rules. On external social media sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn you are under the control of that media's rules in the terms of service. You can even be "turned off" or "banned" or terminated for breaking their terms of service. On a self hosted blog the service is operated under your own terms.
- An important aspect of Twitter concentrates on links to blogs and content on the world wide web. You can certainly use your blog for the same purpose, but in the main the content is the central focus.
- A blog is media that accumulates over time to build a larger whole (an archive of your work). The value of the blog therefore increases over time.

² This is different to wordpress.org, which is self hosted.



- A blog can be analysed using so-called “analytics”. In fact, the statistical analysis of a blog and its reach is almost endless, much of it for free (the same is true for every page of your website).
- A blog has outreach over multiple referral points e.g. email and RSS (we will explain this later) or even print.
- Plugins for blogs are so numerous that you can accomplish most tasks, in fact there are more plugins than you can reasonably research.
- Flexibility of layout and personal aesthetics are maximised.
- It may take some time, but you can certainly establish a “voice” with your blog that will become identifiable and as innate as your accent. With “voice” comes authority, and with authority comes trust. Hence the ideal is to become a “trusted voice”.
- Far more than other social media, a blog can educate clients and customers. The greater the level of education, the greater the chance that they will pass it on to others who become prospective clients and customers. This is another way to become a “trusted voice”.
- Because you are more mature and have experience in your profession, you have more to say and a blog gives you endless room to say it.



- A blog is a referral engine – it is designed to be passed onto others at the touch of a button. That is axiomatic the nature of the medium.

Stand alone blog or part of an existing website?

I wish this was an inconsequential matter, or a consequential matter that has a clear-cut response. It's neither. My own preference is for a stand alone blog i.e. a blog that is just a blog, not a part of your business or firm website. But that's a preference, not a rule, although many professional commentators have definitive (and varying) views about this. Here's a few ideas to help you make up your mind:

In favour of a combined site:

- If you want to give your firm's website a search engine ranking boost, and this is important to you (which will not always be the case), you could have your blog as a page in your website to attract some quality links from others – those individual links are highly influential in search engine rankings. It is better to have "inbound" links from different websites or blogs because these are valued higher by search engines.
- Lots of fresh content on your website will also be a boost the search engine ranking for your website.
- Obviously, a single combined web/blog is more cost effective – lower maintenance costs, lower design costs, lower hosting costs. This may not





be a huge savings in dollar terms, depending on what level of design you choose, but if your firm is starting out the savings could be significant. Certainly you can save a lot on design costs, and there is much you can do yourself with WordPress or other blogging platforms. It really depends on your budget and time constraints. We discuss building your own website in our *MatureMedia Guide to WordPress*, but for now it is worth considering if you have the time to learn the ropes.

Against a combined site:

- Yes, you need a website, but in fact all blogs are websites and vice versa. A combined site creates an extra step for your readers, which cannot be discounted in an age of instant gratification. My biggest issue is that the blog, which you will use to advertise your firm or business with dynamic content on Twitter and LinkedIn and Facebook, should have its own URL and not be diminished as the folder of a main site. And you can, and should, link the blog back to your website.
- You can adjust the tones of each e.g. a more businesslike tone for the firm website and a conversational tone for the blog (and as we will see, a blog is very much a conversation). This can of course be achieved within the same site, but it can be jarring for the reader if the tone is different.
- You can apply a similar design to both to create a corporate design motif.



A blog starter kit

A few simple items in your social media kitbag will make all the difference:

1. A personal headshot is best if you are the brand – you can have a logo if you are a corporate brand. Try to smile. Have a bit of fun if you want – e.g. holding an abacus or tax legislation or an auctioneer's hammer if that's your expertise.
2. Get a jpeg (.jpg) of your logo. The term "JPEG" is an acronym for the Joint Photographic Experts Group which is a standard in digital photography that compresses the size of a digital file with as little loss of quality as possible. There are also other file types that are available – png, psd, eps – if you have a web designer, they can deal with this.
3. A digital camera.
4. A Flipcam or similar digital video recorder. I like the Flipcam because it connects so easily to a PC and can be readily used with YouTube, but there are plenty of alternatives.





5 steps to set the scene for writing a blog

Step one – who are we?

This is where your elevator pitch makes it's first appearance (and it will return!). So, if you haven't done so already, go back to the previous *MatureMedia Guide*³ to develop an elevator pitch. There is no better way to answer the question, “who are we?”

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Step Two – who is my reader?

You cannot begin your blog until you decide on the profile of your reader, presumably your client or prospective client. It's tempting to skip this step because you believe that the whole world is your audience. Please, this is either silly or narcissistic, and at your age you should know better.

³ *Your Professional Online Identity*



Try this exercise. Ask yourself:

(a) 3 “things” (traits, characteristics etc.) about them:

1.....

2.....

3.....

(b) What information do they want?:

.....
.....
.....

Step Three– what is my brand?

Answer the following:

(a) The part of my personality that I want to project is.....

(b) I want to be seen as..... (e.g. helpful, authoritative, approachable, empathetic to client problems, friendly, business-like, a specialist in my field or profession).

(c) My brand is.....





Step Four – what is my style?

Answer the following:

(a) What do my friends like about me?

.....
.....

(b) The part of my personality that I want to project is.....

(c) My style is

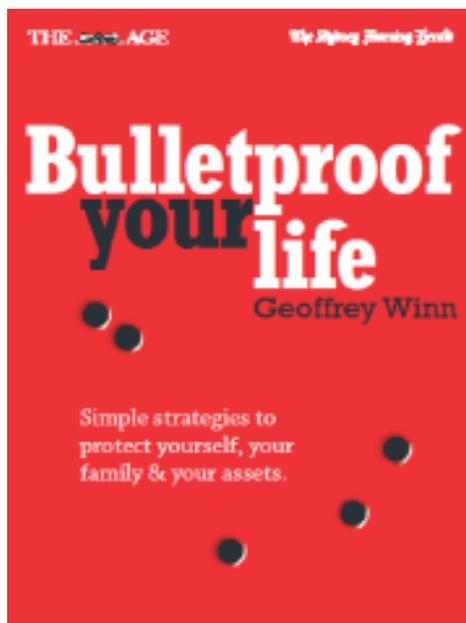
When I pitched my first book to a publisher, I wrote the “sample” introductory chapter in the form of an irreverent story about a dog named Sparky. It explained in a narrative form many of the issues that would be canvassed in the manuscript. Sparky was a boisterous dog who escaped from his property and wreaked havoc in the neighbourhood, leading to many difficult legal consequences for his owners. It highlighted my style and set the tone for what was to follow. Later the publisher told me that this story hooked him on the idea for the book. ⁴

Your aim is to get the trust of readers. You want them to say, “I don’t think of it as the blog of an accountant (or lawyer or financial planner etc.)” – that’s the hurdle

⁴ You’ll find *Sparky’s Story* at the end of this Guide. I have included it as an example of writing that combines professionalism with a deliberate degree of humour and an intended “voice”.

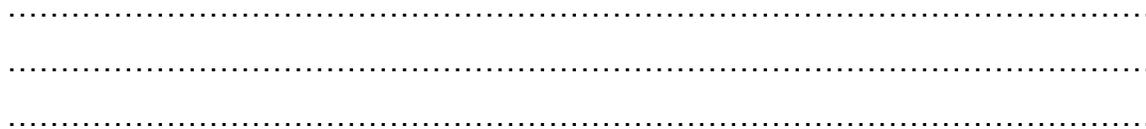


you have to scale. Trust is generated when you offer solutions to clients' problems. Be an accessible expert, not a salesperson. But most of all, adopt a style that is you, and also reflects the work you undertake.



Step Five – what is my goal for the blog?

What do I want to achieve? e.g. foster better relationships with clients; drive more business from them; get recommendations and word of mouth ; referrals; something to send prospective clients?



Now that we've set the scene, it's time to look at blogging in greater depth.

Sparky's Story ⁵

"Woke up, got out of bed, dragged a comb across my head..."
Lennon & McCartney

Henry Simpson woke at 5 a.m. as usual. After checking on the kids, he pulled on his sweats and Shock-Strong™ running shoes with Ultra Pronate-Adjust™ insoles, did a few quick stretches, and headed out the door. Forty minutes later (having checked his milestone times and heart rate using his WatchRun Wrist Meter™) he showered and changed into his work clothes. Thirty minutes of Mikabati Meditation™ (learnt at the Blossom of Life Workshop™) and it was time for breakfast. By now his

⁵ From *Bulletproof Your Life* by Geoffrey Winn (Fairfax Books)



wife Mary was in the kitchen, fixing eggs and toast for herself and the kids. Henry kissed her, grabbed a carton of milk from the fridge, and sat at the granite nook where he had placed a bowl and the plastic muesli container the night before. The muesli was his own special blend, a combination of raw oats, dried fruits, nuts, seeds, lecithin and protein powder. He poured the non-fat vitamin-enriched milk into the bowl and repeated to himself the affirmation set he had learnt during his recent course, Take Control Of Your Life NOW™. After reminding his two children to be careful on their bikes, he gave their border-collie Sparky a pat and walked to the corner to catch the 552 bus downtown.

Two hours later Henry got a call at the small consultancy firm he owned. He tilted forward in his Back-Save™ ergonomic chair and lifted the receiver to his ear.

“There’s been an accident with Sparky,” his wife said in a panicked voice.

Henry took a moment and breathed deeply, first filling his diaphragm and then stomach in a wave-like motion, a technique he had learnt at the Breath For Life™ course. I’m okay, I’m calm, he repeated to himself three times.

“Tell me what happened,” he replied.





Actually, Sparky had not been in an accident. He was the accident. First he escaped into the street when the electricity meter reader opened the front gate (this had happened before, the kids called him an “escape artist”). Sparky had that typical boisterous border-collie nature, but not that typical border-collie intelligence. Now here’s something you need to know about Sparky – he hated cars. Some dogs chased cars or attacked tires, Sparky took this behaviour to a whole new level. He leapt at the windows of moving cars, teeth bared and snarling like a creature from a Stephen King novel.

Sparky ran onto the road and into the path of an oncoming metallic blue 4-Wheel Drive. The driver, Florence Matthews, was shocked to see a black and white apparition rising like a missile towards the passenger-side window. She veered to the right and into the two metre brick fence of Mr. and Mrs. Henderson, a retired couple whose pride and joy was their immaculate garden. Unfortunately Mrs. Henderson happened to be digging in the camellia bed just behind the fence. Her initial injuries resulted from the impact with the bullbar of the 4-Wheel Drive, but it was the bricks falling onto her torso that broke her pelvis. Mr. Henderson, who had been enjoying the late-morning sun on the front porch, jumped in fright from his wicker rocking chair and was immediately seized with a pain radiating down his arm. He was familiar with the stabbing sensation, having suffered a heart attack three months before (“try to avoid too much



excitement,” his cardiologist had advised). He never made it to his feet, toppling head-first into the passion-fruit tree beneath the porch.

Meanwhile Sparky, oblivious to the destruction in his wake, proceeded merrily on his way. He bounded down the street, and spotting Mrs. Johnson’s Siamese cat at number 33, made a sharp left and charged into her yard. On any other day the damage to her 500-thread Egyptian cotton bed sheet on the washing line might have been cause for distress, but at that moment two ambulances were already speeding to the aid of the critically injured Mrs. Henderson and her unconscious husband. Both would recover after protracted stays in hospital and months in a rehabilitation centre (where daily trauma counseling was prescribed), but the legal fallout would see the Simpsons attending their lawyer’s office far more often than either ever visited their parents.

Henry would still be living his orderly life if he had paid as much attention to his personal affairs as he did to his lifestyle. It’s a common enough mistake, but Henry’s disregard led him straight to litigation hell. The Hendersons sued the Simpsons for the pain and suffering incurred as a result of their negligence (it turned out this was the fourth time Sparky had escaped, and he had never been a model of obedience), and as they quickly discovered, their insurance company disputed their legal liability cover as a result of a previous restriction notice against Sparky issued by the Council after he was declared a “wandering dog” (reference was made in the notice to his aberrant behaviour around moving



cars). Florence's car required extensive repair, and she too weighed in with a claim for emotional trauma. The Simpson's lawyer was a trouper. He saw the cases through to the end and then took his family on a cruise to Jamaica.

It's hard to blame Henry. After all, he never really turned his mind to what might happen if he failed to bulletproof his life, and there wasn't much out there to prod him into action. Of course he knew plenty about avoiding illness and maximising his health, he got that message loud and clear from the newspapers, the Government and the advertising industry. He also knew enough to have a regular medical check-up and see the dentist every six months. Not to mention the self-help courses he attended every other week. But when it was all over, after the litigation and the recriminations, Henry would wonder why he never realised that trouble comes in many other guises.

As Henry soon discovered, fall short of your obligations to your family and even the most supportive spouse can begin to have doubts. His wife Mary stood by him through the insurance dispute, after he had initially assured her that they were covered "for everything". She never wavered when he landed in the "rest home" babbling something about camellias and the blossom of life, even though he did not have income protection insurance and nothing in place to deal with his temporary lack of decision-making capacity (that carelessness landed her in a distressing tribunal hearing and more legal bills). But when they had to substantially increase their mortgage to cover all their costs, and later when the creditors started to circle (the lawyer explained that all their investments were



exposed and Henry had left a number of clients in the lurch) – well, she finally took her friends’ advice and spoke to a different type of lawyer. That was the day Henry realised he should have looked more closely at the financial issues that accompany marriage.

Fast forward twelve months. Henry Simpson wakes at 10 a.m. as usual. He reaches for the glass on the bedside table and the bottle beside it. Shaking the pill into his palm, he places the Prozac™ on his tongue...

For Henry the lesson came hard. Like many of us he had insured his family for private medical care, even though treatment in the public system was always there in the event of an emergency. But as he learnt, there’s no publicly funded safety net when you’re lost in the backstreets of the legal system, and no-one to help you return to the highway.

Henry’s nightmare began with the domino effect of a moment’s inattention. For others it would be a failure to make adequate preparation for disability or loss of capacity that delivered their lives into the hands of an anonymous bureaucracy. Still more would leave their families in despair at their inadequately planned estates, or a credit rating that meant they missed out on a crucial loan, or endless legal action with a tradesperson (and for some the jackpot, an appearance on a current affairs show). And the list goes on.