



## Saying “I Do” to Blogging: Key Questions to Ask Before You Commit to Starting One

By Michael W. McLaughlin, Contributing Editor

Many consultants ask if they should start blogging to add power to their market presence. Blogs certainly are pervasive. In fact, if you listen to the experts, you get the impression that everyone should be blogging.

It is tempting to jump on the bandwagon. But only you can decide if blogging is right for your business.

Max, a North Carolina-based blogger, authors one of the 100+ million blogs tracked by Technorati, the Internet search engine for blogs. Like many bloggers, Max regularly publishes short posts with his observations of daily life. Max’s blog has been featured on CNN and many other blogs, Web sites, and news outlets. He is a star blogger.

Max is also a dog—a Golden Retriever to be precise. He writes on subjects like his walks in the park, what it feels like to sit in a hot, parked car, and licking people’s faces.

I’m not sure if Max’s success is a sign that it’s time to get into blogging—or get out of it. But I am sure that blogs are here to stay. Look at the lineup of corporate bloggers and you’ll probably agree. CEOs of companies from American Ventures to Whole Foods count themselves as bloggers.

Bloggers have swayed political elections, consumer opinion, and the daily news. In a recent study, a majority of journalists said that blogs are especially useful in helping them understand the context of a story, or finding a new angle on one. Even the US presidential candidates stopped by a political bloggers’ conference, fishing for votes.

Blogging is the perfect Guerrilla Marketing tactic. You can reach a large audience quickly, and repeatedly. The cost of blogging is low, and the technology is simple to use. It’s an excellent way to stay in touch with your existing clients and help prospective clients get to know you.

With all that going for it as a marketing tool, shouldn’t every consultant be blogging?

Some blog experts will tell you that it’s foolhardy to pass up the opportunity to add a blog to your marketing mix. Before launching a blog, though, ask yourself a few essential questions. Your answers will help you decide if a blog is right for your practice.

### Feeding the Beast

The marketing tools that work best are those that you can execute most effectively. If you get tongue-tied in front of an audience, it doesn’t make sense for public speaking to be the centerpiece of your marketing program. That just leads to foot dragging, and the results aren’t likely to be stellar either.

The same logic applies to blogs. Do you like to write—a lot? If you don’t enjoy writing regularly, or you aren’t very good at it, you may want to hold off on that blog.

The technical aspects of blogging may be a no-brainer, but content drives the success of a blog. Can you feed your blog with content that your clients really want to read? Finding relevant content takes time. Even if you have plenty to say, you still have to draft, edit, and publish, all of which are time-consuming.

You often hear bloggers say that blogs invite informal writing, and that typos and grammatical errors just come with the territory. Maybe that’s okay for Max the Golden Retriever, but it’s the kiss of death if you are marketing a high-end professional services business. Be sure you have the skills, time, and patience to write valuable stuff on a regular basis.

### If You Build It, Who Will Come?

Once your blog is up and running, you have many choices for building your readership. The question is, can you attract not just any readers, but the right ones? You shouldn’t blog to win a popularity contest. You’re better off with a small number of readers who buy or influence purchases of your services, rather than a large list of non-buyers.

As you consider blogging, ask your clients if they read blogs and, if so, what content they prefer to see. You'll find some clients don't read blogs at all and have zero interest in them. Others have RSS newsfeeds for all of their favorite blogs.

The 1989 movie, *Field of Dreams*, popularized the phrase, "If you build it, they will come." Is that true for your potential blog? Can you predict who will come?

### **Look to the Future**

It's not unusual for the initial euphoria of a blog to wane after several weeks or months. Busy consultants often find it tough to keep writing when client work takes so much of their energy. Other times, creative fatigue sets in and a blog can get stale.

If you do start a blog, how will you continue to generate content over the long-term? You don't have to decide everything you'll write about, but it's a good idea to develop a basic strategy for the future.

If your practice includes other consultants, could you tap them for help with blog content? Would you be able to rotate the writing assignments for your blog with others?

What if you try blogging for a while and then decide to quit? Would that tarnish your image in the marketplace? What would you do with the content? Well, you can always reposition content for other uses, for example, articles, either for your website or other sites. The point is to think about if and how you will use a blog six months, a year, or several years from now.

### **What's the Alternative?**

Finally, before you dive into blogging, consider your alternatives. A blog can either be an addition to your current marketing tactics, or a replacement for something. Think about what other marketing tools you might add instead of a blog. Would other activities help you generate a better return on your investment of time and energy?

### **Beginning Your Blog**

Blogging does seem like a natural fit for consultants. It's easy to get started and offers a good channel for you to get your perspectives on key issues out to the market.

Before you take the plunge, just make sure you are willing and able to commit to keeping your blog fresh, and that your target readers will actually be interested in your blog.

Even if you start blogging before answering all the questions I have posed, you'll still reap therapeutic benefits: Research published in *Scientific American*<sup>1</sup> shows that expressive writing improves memory and sleep, and speeds healing.

Footnote:

<sup>1</sup> "Blogging—It's Good for You." *Scientific American*, May 2008: <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-healthy-type>.

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