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Calling all bloggers: guest bloggers add fresh voice and more reach

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There's really no longer a huge need to convince businesses of the value of having a blog. As you probably already know, blogs help you communicate with customers and advocates, build a community, and give you an opportunity to show, not tell, your expertise.

Blogs extend reach and if you post regularly, your chances of customers finding you through SEO (search engine optimization) will greatly increase.



(<http://socialprose.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/guest-blogger-two.jpg>)
Photo Courtesy of [imagerymajestic](http://www.imagerymajestic.com)/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

But like anything else in business development, blog posts take time to write. There's no lack of stories to tell, so how do you get them all told?

One solution is opening up your business's blog to guest bloggers. Think about it. You have clients who are interesting, trade shows and conventions that are exciting and people behind your business's or nonprofit's developments and wins who may deserve more descriptive content than a one-line social media post on your Facebook page.

You also can't be the eyes and ears of everyone involved in what makes your company or nonprofit newsworthy, so why not open your blog up to other people and their unique experiences that circle back to you?

I learned the value of guest blogging when a client, a large nonprofit, held three interesting events in one day that were all meant to raise its profile and educate the community about its mission. My client's communications team couldn't be at the event, so having guest bloggers share their experience brought

color, personality and authentic messaging. Most importantly, it shined a light on the value of the organization in a personal way an audience could relate to. It told a story the communications team could not.

The key to getting our guest bloggers comfortable was giving them guidelines that fit our voice. Here is what they found helpful. You may find them helpful as well.

- **We gave them a word count.** For most organizations, the best blog posts are short and sweet. Narrowing the need down to 4 to 5 paragraphs is not so intimidating to non-everyday writers.
- **We brainstormed the topic briefly with them before they wrote.** Not only will this give your guest blogger the confidence to put words to a screen, you will know what your bloggers are writing about. Your bloggers (hopefully) won't give you any big surprises when the final copy is turned in.
- **We built in a little more time for editing and made sure the guest bloggers were available to make changes.** Every writer needs an editor – especially non-professional writers. Don't be overzealous about pointing out their grammar mistakes. Focus on content clarification.
- **Make sure they have a topic that can be expressed with a photo.** Photos and graphics are a *must* to draw readers in. Also, if you are going to post the blog on Facebook, photos will make your blog more prominent with Facebook's redesign (<http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/Facebook-making-photos-more-prominent-4337294.php>).

Like any kind of quality control over your brand, there are advantages and things to be conscientious about when using guest bloggers.

The advantages are your audience can hear from fresh voices who are experts in their subject and experience. Although contributing bloggers may not know your business like you do, they may have a unique view that shows a side to your business you probably can't see because you are not in their shoes. Just got a great new software package or logo? Invite the IT wizard or graphic artist to write about their project and process. Won a grant to fund that much-needed program for the next year? Why not invite one of the clients the grant will affect to write about what the program means to them? Anyone who can further your brand, mission or goals are game for guest bloggers. If done well, their blog posts could provide a way to give your customers a different lens to see through than you would. They may reach audiences you didn't even know were out there.

Things to be aware of include some of points entrepreneur [Neil Patel](http://www.quicksprout.com/about/) (<http://www.quicksprout.com/about/>) posted about in an [interesting article on the 7 things to think about when accepting guest posts](http://www.quicksprout.com/2013/02/18/dont-accept-guest-posts-unless-you-follow-these-7-rules/) (<http://www.quicksprout.com/2013/02/18/dont-accept-guest-posts-unless-you-follow-these-7-rules/>). The article even includes a nifty video about what Google finds valuable and not-so-valuable about guest blogging increasing SEO and other website traffic. Although the article's tips may pertain to larger blogs, its points are salient for many businesses. One point that resonated with us here at SocialProse was the article's finding that "you just have to make sure the content you are publishing is great and not mediocre."

Final thoughts. If your business is a non-profit, make sure the blog post has a "call to action." My client, a local food bank, had a 7-year-old share his experiences of hosting a virtual food drive. He encouraged everyone to try to do one themselves. We here at SocialProse also think that if you are posting for a business, anecdotes, problem-solution cases and other narrative content is going to gain you more credibility and a larger audience than a straight-up pitch of your products or services. That could be read as pushy.

Remember: You own the content – make sure it puts you in the best light.



(<http://socialprose.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/leslie.jpeg>)

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