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The Tangible Benefits of Blogging

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You see blogs all over the Web. It seems that everyone is blogging or thinking about adding a blog to their website today. Are blogs a flash in the pan or is there a real reason why blogging is so hot right now?

Blogs started out as personal diaries and online journals, but now blogging has hit the mainstream and has become very serious business.

In this white paper I will try to answer several important questions about the benefits of blogging and why a website owner should consider adding a blog to his or her web presence plan.

- What effect does blogging have on a website's traffic?
- Does a blog add to a website's "stickiness" factor?
- What impact does blog setup have in organic search engine results?
- Does blogging enhance a website's visibility and improve organic placement on Google?

Summary of our results:

- Blogs increase website traffic.
- Blogs increase a website's "stickiness".
- In some cases hosting your blog on Blogspot may improve your organic search results when compared to custom FTP blogging.
- Blogging allows new phrases to match user search queries and blog posts act as entry points improving Web visibility.
- Blogging appears to improve a website's organic search engine page position on Google.

A Blog's Impact on Website Traffic

- What effect does blogging have on website traffic?
- What happens to website traffic when a site owner stops blogging?

I have carefully studied several clients' website statistics to identify traffic trends in order to evaluate and identify if a blog helps to increase overall site traffic. I have found in all of my case studies, that a website that uses a blog will have an increase in site traffic. Our case studies show an average increase in website traffic of 55.3%. On the conservative side however, I would say that a site owner can expect an immediate 25% to 34% increase in overall traffic when an active, well-written blog is associated with their website.

Case Study One: Three Long Term Care Insurance Agents

In this situation, I had three identical websites. Only one website owner decided to blog. Below you will find the traffic results for the site that blogged and for the better of the other two sites that did not blog. These sites were created before Google's duplicate content penalty. The site that was blogging had a 58% increase in traffic when the blog was added in April. The blogging

site averaged, in a three month period, 3684 page views per month and the non-blogging site averaged 358 page views in the same period. This is nearly a tenfold increase in site traffic for the site that was blogging.

Month	Page Views Blogging Site	Page Views Non-Blogging Site
March	3196	152
April	3527	561
May	6095	361

Case Study Two: Real Estate Agent

In this situation the client started blogging and then stopped. This allowed me to analyze what happens to website traffic when a blog is abandoned. This client started blogging in April and then stopped actively blogging in May. His website traffic dropped 44% when compared to April when he was posting to his blog three times per week.

Month	Pageviews
March	218
April	849
May	470

Case Study Three: Real Estate Brokerage Firm

In this case study the client actively blogged consistently for about two months and then stopped. I was able to verify that an active blog builds site traffic. This client started blogging in March and experienced an immediate 47% increase in page views over the previous month's traffic. In April, a full 10% of his website visitors were visiting his blog site. In May, the client stopped posting to his blog. He experienced a 28% dip in website traffic that month. In June, 12% of all of his website visitors were still reading his old April blog posts.

Month	Pageviews
February	2146
March	4082
April	4118
May	2996

Case Study Four: Insurance Services

In this case study the client started blogging and then stopped for as long as six months and then restarted blogging several times over a period of two years. We can see a marked difference in website traffic when the site owner is blogging. In this one situation the client restarted blogging in March and experienced an immediate 25% increase in unique sessions.

Month	Unique Sessions
January	331
February	331
March	581
April	530
May	605

Case Study Five: Service Business

In this case study the client started blogging at the end of February. Not only does the traffic increase the first full month by 51% when compared to the pre-blogging period in January, but the traffic increases nearly each month and stays at a high level for the six month period that we

monitored.

Month	Page Views
January	3152
February	5218
March	6476
April	4337
May	5770
June	6176
July	7453
August	8412

Our Conclusion

Based on our study of five different situations, it is clear that blogging does increase a website's traffic and that when blogging is stopped, site traffic decreases.

Technorati did a study recently and found that 45% of all blogs have not been updated in the last three months. After about 30 days of full time blogging at a frequency of three to five posts per week, most of our clients lose interest in blogging. At this point they abandon their blog, hire a ghost blogger, or move to a sporadic blog posting schedule. As you can see from our series of case studies, when a blog is abandoned, website traffic is impacted and may drop as much as 50% when compared to the active blogging period.

A Blog's Impact on Website "Stickiness"

- Does having an active, well-written blog add to the website's stickiness or amount of time that a visitor stays on a website?

Case Study One: Service Sector Business

In this case study a blog was started at the end of February. From March to June the average time on this site was 1 minute and 33 seconds with an average of 1.61 page views compared with an average pre-blog time of 54 seconds with 1.48 page views. For this site the introduction of a blog added to the length of time a visitor stayed on the site and increased the average number of page views per visitor.

Period	Average Time on Site	Page Views
Pre Blogging Period	0.9 minutes	1.48 Pages
Active Blogging Period	1.33 minutes	1.61 Pages

Case Study Two: Health and Alternative Medicine Business

In this case study we have more statistical data to review to really identify trends of site activity. Here we analyzed 11 months of blogging traffic for time spent on the site and the number of page views. We were able to compare this data with six months of non-blogging traffic two months after the blog had been abandoned. During the post-blogging period visitors were still reviewing the blog. We also saw that the average time on the site and page views decreased when blogging stopped.

Period	Average Time on Site	Page Views
Active Blogging Period	Average 4.78 minutes	2.53 Pages

Post-Blogging Period	Average 4.43 minutes	2.13 Pages
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Our Conclusion

In regards to site stickiness, a well-written blog that is actively updated at least a minimum of three times per week can increase the amount of time that a visitor spends on a website and can increase the number of pages that will be viewed. The increases in this area are not as dramatic as the increases in site traffic, but are still important considerations.

The Impact of Blog Setup on Search Engines

- What impact does the blog setup have on search engine placement? Should I use Blogger's custom FTP blogging or Blogger's Blogspot hosting with a custom domain?
- What happens in regard to organic search engine placement when I use Blogger's Blogspot custom domain setting?

First, it is important to know that when you utilize Blogger that you have several options for blog setup.

1. You can set your blog up on Blogspot using a domain name such as <http://MyBlog.blogspot.com>. You do not need to have a domain name or web hosting service to use this option.
2. You can setup your blog on Blogspot using a custom domain name such as <http://MyBlog.MyDomain.com>. You will need to own your domain name and have access to the domain name setting control panel to make these changes. Although it appears that your blog posts reside at the same location as your domain, they do not, they are archived at Blogspot.
3. You can setup your blog on your own domain name using custom FTP blogging. This will allow you to archive your blog posts back on your own web hosting server which is where your main website resides using a domain such as <http://www.MyDomain.com/MyBlog/>. If you select this option, we recommend that you instead utilize WordPress (our preferred platform) as your blog platform.

Here are several reasons why you WOULD choose to host your blog at Blogspot:

1. You do not have a website and do not want to invest in a web hosting fee or a domain name charge.
2. You want to use Blogger's dynamic layout options add widgets and other interactive components to your blog on a regular basis without any HTML knowledge. You only have this capability when your blog is hosted at Blogspot.
3. You like to change the colors and layout of your blog frequently and do not want to employ a webmaster to make changes for you.
4. You will be blogging on a narrow theme matched to the services that you offer and do not want the content of your website to be considered as adjunct content by search engines. For example in our case a workable strategy for improved performance would be to create one blog on blogging, one on search engine optimization, one on e-newsletters, and one on Google AdWords. Each unique blog would have its own Blogspot custom domain address and would be archived at Blogspot and not on our

server.

Here are several reasons why you would NOT choose to host your blog at Blogspot and WOULD choose custom FTP blogging with posts archived back under your domain:

1. You have a regular website and want the search engines to show your blog posts in relation to other pages on your website in the search results.
2. You want to have a blog template that matches your website as closely as possible.
3. You have a website search function and want your own search engine to include your blog posts as results to search queries back on your website.
4. You do not provide multiple services, only want one blog or do not want to spend additional money for several ghost blog writers or take the time to post on several blogs.
5. You have significant core business content on your website and your blog posts can piggyback on that content's authority for better organic search engine placement.
6. You may want to periodically back up your blog content to prevent possible catastrophic loss of all blog posts.
7. You may want unlimited storage space for your blog for images and video. Blogspot will only allow 300 MB of storage.

Case Study: McCord Web Design's Web-World Watch (Custom FTP blog) Compared to Blog-World Watch (Blogspot hosted blog with a custom domain setting)

In preparation for this white paper, I wanted to identify exactly what happens when a blog is hosted at Blogspot versus using Blogger's custom FTP blogging set. I setup a new blog, Blog-World Watch, using Blogger's Blogspot server and then setup a custom domain. My Blogspot blog is now found at <http://blog.mccordweb.com>. However the post pages do not reside on my server they reside at Blogspot.

My other blog is called Web-World Watch and is found at

<http://www.mccordweb.com/weblogs/blogger.html>.

The posts for this blog are archived back on my website server and I use Blogger's custom FTP blog setup for this blog.

To test how search engines choose to show the blog posts based on blog setup, I actively blogged on both blog sites on a variety of content-rich topics over a four month period. I chose to publish eight of the same exact posts on both blogs the same day and on several different days so I could evaluate how search engines would sort the posts in Google's organic search results

Search Term	Position	Higher Positioned Blog
Ghost blogging services	1 position higher	Web-World Watch
Blogspot custom domains	56 positions higher	Blog-World Watch
Google AdWords Compared to Yahoo	1 position higher	Blog-World Watch
Blogging for organic search placement	7 positions higher	Web-World Watch

Nancy McCord in Investor's Business Daily	2 positions higher	Blog-World Watch
Maukie the virtual cat	4 positions higher	Blog-World Watch
Widget world	5 positions higher	Blog-World Watch

I had expected to find that the custom FTP blog would outperform the Blogspot domain blog setup, but that is clearly not the case. On initial review, the custom FTP blog posts ranked higher than the Blogspot blog posts. But now, nearly four months after publishing, most of my blog posts are placing higher on the search results page with the Blogspot setup than those that have been published using the custom FTP blogging setup. This information shows that using Blogspot may be, in some cases, preferred for blog setup. In addition to this, I have found that Blogspot blog posts will typically appear in the Google search index more quickly than blog posts that are done using WordPress or Blogger Custom FTP.

One important note: on the results for the search phrases "ghost blogging services" and "blogging for organic search engine placement", our custom FTP blog outperformed the Blogspot blog due to the depth of content archived on our website. It is clear that our blog posts were able to piggyback on the authority of our website content pages. It is possible that they were considered to be from a more authoritative resource by Google and therefore earned a higher organic position.

Utilizing Blogspot as a platform for your blog and blog archive will definitely not hurt your search engine results. In fact, if your blog is on one narrow topic as mine was for Blog-World Watch (content on blogs and blogging techniques) versus a wider variety of posts found on Web-World Watch, your single topic blog at Blogspot may outperform a multi topic blog regardless of the setup.

The benefits that you as a blogger get from using Blogspot such as being able to change your blog layout, add new widgets on demand, etc., and quick Google indexing may outweigh the minor benefits of custom FTP blogging. However, there are still reasons why custom FTP blog setup may still be best for your needs.

We have found that the position of the blog in search engine results has more to do with the topic covered in the blog and the associated content that exists in other pages on the same server than on the actual setup.

The Impact of Blogging on a Website's Visibility on Google

- Does an active well-written blog improve a website's visibility on Google?
- Will custom FTP blogging improve my website's organic search position?

Several clients have asked "will using a blog help me with organic search engine placement?" An active blog that is updated a minimum of three times per week and is well-written will certainly improve your site's experience for viewers and should be one of the techniques that you employ in working to improve your website's organic placement. Our limited statistical data does show that blogging can improve organic search engine placement. Additionally, blogging speaks directly to several key elements that search engines consider important when determining organic results page ranking.

1. Well-written blogs add quality new content on a regular basis to a website. This is known as "freshness".
2. Well-written blog posts should be keyword dense and contain keywords in the title. This

tactic will improve opportunities for better organic position.

3. Adding labels, tags, meta tags, or categories to your blog and using your top keywords as the descriptor as well as sorting your posts into these categories is a strong strategy for performance.
4. Blog posts can build "site authority" on specific topics important to a site owner, search engines, and to readers.
5. Blog posts can provide strong keyword dense anchor links back to inside content pages of the parent website.
6. Blog posts can link to other internal blog post pages helping to keep the blog out of Google's Supplemental Index.
7. Blog posts that use backlinks allow for inbound links from other sites that may be on similar topics and some may be considered by Google and other search engines to have more authority and value, potentially increasing organic page ranking.
8. Blog posts are indexed as if they were new HTML website pages, so a custom FTP blog can add to the overall number of pages on a website. Google considers the size of a website as just one of its key factors for determining its patented PageRank. You would experience these same benefits with a WordPress blog.

There are over 100 different factors that Google uses to determine PageRank. A well-written, actively maintained blog speaks directly to many of the important benchmarks that Google uses to determine a site's organic position.

When we perform search engine optimization for a site, we encourage the site owner to consider adding a blog. Having fresh quality content that is on a core business and is keyword dense is a good strategy for improving organic placement.

Case Study: Two Identical Websites One Blogs; One Does Not

We compared two identical websites: one that blogs and one that does not. The one that blogs has used custom FTP blogging. Both are mature sites and both have not had content changes or upgrades other than new blog posts for the one. All search research was done on Google on September 12, 2007.

Search Phrase	Blogging Site Page Placement	Non Blogging Site Page Placement
Long term care insurance Kentucky	Page position #6	Not in top 50 listings
Medicare supplement insurance Kentucky	Page position #3	Not in top 50 listings
Louisville long term care insurance	Page position #8	Page position #36
Louisville long term insurance specialist	Page position #3	Page position #2
Long term care insurance pricing Kentucky	Page position #1	Page position #42

We found that the organic placement was higher for the site that blogged. Can a blog actually improve *your* website's search engine page ranking? Possibly, but with so many factors that

impact site placement, a blog may improve organic search placement for one site and not move another site in the organic results at all. Remember that these potential organic position benefits will only apply to custom FTP blogging sites.

In addition to possible organic search placement improvements, blog posts may also be important "doorways" to lead readers into your website on keyword phrases where your main website's organic search placement is actually lower than the relative position of a blog post. This leads to increased Web visibility regardless of blog setup.

All search research was done on Google on September 2, 2007.

Search Phrase	Blog Page Placement	Website Page Placement
Google website optimizer invitation	Page position #6	Not in top 30 listings
Allan Kahane author	Page position #2	Page position #11
Selling your home with a contingency clause Maryland	Page position #20	Not in top 30 listings
MNS adCenter opt out of content	Page position #2	Not in top 30 listings
Finland Faberge Egg Stamps	Page position #3	Not in top 30 listings
Eco-friendly mouse control	Page position #4	Not in top 30 listings

Blog posts create great topical entry pages into your website that can funnel search traffic to match specific product names, model numbers, specific services with a locality descriptor, and expanded keywords that dovetail closely with the theme of your website.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Blogging can make a difference in website traffic, increase website stickiness, improve Web visibility and improve your website's organic placement. So what's the down side to blogging? The big problem with blogging for most people is the time needed to stick with it. Initially, posting to a blog is exciting and fun. After a while, it's hard work to keep on topic, find interesting new information, and consistently write in an engaging style.

From my own review and work with clients, blog abandonment is a real problem. Typically, after two months of blogging, our self-blogging clients simply tire of blogging, instead of blogging being fun; it becomes a chore taking them away from the needs of their core businesses. In fact this is the reason that we created our ghost blogging services.

For a blog to be successful, consistency is crucial. The site owner who can stick with blogging and create interesting content will reap the benefits of increased site traffic, improved site stickiness, increased Web visibility and even garner improved organic search engine placement.

Here are my recommendations:

1. Use Blogspot setup if you will be doing your own content writing and blog setup.
2. Use WordPress if you will be using a custom template to match your website or want your blog posts to appear in your website's local search engine results instead of Blogger's custom FTP setting.
3. If you are really serious about improving your organic placement and not just Web visibility consider using WordPress or Blogger custom FTP blogging.

4. Blog at least three times a week and space your postings out. We recommend a Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule. This will keep your blog's RSS news feed alive in portals like My Yahoo. Posting every three days will keep your blog's news feed from collapsing and resulting in the notice "no new posts in the last seven days" thereby turning off your RSS subscribed readers.
5. If you need help with blogging, get it. Employ a ghost blogger or hire a temporary blogger if you get busy. Don't abandon your regular readers and have to rebuild your readership from scratch when you decide to return to blogging. You want to feed your readers and search engine spiders content on a regular schedule. Taking too long between blog posts will break a reader's pattern of review and a search engine's pattern of spidering your content.
6. Don't think that a blog post can consist of one sentence and a link. You will never get a blog to work for you with this type of approach. Take time to create unique content that *you* would want to read.
7. Write with your reader in mind. A business blog is not the place for a personal rant on off topic subjects. Include keywords in your post title. Keep your content targeted and keyword dense. Make your titles catchy as some RSS readers will only display a title.
8. Don't lift content from other sites and pass it off as your own. You can quote a paragraph or two in your blog post and then link to the full content on the Web and not get caught up in copyright infringement. Don't take someone else's intellectual property and pass it off as your own in your blog even with a full reference of the content's original location.
9. Keep your blog posts to around 250 to 350 words long. This is about three paragraphs of content. If you have a longer stream of thought, break it into multiple posts. Remember, high keyword density is easier to achieve in a shorter blog post.

If you are ready to start blogging but don't know where to start, I invite you to visit our website at www.McCordWeb.com and review our advice there on setting up a blog, using blogs and feeds, and how to use blogs for your business. If you need professional help, we do offer ghost blogging services, WordPress installation, Blogger custom FTP blog setup, and Blogspot custom domain setup services.

Blogging is fun, increases your website's traffic, improves your website's stickiness, offers new keywords and phrases that search engine users can utilize to find your services, and can improve your organic search engine page ranking. If you've been thinking about blogging, now's the time for you to consider adding a blog to your website to improve your own Web visibility.