



Cathy: Today we're going to talk about **best blogging practices**, and I'm going to try not to mute the lines, in case you have something that you want to say. If you do, then just feel free to say it, or ask questions. We have a lot of questions already submitted on the web, so you can submit your questions that way, or you can just ask while I'm speaking. Feel free to interrupt me and I'll address those as we go.

I am the WordPress Wizard and I'm guide into the wonderful world of blogging and WordPress – the best blogging platform ever. Thank you to everyone who's here, and for all of your questions that we have so far, waiting for answers. We do not have an Action Guide today, because, we're just going to talk about the best blogging practices and why you don't want your blog to suck. So, these are going to be some really good, informative ideas for you. Just take notes as you feel you would like to, and do please interrupt with questions as we go along.

The first thing that we're going to talk about is (and I talk about this often), the difference between WordPress.com, and WordPress.org. I think that there's a lot of confusion out there about that, because WordPress.com is hosting your blog on the WordPress servers. WordPress.org is getting the free WordPress software, loading it onto your own server, and owning your own data, and your entire blog. Of course, owning your own is the way to go, and I thought of a little way to describe that for people who may still be a little bit confused.

Let's say that you have a computer, and your friend has a computer. If you go to your friend's house to post on your blog, then you don't own that information. Then it's your friend's information; your friend is totally in control. Your friend says when you can come over and when you can post. While hosted blogs like TypePad, and Blogger, and WordPress.com don't limit you in that way, they still own your data. They own you, and you have no freedom whatsoever.

I said this before, and I had another example of it in speaking to a client this morning who had a Blogger blog that was shut down for no apparent reason. There was one complaint, and it was not easy for this person to find out why the blog suddenly disappeared, but it did. One complaint to Google, and with no recourse, with no forewarning, the blog was just gone. So, the person, first of all, had to figure out, "Well, what do I do now, my blog is gone?" "Why is it gone?" "Who do I contact?" We finally

figured out how to get a hold of Google (which isn't easy), and found out that there was one complaint and the blog was gone. That will not happen to you if you host your own.

So, let's say that you own your own computer, and you post on your own computer, then that's you owning you data. You cannot be shut down; your friend could shut you down, if you went over there to post. Your friend gets tired of having you come over – poof! Your blog is gone. If Google gets one complaint about you, or WordPress, then your blog is gone. So, that's the difference between WordPress.com, and WordPress.org.

There is a huge, huge difference.

So let's talk about what could make your blog, not so great, or what could make your blog actually *suck*. If your blog is kind of duct taped together to your site, with no thought on how to integrate it, it's just, kind of, and appendage. It doesn't look the same, people don't know that they're in the same place; they don't know that it's you when they go to your blog – that's very poor blogging practice. You want your site and you blog, if you have both, which you do not need (which we'll talk about in a little bit), you want them to be integrated. And not just appear to have duct tape on them.

If you blog is on Blogger, it really makes you look kind of cheap, or maybe like a spammer. And, nobody likes Blogger's commenting system anyway. So, please, don't have a Blogger blog, unless you want one to practice, and you're just getting started, and you know that it's not going to be your final destination. Blog on Blogger for a while, but just understand that the page rank that you attain for yourself, is not for yourself, it goes to Google, and they don't need any more page rank. They're number one, so it's not going to do anything for you (really) search engine-wise, because you're going to have that “blog spot” word in you title, and it's not going to be you own.

Maybe you have your blog on TypePad, which actually, means it's probably pretty ugly. It's hosted somewhere else, you don't have total control over you theme, or the look and feel of it, and people just have a very fractured idea about TypePad blogs. You're fractured because you can't get good statistics and it's not a good practice to have your blog hosted elsewhere.

Let me just talk about statistics for a minute because your blog statistics are very critical to your success. You have to know where your people are coming from, and how long they stay on your site, and where all do they go on your site. Your own hosting statistics can give you all that information, and you cannot get that on a blog hosted elsewhere. So, that's

another good reason to host your own.

Maybe you have Blogger blog, or a TypePad blog, or a LiveJournal blog, well it's going to look like everybody else's. It's absolutely going to look like a Blogger blog. I could spot a Blogger blog a mile away. I don't need to see the address, and see "blog spot." They just look too much the same, and you're so limited in what you can do with them, that it doesn't represent you; it doesn't represent your site, and that makes it very difficult to brand yourself. So, that's just another reason to have your own.

Another good blogging practice is to have your comments turned on. If your comments are turned off, then you've just turned off your customers. The whole purpose (well not the whole purpose), but one huge purpose of your blog is to build a community, and if people cannot leave comments, then they can't get to know, like, and trust you, as well as if they can leave comments, and you comment back to them. Other people will comment on other people's comment, so it's a really good way to build a community. If you have your comments turned off, you might as well not have a blog at all.

If you write posts that sound like commercials, and instead of real person having a conversation. That's also bad. You want to write like you talk, and always remember that it's a conversation. You're not talking at people; you're talking with people. Another whole reason to have comments turned on, and to write like you talk.

Maybe you never link to anything in your posts, maybe you don't know how. Well learn how! That's an excellent way to start a discussion inside the blogosphere. Not just with people who read you blog, but with other bloggers. If you link out of your post to other blogs, they'll know it. Especially if it's a WordPress blog or if it's any blogging platform that has permalink capabilities, they'll know that you've talked about them, and perhaps they'll talk about you. That's just link love in the blogosphere, and you want a lot of that!

Kristina: Cathy?

Cathy: Yeah, go right ahead!

Kristina: This is Kristina, and I have a question. I'm still back at the part about "hosting your own." Does that mean, I know that you said that you should post from your own computer, but can I add to my blog if I'm somewhere else and don't have my computer?

Cathy: Yes. That was an example of blogging on your computer or going to your friend's computer.

Kristina: Right, I understood that, but let's say that I don't have my computer with me, and I'm traveling and I want to add to my blog. So I use somebody else's computer, and they give me permission.

Cathy: Exactly, you can log into your WordPress blog from *anywhere*.

Kristina: Anywhere. Okay, that's what I had thought.

Cathy: Yes, anywhere in the world, you can log into WordPress. You can post, you can add, you can do anything from anywhere. Anything that you can do from your own computer, you can do from anywhere.

Kristina: Okay.

Cathy: Maybe my example wasn't quite as good as I thought it was because I don't want to confuse you.

Kristina: I'm going to ask some very simple questions.

Cathy: Please do. That's just fine, because if you have that question, then other people have the question too. So, I appreciate that, and that was an excellent question. And yes, you can blog from anywhere with a WordPress blog.

Another thing that will make your blog not quite *good enough* is if you have no idea how your blog is supposed to support your business. Therefore, you don't have a content strategy. Or if you don't know whom your ideal customer is, then you don't know how to talk to those people who are your ideal customers. One thing that can help you out with that really greatly is my Blog Strategy guide (which is free), and it's at TheWizardWeekly.com. You can download it, and fill it out, think about it. It's really a good way for you to focus on who your ideal client is, and what you want your blog to do. It'll really help you out a lot.

If you think of your blog only as a marketing channel, well, a marketing channel in my world is a euphemism for corporate propaganda. Don't do that! Talk to people; don't use corporate speak. Don't use jargon; just have a conversation with people. That's the whole purpose of a blog – to have a conversation with people. If you only post three times a month, you might as well not post at all because if your readers who come back to your blog frequently do not find due content, then they're not going to bother to come back. That doesn't mean that you need to post fifteen times a day, not by any means, but maybe every other day, but you need to have some fresh content, definitely more than a few times a month. If you're just going to do a few times a month, you might as well not have a blog. Google's not going to like it, and your readers are not going to like it. So,

post often.

If you write your posts in Word, (this is a good one, because I've actually had people ask me if they could do this), and then give them to somebody to post on your blog, then you're not connected at all. You need to be inside your blog, reading comments, seeing what people are saying, and getting some feedback. If you're just writing something in Word and handing it to somebody else to put up on your blog, then you're not writing anything that's worth anybody else's time. So you really do need to be in your blog, in your head and know what people are asking, and how people are viewing your blog.

If you think that your blogging just another form of advertising, then you don't understand the purpose of a blog. Sure it's advertising, it's branding you, but it's advertising and branding you in a personal way. I guess this all comes back to the fact that I was at Bridging Heart and Marketing a couple of weeks ago, and have just embraced the entire soft sell principal that you don't have to beat people over the head to get them interested in your product. If you tell them about your product, don't say, "If you don't buy my product you family will die..." That's pretty hard sell in my estimation. If you can explain things to people, then people will really come back. Write review of your products, write reviews of other people's products; products that you'd like to sell as an affiliate. Just be personal and personable.

Something else that can really hurt your blog is if you have a huge banner on you blog that says, "Protected by CopyScape," or, "This work is totally copyrighted and if you steal it I'm going to throw you in jail." Generally what you write on your blog is not worth stealing; it's personal. It doesn't apply to other people and so they probably wouldn't want to steal it. Even if you have a big banner that says it's protected, it isn't going to stop people who want to steal anyway. It's just off-putting to have that in your blog. Now if you put that in your footer, copyright, and your years, this year or the year you started, that's plenty. That's also legal, and if you want to go out and throw them in jail, I guess you could, but don't advertise the fact that you're all copyrighted because it'll make you see grandiose to people, and you don't ever want to sound grandiose.

It's the same if you have a huge legal disclaimer, or if everything that you write has to be sent past your lawyers before it can be posted. That's definitely not good blogging practice there. If you need to that, for instance, if you're a health-care practitioner and you need to have legal disclaimer, put it on another page; don't put it on your front page. Make it accessible, put it the footer "Legal Disclaimer," or wording to that effect, whatever your attorney tells you to put there, but don't smear it all over your front page. It's there, people can read it, and if it needs to be there,

then it absolutely needs to be there, but don't throw it in people's faces.

If you keep referring to posts as blogs, then your blog probably sucks because the blog is the entirety of the site. It includes your posts, it includes your pages, it includes your sidebar widgets, and it includes everything. What you write on a day-to-day, or every-other-day basis is called a post, or to be more correct, it's actually called an article. So, call them posts or articles, but please, don't call it a blog.

Finally, your blog probably sucks if it isn't doing anything for your business. This is your way of branding yourself, of being likable and personal, and getting people to know, like, and trust you. So, that's the huge, huge reason for having a blog, and that kind of leads into some questions.

"I'm trying to decide if I want the blog to be what people see when they go to the website, name.com, or if I need a static web page at the website, name.com. Is this an irrevocable decision or something that can be changed? Why would I want the blog as the first page, or why would I want a standard web page as the first page?" That's huge question and it's something that is very important for you to think about and decide, because it's totally up to you. You don't actually need to have a website (a static website), and a blog, because a blog is a website. Anything that you can do on a website, you can do on a blog. So, it's totally up to you. I do not personally have a static website, everything that I do is done from my blog. So, it is up to you, I don't think that there's a need for a static website, but let's say that you have one already and it's yourname.com. Buy a new domain name, and put your blog on that domain name. Make it the same look and feel, which is not difficult to do in WordPress; you can use your own header. Lets think of a website that has a great header that you love, you can stick that right on your blog, it doesn't matter if it's the same domain name, you can just put the header right up, and you can make it the same colors, you can give it the same look and feel.

So that when people go back and forth, they feel like they're in the same place. That's something that's really good if you want to buy your domain name "blog.com," a lot of people are doing that now. If I had "thewordpresswizard.com," as a static site, I might buy "thewordpresswizardblog.com," as my blog. This gives you two pieces of the virtual real estate, two spots on the internet that are not the same domain name, (and Google likes that), and people won't care because, you'll have links. So it won't matter to them what the name of the address or the URL of the blog is. Of course you do want to have some good keywords in it, but as far as people go, it isn't going to make any difference because you're going to be linking around, back and forth, anyway.

So, if you don't have anything yet, I suggest a blog first, or perhaps, only. The reasons for that are many, but mainly because a blog is easy to put up, easy to maintain (I'll get to that in just a second, but I do have some other questions on maintaining it), people like blogs. People are used to seeing blogs more now. Almost more importantly, Google likes blogs also. You'll hear me say a lot to "write to people, as well as to Google," and that's important, but we always have to consider Google, and when I say Google, I'm using that as a generic term for all the search engines:

- Yahoo!
- MSN Live
- IceRocket

And all of the different search engines. They like blogs because they're excellent for search engine optimization, they're updated frequently with new content, and there isn't anything Google likes more than new content. They want things to be relevant to search terms and they want it to be fresh. If they find a website that's been up for five years, and they find your blog on the same topic, believe me, if your blog has only been up for a couple of months, it's still going to rank higher than the static site that's been up for five years and has not changed. So that's an important consideration, also.

Another question is, from Sharon in Charlotte. Hi Sharon, by the way. "How important is it to start with a WordPress theme that you really plan to stick with?" That is get it right at the beginning, versus changing themes after you've posted for your site's best look and feel. You can change your theme almost at will if you follow a couple of rules, and that is, back up, back up, back up. Back up everything. Back up your database, back up your current theme, back up your plug-ins, and if you don't know how to do that, then you just send me an email and I'll tell you exactly how to do that.

Or of course, I have a maintenance plan, I'm not going to exactly talk about that now, but I'll back up everything and make sure that you have all of the newest stable upgrades of WordPress. I don't put up an upgrade until I know that it's stable and works, and at any time that you want to change your theme, you just have to say, "I'm going to change my theme," and I'll do all of your backups for you. The reason for that is, that some themes are junk! Some themes are good. That applies to both free and paid for themes. Some paid for themes are junk too, and they just don't work. You're not going to know that until you actually put it up and start messing with it, and start trying to do things in it. So, there are times when you're going to have say, "This theme is junk I can't work with it," and you'll have to find a new one.

If you have all of your data backed up, and all of your old themes and your old plug-ins, you can go right back to the way it was before. Almost immediately, because it takes very little time to restore from backups. So, you can be back up with your old theme and working very quickly. If you don't have backups, you're kind of sunk because you can't get your old stuff back, your new theme doesn't work. See, you go to find a new theme, and you get the new theme up, but the old stuff isn't there. So, my number one rule is "backup, backup, backup."

When I was a mainframe programmer, we had a little thing, "backups are for sissies." We didn't really mean that, because I'm going to tell you that we backed up everything *all* the time. We had more backup jumps running, practically than live jobs, because the data is so critical and that's one thing that people who work on PCs don't really seem to get. That need to back things up, because if you lose it all, it's there in the backup. If you put up a new theme, and it doesn't work, then it's there in the back up. So that's the rule for getting a new theme, backup, backup, backup. If you have your backup, go right ahead and change your theme. Find a new one that you like, put it up, look at it, and it never hurts to update your site. I don't mean regularly, or monthly, or a schedule, but when you get tire of looking at your theme, do, go get a new one and put it right up there, but please back up first.

Another question from Sharon is: "How hard is it to put an auto responder form (like AWeber, etc) for list building into WordPress?" The answer to that question is: it's very simple. It's a bunch of picky little steps, but it's not difficult, and I like to see the optin form, actually that's what the auto responder form is called. I like to see those in the side bar, and now, WordPress themes almost always come Widget ready. Widgets are wonderful, and I'm actually going to do a whole call on Widgets soon, because I love them so much, and it's such a wonderful addition to WordPress. It makes putting things in your sidebar very easy.

All you have to do is go to your AWeber, your 1ShoppingCart, your whatever, you can build your form and answer their questions. At the end, they will give you a block of code that says "copy and paste this into your website." All you have to do is:

- Highlight it
- Copy it over to WordPress
- Create a text widget (which is very easy to do)
 - Just paste the code into the widget
- Save it and the form is in your site

It just couldn't be much easier than that. Widgets are wonderful, they really are. So, no, it's very easy to put an auto responder form inside of your WordPress blog. There is another way that you can do it; you can put it on it's own page, you could put it in a post, but the only probably with putting it in the posts is that as

you do new posts that auto responder post keeps moving down the list. Pretty soon it'd be off the front page. Or, at the very least, below the fold (below what people see in one screen). So, I prefer to put it, and like it in the sidebar in a widget. It's very convenient, you can post about, you can say, look just to your right and get my three free tips for building your log cabin, or whatever you're offering. It's right there, it's always there, and it's always in front of people. That's good because they don't have to go to another page to do it. Although, you can put it on a page and advertise it on the front page, but I *love* to see it in the top right hand widget in the sidebar is where your opt in should go. Truly, it is easy.

Now, someone who didn't give me their name, but that's okay, says "I want a blog that is search engine friendly, Web 2.0 compatible, can post photos and videos, and Add Sense ready. I hear different expressions, and I don't know how much they overlap (the Web 2.0, Add Sense, and SEO, as an example). I know that I need plug-ins and widgets besides the WordPress theme. How do I convey what I want to the WordPress expert, so that I get what I have in mind? And after it's installed, will a normal bright, non-techy be able to use it? Or will it be over my head?"

I'm going to answer your last question first. After you get everything set up, it's very easy for you to use. You do not need to be technically oriented to post on a WordPress blog. Someone else asked about TypePad being more user-friendly, and that's certainly not true. WordPress is very user friendly after everything is installed and up and running.

How do you convey what you want to the WordPress expert? The WordPress person should ask you, "What do you want to do with your blog? Do you want to put up audio? Do you want to put up video? Do you want social bookmarking capabilities (and if you don't know what that is, you ask, and your answer should probably be "yes, I do want that!")" The way that you convey it is to just say what you want to be able to do. Even if you don't know everything that you want to do right now, this minute, that stuff is all addable later.

Let's say that you say, "No, I'm never going to do video, oh my gosh I can't *stand* my voice." But then someone says to you, "Gosh, you have a great voice! You should put up some audio on your blog. Audio's the way to go!" And you say, "But I didn't arrange for that at first, so now I can't!" That's not true. Plug-ins can be added and deleted at any time. The best plug-in for audio and video is PodPress, and it can go up and be activated, and deactivated, and activated, and deleted, at will. So, you're never locked in to anything that you say, "Oh, I can't do this because I didn't plan for it at the beginning." You're never, ever locked into that.

I have one more question here, and I touched on it a little bit earlier. This is from Harriet, "Why should I use WordPress instead of TypePad? I don't have a blog yet, and I understand that TypePad is more user-friendly. I have a website that

specializes in employee moral leadership and confidence.”

TypePad is not more user-friendly, and it’s not your own. It’s hosted over at TypePad. You can’t get statistics very easily, you might be able to get a plug-in that will give you some statistics, but it’s not complete. It’s not as complete as if you look at your own hosting account’s statistics because there’s no plug-in that I know of, in fact, there’s no plug-in for statistics that I know of that actually works, that’s going to tell you:

- Where people came from?
- What keywords did they type into their search engine to find you?
- Where did they go in your site?
- How long were they on your site?
- What country do they come from?

That’s not critical, but I find it very fascinating; to look at my statistics and see all of the different countries in the world that people come from to visit my site. That’s just a little added attraction that I think is very fun, but no plug-in is going to give you that information. So, if you have a TypePad or a Blogger, or a WordPress.com blog, you’re also not going to get that information because that comes from your hosting company. That’s just another reason to have your own hosted blog.

Okay then, we’re going to wrap this up for today. I will send an email when the recording is up, and I know that I haven’t put up the transcript from last week, but I’ve been out of town and sick, but I promise that will get up. And this transcript will be up just as soon as I get it back, so I’d like to thank you all for joining me, and if you liked this sort of open, ask your question sort of format, let me know and well do it more often. So, thanks everybody for joining me, and as I always close, blog on and blog now! Bye everybody!