

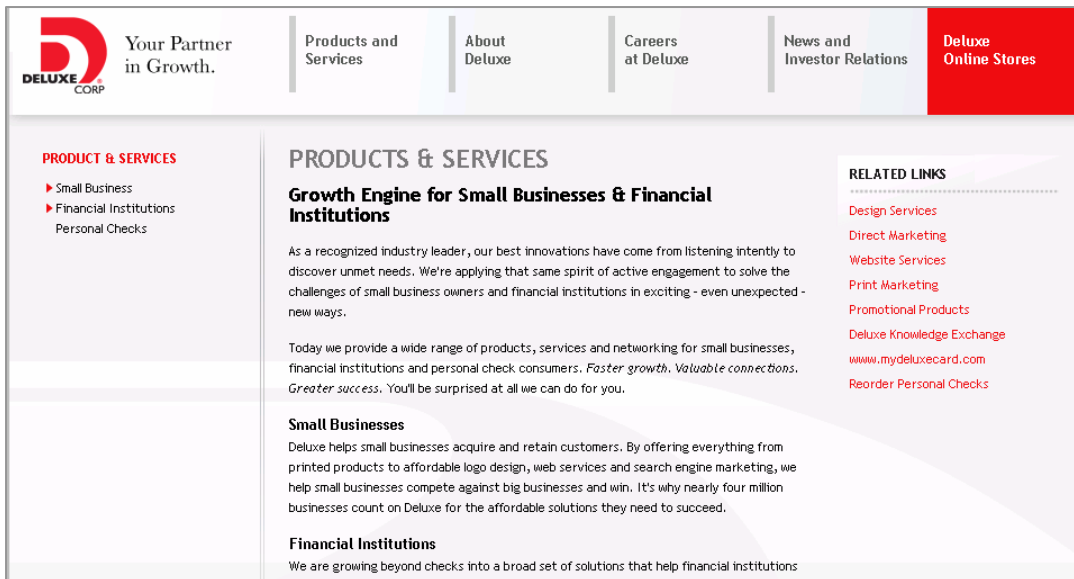
What is a blog? How is it different from a regular Web site?

Before you begin to consider a blog as a tool to generate traffic and improve your business, it is critical to understand the role that blogging plays on the Web and the difference between a blog and other kinds of Web sites.

First - a blog *is* a Web site – but it is a site that is designed for a specific purpose and therefore displays information in a special way.

While a typical Web site is focused on presenting *relatively* static information to help visitors understand how that company can meet their product and service needs, a blog is focused on presenting constantly new information, that helps the visitor understand how the blogger can meet their *information* needs. Blogs are generally information focused and as such are designed to present the most current and most popular information first.

Deluxe's Product/Service Web site: <http://www.deluxe.com>



The screenshot shows the Deluxe website's product and services page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Deluxe logo and tagline "Your Partner in Growth." followed by menu items: "Products and Services", "About Deluxe", "Careers at Deluxe", "News and Investor Relations", and "Deluxe Online Stores". The main content area is titled "PRODUCTS & SERVICES" and features a sidebar with a "PRODUCT & SERVICES" menu listing "Small Business", "Financial Institutions", and "Personal Checks". The main content is organized into sections: "Growth Engine for Small Businesses & Financial Institutions" with a descriptive paragraph, "Small Businesses" with a paragraph, and "Financial Institutions" with a paragraph. A "RELATED LINKS" section on the right lists various services like "Design Services", "Direct Marketing", "Website Services", "Print Marketing", "Promotional Products", "Deluxe Knowledge Exchange", "www.mydeluxecard.com", and "Reorder Personal Checks".

Deluxe's site provides all of the information a customer would want in order to understand what is offered and how to get it, and displays that information in the simplest way possible so that it is easy for the customer to find, read and understand. Note how the information on the site above is structured according to static topics that the visitor can learn to expect like "Small Business" or "Design Services". These pages will not change unless Deluxe updates its service offerings. On a product/service site generally as consumers we want to see a degree of consistent and static content.

On the other hand, take a look at Deluxe's small business blog:

Deluxe's Small Business Blog <http://deluxesmallbizblog.com>



Deluxe Small Business Blog

Home Events Calendar Library Resources Business Success Seminars

DELUXE FOR BUSINESS

Search [] Go >

July 9th, 2010


Local businesses use mobile search to generate new business

Small businesses often have a hard time competing with larger companies on the web, though that may not be the case in the mobile market. A new report from research firm **Compete** has found that local retailers could use mobile phones to drive new customers.

According to the survey, nearly 33 percent of smartphone owners have visited a local business after discovering it through a local search application. This was the case for nearly one-third of all Android and iPhone users, who went to at least two new places found via their phones in the first quarter of 2010.

"With the increasing popularity of local search, retailers should ensure their sites are optimized for mobile browsers," said Danielle Nohe, director of technology and entertainment for **Compete**. Nohe suggests that small businesses prominently advertise their locations on these apps to maximize the marketing potential of smartphones.

Besides search applications, many entrepreneurs are using mobile devices to reach on-the-go consumers with **email marketing** campaigns. Writing for **ClickZ**, marketing expert Derek Hardin expects cross-platform email initiatives between smartphones and traditional computers to become easier as mobile technology improves.

Posted by Nathan | 2 Comments >  ShareThis

July 9th, 2010

Apple's iAds please both developers and advertisers

Polls

Are you using social media for your business or do you plan to in 2010?

Using it currently

Not currently using it, but plan to in 2010

No plans to use social media

Vote

View Results

Categories

Automotive Marketing (20)	Branding (54)
Business Planning (16)	Business Success Secrets Seminars (6)
Competitor Analysis (1)	Cost Effective Marketing (26)
Customer Retention (29)	Email Marketing (67)
Ethical Marketing (8)	Events (6)
General Marketing (67)	Generating New Business (70)
Growco (6)	Healthcare Services Marketing (6)
Logo Design (7)	News (5)
Professional Services Marketing (3)	Retail Marketing (8)
Search Marketing (27)	Small Business Finance (2)
Small Business Marketing (35)	Small Business Networking (5)
Social Media Marketing (85)	Start up Marketing (4)
Uncategorized (3)	Video (3)
Web Design (17)	

Twitter

RT @maishawalker: Maisha Walker's Blogging 101 - free Webinar generously sponsored by Deluxe Corp! This Tuesday at 2pm. <http://ow.ly/29qIM> 1 hr ago

Great article from the Chicago Tribune "Small businesses learn to use social media to connect with customers" <http://bit.ly/cJPWFH> 2 hrs ago

Local businesses use mobile search to generate new business <http://bit.ly/cZB3hG> 3 hrs ago

Tickets for #smbmsp 28 on 7/23 (social media for small business) are running low! Get yours before they are gone! <http://bit.ly/bUq2f1> 3 hrs ago

Here Deluxe provides a very different structure. Each post may or may not be related to a product Deluxe provides, but the content is valuable to the reader either way. Notice the longer list of categories on the right side – this is typical of blogs. These categories can grow and change at any time. The home page of the blog is also designed to display not something static but the most recent post on the site. Blogs are designed to help readers find the most current information and then research through archives for additional depth on a topic. Notice this blog is also highly interactive - encouraging connection through social media sites, encouraging an information exchange through polls and comments, and even identifying the author of the post. This is a **completely** different approach but is exemplary of how a blog works.

In the way they share information while also encouraging interaction, Blogs are like a cross between a newspaper and a town square. As consumers become more used to blogs, we will start to see the lines that define blogs blur more and more.

How can a blog support my business?

Understanding how a blog can support and drive business for you, begins with understanding what kind of business you have and how that business should be presented online. From the perspective of how your business generates revenue there are basically 4 kinds of Web sites:

1. Branding
2. Advertising Revenue
3. Leads Generating
4. eCommerce or Direct Sales Revenue

Your business probably fits into one or more of these categories and how you market your business (both online and offline) should start with this definition.

The 4 Web Site Types			
Branding	Advertising Revenue	Lead Generation	eCommerce
<u>Coca Cola</u>	<u>Inc. Magazine</u>	<u>message medium</u>	<u>Amazon</u>
<u>Seth Godin</u>	<u>Prologger</u>	<u>Razorfish</u>	<u>Zappos</u>

If desired, a blog can be used as a strategy for any one of these businesses by helping to drive traffic, carve out a brand, set you apart from your competitors, give people a much, much deeper understanding of what your areas of expertise and interest are, and help you stay in touch with your customers, potential customers and supporters on a regular basis – and this can all be done at a cost that is far lower than other techniques.

Here are some examples.

- **Branding blog: Seth Godin** I'm not privy to Seth Godin's finances, but I'm willing to bet that a lot of his revenue comes from the 12 best-selling books he has written. Not his blog, his books. But so much of what sells his books is their "Seth-ness". Seth has done a great job of building a powerful brand and his blog does a great job of reminding everyone of that brand with every post.
- **Advertising Revenue blog: Prologger** is the most popular resource for professional bloggers. In addition to being a great resource it is designed to fit

within the business model of generating revenue through advertising. The more traffic to the blog, the more revenue it generates.

- **Lead Generation blog: "The Internet Strategist"** my blog does double-duty! In addition to generating revenue for Inc. it helps you the reader understand my areas of expertise as an Internet Strategist, which my company message medium hopes will help us generate more clients and customers.
- **eCommerce blog: Zappos** the quirky, entertaining Zappos.com blogs generate brand loyalty and presumably boost sales. Look at the Zappos example of site vs. blog. Can you point out the major differences?





What are the real payoffs? Why is blogging so popular?

With a single tactic, blogging can help you generate many benefits that are highly useful to small businesses including:

- Creating Intimacy, Establishing Credibility and Building Community around your brand
- Networking & a Consistent Presence
- Customer Loyalty & Customer Service
- Differentiation & Helping Customers Self-identify with Testimonials & Examples
- "Google-able", Reusable, Link-attracting Content
- Advertising Revenue
- Market Research

If you'd like to learn more about each of these, they are all outlined in depth here:

http://www.inc.com/maisha-walker/2009/10/bloggings_11_big_payoffs.html

and here:

<http://www.inc.com/maisha-walker/2009/10/bloggings-11-big-payoffs-pt-2.html>

But the really big payoff which many of these items come back to is a consistent presence.

So much of marketing, whether online or offline, is just making sure the right people know you exist. For small businesses this can be a real challenge as you try to build buzz while managing the time and financial resources available to you.

Blogging is a great way to show off what makes you unique, to a captive audience who may only be waiting for the right incentive to buy from you. It's amazing what happens when you're just in front of people **all the time** with something interesting and relevant to say.

But in order to take advantage of this you must do something extremely important – you must consistently market your blog. Not understanding the importance of this point is where many business stumble.

What are the real investments? What makes blogging hard?

The two biggest challenges bloggers face are spending time wisely and having the right tools.

Time for Content: in order for blogging to be worthwhile you need to do it on a regular basis, and that means thinking of things to blog about. Popular kinds of content to blog about include:

- Company news
- Industry news & opinion
- Tips and Suggestions
- Tutorials
- Case studies
- Customer testimonials
- Event Recaps

While coming up with content may be a challenge, businesses often have stores of content like the above that could be repurposed, redistributed and leveraged through a blog.

Time for Marketing: not only must time be spent to write the content of your blog but also to market it. Some bloggers spend more time writing than marketing!

Marketing is a critical element of your blog's success and deserves it's own focus. You should consider marketing in key places as often as time and etiquette allow. Some of the best ways to create new blog readers and get readers to come back include:

- Link Building
- Syndication
- SEO
- Good Design
- Regular Posting
- Online PR
- Mass Emails
- RSS Feeds
- Internal Linking

I've gone into detail on all of these ways to market your blog here:

http://www.inc.com/Maisha-Walker/2010/01/13_proven_techniques_to_attrac.html

and here:

<http://www.inc.com/Maisha-Walker/2010/01/drive-blog-loyalty-how-to-get.html>

The Right Tools: you want to build your blog from a solid platform. There are many ways you can construct a blog including both completely free tools and tools that have a cost associated with them.

Choose Your Blogging Software	
Free	Self-hosted
No Cost	Monthly Hosting Cost
No Software Maintenance	Software Maintenance Cost
Limited Designs	Full Design Control
Limited Plugins	Full Plugin Control
Cannot Sell Ads	Can Generate Ad Revenue
Limited Ownership	Full Control/Ownership
Limited Customer Service	Paid Customer Service
Shared Branding	Only Your Brand

If you're going to blog seriously and/or you want to build a blog for your company, the free blogging sites may not be the way to go since they present some significant limitations. You want a degree of control over your design, features, functionality and content that is hard to get from the free sites. This is explained in great detail here: http://blog.inc.com/e-commerce/2009/10/build_your_blog.html.

Depending on how technical you are (or want to be!) you may need help setting up your blogging software. It is also important to note that switching between blogging software (including from free to self-hosted) can present problems in creating broken links to your posts since each tool has it's own way of constructing URLs. With the help of a programmer you can sometimes remedy this, but it's much simpler to choose one and stick with it.

Manage your own expectations

Blogging is a marathon tactic – not a high speed sprint. You should anticipate spending a few lonely months writing content that gets little to no traffic, comments or feedback

unless you already have a large audience of people to promote it to and/or you're writing about a topic that people are very passionate about but don't yet have anywhere to go to read about it. Expect to spend at least 1 year of consistent posting at least once per month (better once per week) building your blog to a place where you get regular comments and traffic (beyond friends and family!).

Understanding that timing, sometimes a business needs faster results. If that's the case, blogging may not be your immediate solution, but it may still be worth a look as a longer term strategy that you start on now and reap the rewards from later.

What about generating advertising revenue from my blog?

One area we really haven't touched on is using your blog to generate advertising revenue. While this can be very lucrative, it is also very elusive. According to Technorati's State of the Blogosphere 2008, 50% of the bloggers surveyed earned less than \$200 per year from their blog (yes, that's two **hundred** dollars per **year**). The top 10% earned an average of \$19,000. You usually need tens or hundreds of thousands of page views or visitors per month before making significant revenue from your blog. It can take several years before you see these results, but the payoff is that for bloggers who had at least 100,000 unique visitors (that's a lot by the way; many small business sites we've seen get about 300-1,000 unique visitors per month), the average income was \$75,000.

Follow Up – Additional Blogging Resources

Here are places to get more information as you consider whether or not you're going to blog and if so, what your blogging strategy will be.

Download this *Blogging 101* White Paper

<http://www.messagemedium.com/deluxe>

To Blog or Not to Blog

<http://www.inc.com/maisha-walker/2009/09/to-blog-or-not-to-blog.html>

10 Step Guide to Blogging

<http://www.inc.com/guides/10-step-guide-to-blogging.html>

Prologger

<http://www.prologger.net>

Copylogger

<http://www.copylogger.org>

About the Author

Maisha Walker created and authors *Inc.* magazine's most popular blog - [The Internet Strategist](#). She was able to grow it into the highest traffic generating blog for *Inc.* in just 1 year. Maisha is also the Founder and President of message medium a New York

Internet marketing firm that works with small businesses to help them create custom online brands.

With a career that began in programming at 9 years old, and since college has included both marketing and finance, Maisha has invested the last 13 years as an Internet strategist, providing guidance to thousands of small businesses through her company, message medium, as well as through her blog at *Inc.* magazine, articles in Entrepreneur and Business Week, and both live and virtual classes. Recently, she authored the book, *Web Site Fundamentals for Entrepreneurs*.

A Princeton graduate and an eternal student of the Web, Maisha brings a wealth of knowledge and delivers it, thankfully, in a language we can all understand!

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