



# the value of blogging.





## HOW IS BLOGGING GONNA MAKE ME MONEY?

It's the quintessential question of business owners, marketers, and aspiring freelancers around the world. We would suggest asking [Seth](#), [Neil](#), or [Ree](#), but they probably don't have time to answer with anything other than proof.

(Go ahead. Click the links. Read their stuff. They're pretty famous in the blogosphere.)



## **PEOPLE MAKE MONEY ON BLOGS.**

People notice that companies have blogs. People read blogs. But when it comes to a company investing time and resources into creating blogs, the questions fly. Most center around a central theme: “How does blogging get me more sales?” The folks who ask that question are what we call “bottom liners”, and they have a point, misinformed though it may be.

Marketers of the past wanted a direct connection between a tactic and a sale. They wanted to be able to draw a straight line between someone seeing an infomercial and that same person making a phone call, between a coupon in the Sunday paper and an increased number of people in the store requesting the discounted product. In some ways it was easier to track ROI in those days.

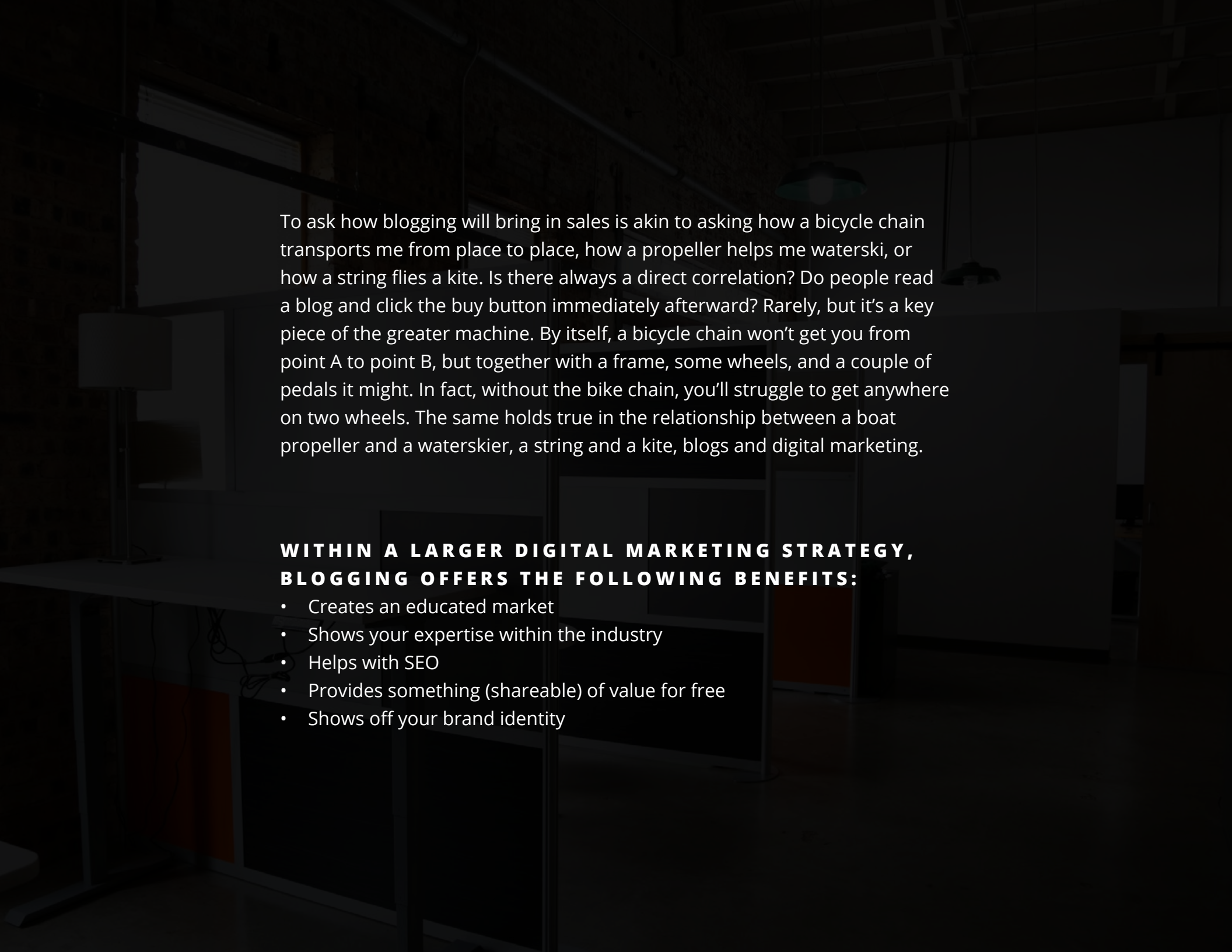


## **TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MARKETING HAS MORE LAYERS.**

You've probably heard it referred to as having "an omni-channel presence". At first glance, those channels may appear to be TV, radio, print, and the Internet. Anyone who has been around marketing longer than it takes grass to grow could tell you that each of those channels has layers of its own, especially online marketing (which we'll call digital marketing for the remainder of this post because it's the proper industry speak, and I'm nothing if not a professional).

Think of all the ways and places you see marketing online. It's on social media, in email, within search engine results, in affiliate links, and in the paid ads that follow you around the Internet. Anywhere there's content, there's an opportunity to market. Blogging is content, so it's part of the marketing landscape. More than just being on the landscape, blogging is an essential part of the digital marketing machine.

**blogging is an  
essential part of a  
digital marketing  
machine.**



To ask how blogging will bring in sales is akin to asking how a bicycle chain transports me from place to place, how a propeller helps me waterski, or how a string flies a kite. Is there always a direct correlation? Do people read a blog and click the buy button immediately afterward? Rarely, but it's a key piece of the greater machine. By itself, a bicycle chain won't get you from point A to point B, but together with a frame, some wheels, and a couple of pedals it might. In fact, without the bike chain, you'll struggle to get anywhere on two wheels. The same holds true in the relationship between a boat propeller and a waterskier, a string and a kite, blogs and digital marketing.

**WITHIN A LARGER DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY,  
BLOGGING OFFERS THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS:**

- Creates an educated market
- Shows your expertise within the industry
- Helps with SEO
- Provides something (shareable) of value for free
- Shows off your brand identity





## **CREATE AN EDUCATED MARKET.**

### **A BIG PART OF SALES IS EDUCATION:**

- Educating customers on your product
- Helping them distinguish your stuff from your competitors' stuff
- Proving how your product or services will meet their current need and make their life better

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Any information your sales staff would present on the showroom floor is information online shoppers need in order to help them make an educated purchasing decision. Put it in a blog post or a series of blog posts. Meet them where they are doing the research and educate them. Tell them about the latest industry advances, the newest trends, and ground-breaking discoveries. When you focus on educating your market, they'll begin to view you as an expert. That sets you apart from the competition in all the right ways.

For example, let's say you own a mattress company. Your target market needs to know that not everybody sleeps in the same position. As a result, not every mattress is

manufactured in the same way. Some consist of wrapped coils, some are foam, and some have pillow tops. Mattresses have different levels of firmness that contribute to a better night's sleep in more ways than the initial feeling of comfort. All of this information and how it pertains to specific customers is vital to folks shopping for a new mattress. Which store would you be more likely to visit? The one that educates you about such matters on their website, or the one that just shows pictures and basic product descriptions? If shoppers want the best mattress for their specific needs, and they recognize from your blog that you know the nuances to help them find that particular mattress, you've won a loyal customer.





## **SHOW YOUR EXPERTISE IN THE INDUSTRY.**

*"But how can I be sure the people who visit my website  
will actually read my blog?"*

That's a valid question. What if we flipped it? People who read your blog are already on your website.

That's not just word play. Keep reading.

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What if, when people asked Google a question, Google cited you as the expert with the answer by putting a link to your blog post on the first page of search results? People click the link to read the post and find themselves on your site. In their mind, you're an expert in the field so they're reading what you have to say. And now they're on your website, too. With some well placed and applicable calls to action in the body of the blog, you're well on your way to acquiring a qualified lead. That's the power of blogging.

Maybe it doesn't happen that fast. Maybe they ask Google a few different questions over the course of a few weeks. If you've

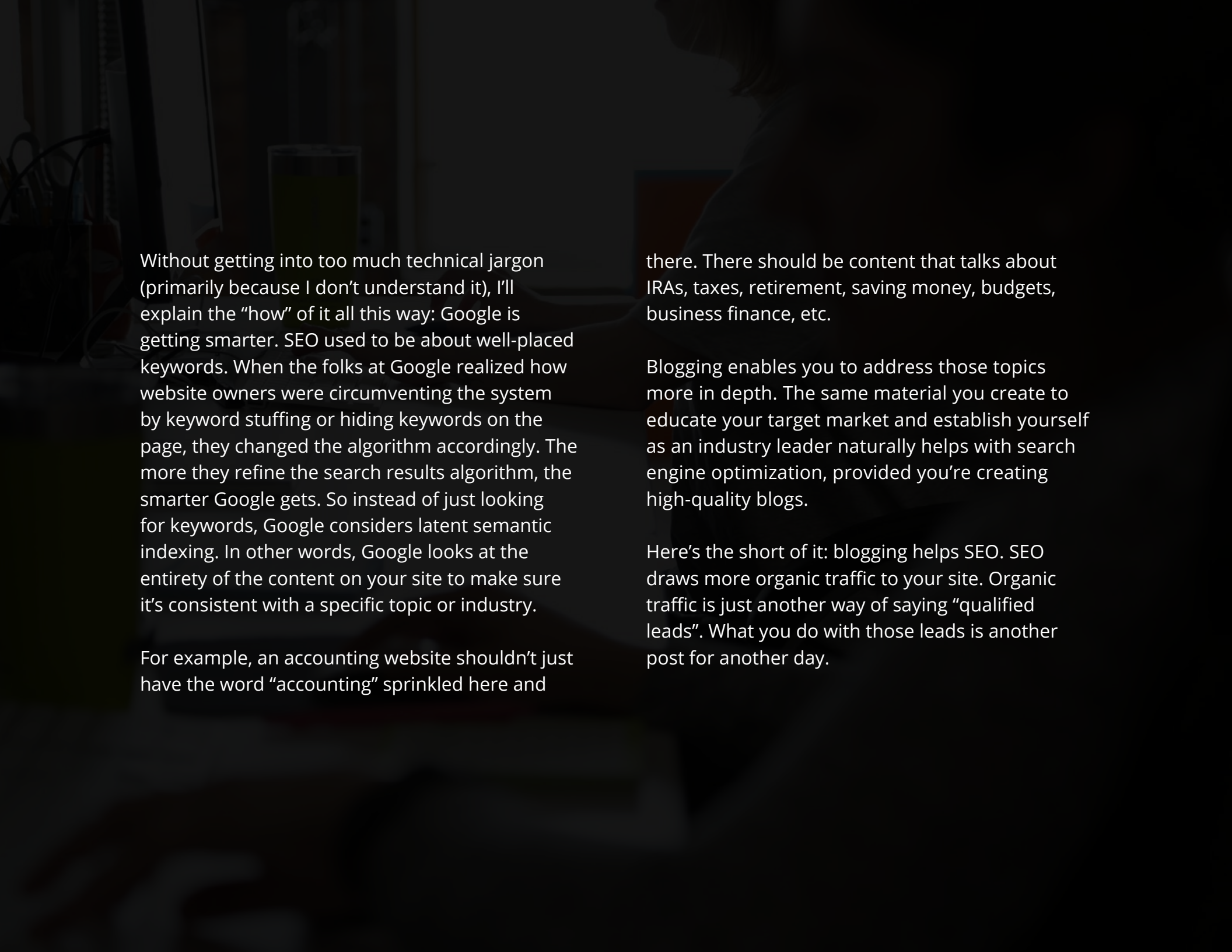
written blogs that answer their questions, they'll begin to recognize you as a leader in the industry and as someone who can educate them (see the previous section). Being seen as knowledgeable and helpful in any industry can only benefit your company's reputation.

Sometimes expertise generates leads and sometimes it raises brand awareness. In either case, blogging benefits an overall marketing strategy.



## **HELP WITH SEO.**

Search engine optimization (SEO) is essentially doing all you can on your site to make Google recognize you and find you relevant enough to display in search results. Blogging helps by giving you a platform to add fresh content regularly and by giving you the opportunity to show Google that you know what you're talking about.



Without getting into too much technical jargon (primarily because I don't understand it), I'll explain the "how" of it all this way: Google is getting smarter. SEO used to be about well-placed keywords. When the folks at Google realized how website owners were circumventing the system by keyword stuffing or hiding keywords on the page, they changed the algorithm accordingly. The more they refine the search results algorithm, the smarter Google gets. So instead of just looking for keywords, Google considers latent semantic indexing. In other words, Google looks at the entirety of the content on your site to make sure it's consistent with a specific topic or industry.

For example, an accounting website shouldn't just have the word "accounting" sprinkled here and

there. There should be content that talks about IRAs, taxes, retirement, saving money, budgets, business finance, etc.

Blogging enables you to address those topics more in depth. The same material you create to educate your target market and establish yourself as an industry leader naturally helps with search engine optimization, provided you're creating high-quality blogs.

Here's the short of it: blogging helps SEO. SEO draws more organic traffic to your site. Organic traffic is just another way of saying "qualified leads". What you do with those leads is another post for another day.





## **PROVIDE VALUE FOR FREE.**


In all of these efforts, you're providing something of value to clients and potential clients at no cost to them. It may seem counterintuitive, but if it establishes you as an authority in people's eyes, it's worth it. If it makes you top of mind when they think about your industry, even better.

When people get something they deem valuable for free, they are more likely to share that information with friends, family, and colleagues. Suddenly your blog post becomes a grassroots marketing effort headed by people you've never met.

**THAT'S THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA.**

**THAT'S HOW YOU GO VIRAL.**

**THAT'S WHY YOU PRODUCE BLOGS.**



If Facebook has taught us anything it's that people like to be the first to share news (even if they can't identify the source or verify it as true). The same can be said of quality content. Endorphins elevate when Facebook friends thank you for sharing a valuable piece of information. The more you provide sharable material for free, the more your social media followers get to experience those endorphins and the more loyal they become.

It's not brainwashing, though.

They're doing all the work. You just write stuff.



## SHOW OFF YOUR BRAND IDENTITY.

For many companies, the products themselves distinguish one business from their competitors. What happens when the products or services you sell are identical to those of your competitors? Take a car dealership, for example.

Any manufacturer's dealership offers the same brand, the same models, the same options, and the same features as another manufacturer's dealership. Other than location, how does one set itself apart from another?

Enter blogging. Blogs enable a dealership to present their identity, their company personality. The tone of the blogs, the content of the blogs, the fact that they're blogging... all identify the blogging dealership as unique from other dealerships with the same products.

This is true even if you're not selling cars. Blogs about your [company culture](#), the behind-the-scenes workings of your company, the victories and celebrations of your employees, as well as the tone of your educational content establish your company identity. They essentially introduce you to the world and show off your style. Like a tattoo or a wardrobe choice, a blog is a distinguishing feature that represents your personality.

**| outsource your  
blogging efforts.**





**work to live** > live to work

The argument brewing in your head for the past few paragraphs probably sounds a little like this: “That’s all well and good, but I don’t have time to do the stuff I’m already doing. How in the love of mother’s milk am I gonna have time to blog?”

It’s a valid argument, but only to a point. Here’s why: You can either outsource blogging or use content you’re already creating (unaware).

## FIRST, LET'S TALK ABOUT OUTSOURCING.

You can save time by having somebody else create blog posts at a fraction of the cost of hiring a new employee. That's the good news.

The bad news is that you sometimes get what you pay for. Here's what you don't want when hiring a freelance blogger:

- Someone who is proud of their ability to "spin" articles. It's unethical. It borders on plagiarism. Google frowns upon it. It's not the quality post you need in order to get the best value from a blog.
- Someone whose English skills reveal that it's not their native language. While there are individuals who speak and write multiple languages fluently, not everyone who says they are proficient in the language actually is. English is a complicated language with tons of nuance that

can easily be missed by someone telecommuting from another country. Since the blog represents your brand, you want the language, grammar, and spelling on the blog to be flawless.

- Someone who spends more time writing fluff than researching the topic. Word counts are a guide to how long something should be, not the holy grail of magic word numbers. When writers add unnecessary phrases that don't say anything of value, they're focused on the word count that will get them a paycheck, not the value of the content to future readers. Read samples of their previous work to get a better idea of the depth of the research they're willing to do.
- Someone who is unwilling to become familiar with your industry. Rarely will you find a writer who is an expert in your industry. That's the proverbial needle in a haystack. However,

many writers enjoy researching and learning about new things. Eager learners are a better bet than professional manure shovelers.

*Side note: you don't have to use an independent freelancer. There are agencies that employ copywriters who write on behalf of companies professionally and have been tried and tested by both the agency and their clients. (Ahem. Not to toot our own horn, but... )*

"But an agency is too expensive," you counter. More often than not you can hire an entire agency for less than the cost of hiring just one additional employee. (And agencies don't ask about the benefit plan.)



## USE CONTENT YOU ALREADY HAVE

Still not convinced outsourcing will work for you? Okay. Let's consider viable content you may already be creating without even knowing it.

Do you speak at seminars? Set up a video camera in the back of the room and post snippets of your talk as video blogs. (That's right! Blogs don't have to be text only.) Share the presentation slides. Use the promotional summary you wrote for marketing materials as the starting point for a blog post.

Do you find yourself answering certain questions from clients or customers repeatedly? The next time you type out the email response, copy and paste it into a blog. If one customer is asking, others probably are, too. Save yourself a couple of phone conversations, post the answer on your blog, and share the link. Ask your employees to do the same for questions they answer and you've got an entire FAQ series.

Have you dictated or typed a letter to a potential customer detailing the services you offer and how they'll be of benefit? That's a great blog post.


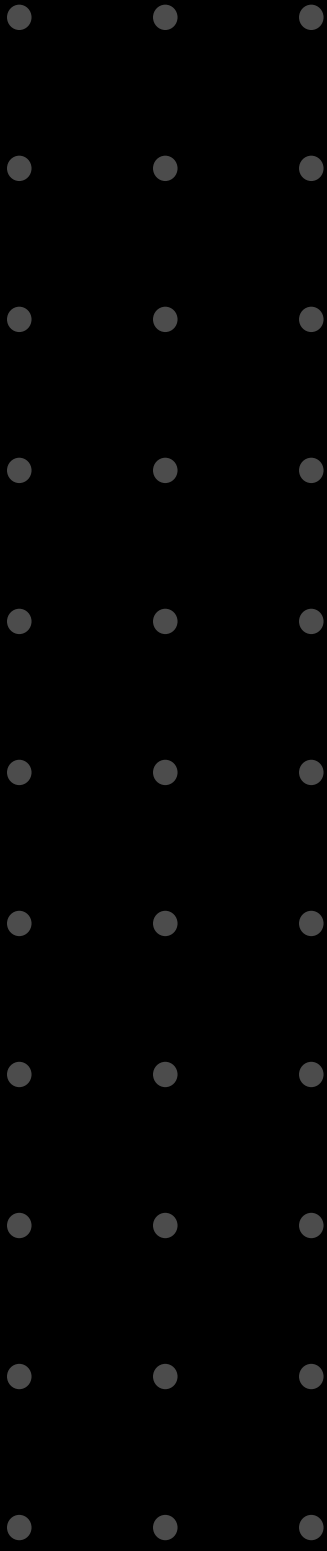
Look at old brochures, training notes, and sales material for additional copy.

See? You're already creating content. You just didn't think about repurposing it on a blog.

Now you know.

**| how ardent  
creative does it.**





As a digital marketing agency, Ardent creates blogs for multiple companies. Doing so has enabled us to refine our blog creation process. Since you've read this far, we like you, so we'll share this unique process with you.

The first step to writing on behalf of someone else is to get to know the company (or person) you'll be representing. Some of the research we do on our own, and some involves having a conversation with the client. Before talking to the client, we read through their current website and ask to read any print collateral that may exist. This tells us more about the products they sell and the industry they're in.

From there we employ a tool called Google. Thinking like a potential customer, we type a question or a product into the search bar to see what shows up on the first page. That tells us a little more about the industry and where our client fits within it.

When we meet with the client in person, we ask about the history of the company, who the top competitors are, current company goals, and what makes the company unique within the industry. This conversation not only provides valuable information, but it also tells us something about the values and voice of the brand itself. Verbal communication, person-to-person, provides intangible information writers use (sometimes unaware) to represent the company.

For example, some of the intangible information revealed in those conversations can be understood by answering the following questions:

- Did the client use humor to tell the company story or industry jargon and professional seriousness?
- Did they tell stories or cite data?
- Did they speak of the customer with compassion and respect or annoyance and condescension?
- Did they show up in a coat and tie or a t-shirt and shorts?
- Were they long-winded or short and succinct in their answers?
- Did the answers come easily and with confidence, or did they seem to be making them up on the spot?

Obviously, these questions represent extremes, but you get the idea.



## DEFINE THE TARGET MARKET

Also in the context of our conversation with the client, we ask them to help us identify the target market. This will become the audience for our blog posts, so it's important to get it right. Usually the questions include:

- What do your current customers all have in common?
- Who would you say qualifies as the ideal client? What makes them ideal?
- What pain points are your potential customers experiencing?
- How do potential customers find you?
- Have you created a buyer persona you're willing to share with us?

The answers to these questions help us determine the demographic(s) of people our digital marketing should aim to reach and it helps us know better when to find them online. For instance, interior designers are more likely to be on Pinterest than commercial properties needing pest control would. Someone shopping for medical equipment would be more likely to read scholarly journal articles than someone shopping for NASCAR tickets.

Target markets are groups of people who share a pain point (the need for a specific product) plus something else (a demographic or shared interest) in common.




## **DISCOVER OR CREATE BRAND VOICE**

Once we have a better understanding of the brand (or agree with the client to do a brand audit), we can move forward and discover or create a brand voice. The brand voice is (or will be) the underlying tone of all messaging, including the blog posts.

Think of the brand voice as the narrator who tells the story of the company. In a movie, the narrator's tone matches the overall tone of the movie. For example, a movie narrated by Morgan Freeman (Oprah) is likely going to be more serious and somber than a movie narrated by Tina Fey (Ricky Gervais).

The brand voice provides a cohesiveness to the overall brand strategy and should be remembered when writing blogs. For companies with an established brand voice, Ardent strives to understand the tone well enough to hone a believable imitation.





By way of an example, think about what you've read from Ardent. Our brand voice goal is "snark without crossing the line". Obviously not everything we say can be sassy or tongue-in-cheek or nobody would take us seriously as professionals, but when we have the opportunity to add some humor or push the envelope, we take it.

Other brand voices we've employed for clients include:

- Scholarly
- Corporate
- Easy-going
- Elite
- Compassionate
- Friendly
- Authoritative
- Laid-back but adventurous

Once we've determined the voice, we work hard to keep it consistent across all platforms and in all media, including blogs. To ensure this happens for our brand audit clients, we create a Brand User Guide to set standards for our agency and their organization to adhere to.



## **BRAINSTORM BROAD TOPICS AND CONTENT IDEAS**

Only after we've gathered all the information about the company, the industry, and the target market can we brainstorm ideas about topics and titles for blog posts. Otherwise we're spinning our wheels and spitting in the wind, with no real direction and a mess on our face.

## **BROAD TOPICS**

We start by brainstorming broad topics before narrowing down to specific titles. Broad topics include general topics related directly or indirectly to the industry. For example, for a local wedding venue, the broad topics we came up with included outdoor weddings and Texas weddings. For a local furniture store, the broad topics included interior design, rugs, and Fort Worth living. For a local non-profit, the broad topics included volunteerism, donating, and education. Our goal is to create a list of 10 broad topics per client.

## **CONTENT IDEAS (A.K.A. TITLES)**

The next step is to take each of those broad topics and come up with 10

possible blog titles that fall under each topic. (That's right, math wizards, at the end of the process we should have 100 potential blog post ideas.) A quick way to create blog titles is to finish some (or all) of these starter phrases:

- 10 Tips for...
- What if...?
- How to...
- What is...?

You could also do series related to...

Frequently asked questions

- Comparison tests demonstrating what makes this product superior
- Counterarguments (combating excuses people offer for not buying the product)
- What you wish clients knew

Finally, ask yourself what information a mentor might offer a potential

customer to help them make the right decision. Those pieces of information could one day become blog posts.

## **BLOG POST MEDIUMS**


It should be noted that not all blog posts have to be created by stringing together a series of words. Like we mentioned above in the "Use Content You Already Have" section, you can use videos, slideshows, or lists as well.



## RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW

Yep. Research is the first and the last thing we do before writing blogs. At the stage, we're doing the actual research for specific posts. When using Google for research, we recommend the following best practices:

- Consider the source. Do your best to stick to names well known to business as a whole or to the specific industry you're researching. There's a lot of crap out there. Stay away from it or your blog post will stink.
- Dates matter. Depending on the industry and the information, some of your research will return outdated results. For example, if you're researching digital marketing and the article you find is dated 2012, there's a good chance most of that information is obsolete.
- Take advantage of cross-referencing opportunities. Good articles cite other sources. Those sources are clues to discovering pools of valuable information. Side note: use Wikipedia sparingly. It's most helpful for finding links to other sources.



Google comes in handy, but what we've found to be even more effective is conducting interviews. It's become part of the Ardent process to interview the client about content ideas. After all, our clients are the experts in their field. In the course of those interviews, sometimes they'll refer us to an employee or another industry expert they know who is able to share more information with us. This first hand knowledge helps us hone the research we do on Google in such a way that we become fluent in the industry language.

It's also been helpful to interview our clients' customers. Often times their stories about the product make great blog posts. Everybody loves a "feel good" story. If you can write a "feel good" story that sheds light on the legitimacy of the product and company, then it's a win for everyone, including the reader.



## **A BRIEF CASE STUDY**

Here's one final example to illustrate what we mean before you head off to write your own series of blog posts.

One of our clients is a management company that owns a significant bit of downtown property. The property is leased to merchants and is a center for community events and entertainment. We wanted the blog posts to do more than sell stuff. The goal was to increase physical traffic and brick and mortar sales for the merchants, thereby increasing demand for the properties offered by the management company.

We wanted local residents to get to know the company as well as the merchants who lease from them, so we interviewed the merchants. One by one, we released blog posts telling the story behind the merchants' downtown businesses, introducing folks to the faces behind the brands. Everybody loved them. Additionally, we wrote blogs about upcoming events. Instead of just posting the pertinent event details like date, time, and location, we focused on the people (artists, organizers, past participants, etc.) to tell the story.

Your blogs should be well-researched and present valuable information, but they don't have to read like research papers. In fact, more people will read them if they don't.

A decorative grid of 30 small, light gray dots arranged in 10 rows and 3 columns on the left side of the slide.

**Bloggging is  
extremely valuable,  
but it takes time  
and energy.**

**ARE YOU WILLING TO MAKE THE INVESTMENT?**

