

Creating a blog

Want to get more traffic for your business website? Helen Kaut explains what you need to create your own attention grabbing blog

The word blog is short for 'web log' and is used as an online journal. A blog can boost your business profile, help you connect with your potential customers and fellow artists and build links to your own website. If you don't have a website you can even sell directly from your blog by adding a Paypal button. The key to a well-written and popular blog is an appealing layout and quality content.

Getting started

First you need to choose a name for your blog and a publication platform to run it on. Most publishing platforms come as a web application that you can install on your web site, enabling you to create your content via a content management system (cms) directly through your browser so you don't need to know html or be a technical guru. If you don't have your own web hosting, there are alternative platforms which offer a complete service. Blogger.com is free and you can register via Google, while Typepad.com offers a free 14-day trial but is not free and offers three different price points. And then there is WordPress.org, while you can download this application free of charge you would need an independent web host for it or let WordPress.com host it for you. My own blog 'Helen's Paws for Thought' is linked to my journalism website, because it originally started out this way, and the application I use to maintain and write it is WordPress.

Choosing your layout

Once you have downloaded your blog application you want to choose a 'theme' for your blog, which is essentially the layout. Though WordPress comes with a default theme there are loads of free themes to choose from. I chose a theme called Graphene, because it is customisable and lets you add your own logo or images in the banner and background. Play around and preview several themes until you are happy with one. I recommend choosing a theme that is easy to read and avoid a white font on dark background.



Adding pages and content

Every blog has a page function and an About page is a good way of introducing yourself and your blog to your reader. You can change and update it if you wish, but this is the page which usually won't change.

There are plenty of things you can write about and I recommend that you take photos as often as possible to document what you are working on. You could also upload videos on YouTube and embed them into your blog.

Here are some ideas for your blog: your latest bead stash that just arrived in the post, new tools you just bought, your work bench or desk, the making of a piece of jewellery, a fair you attended with your own stall and new items ready to go on your website. You could also encourage readers by offering a contest. Or review a jewellery kit you just bought and want to recommend.

I don't just write about my own jewellery, but also about other crafters and jewellery designers whose work I like. I feature them with a long interview and plenty of images which link directly to their websites. If you find blogging about jewellery not enough and want a bit more variety – why not include other areas of interest you care about. My blog also features animal welfare issues and organisations, cats, especially our cat Bobby, comedy, TV programmes and books I am reading. This means I can vary my posts and keep myself motivated to post regularly. Make sure your posts are not too long, have enough space and paragraphs, are free of typos and spelling errors.

Adding images

Images should be clear, in focus and small in resolution (dpi) as big images take a long time to upload. Some cameras have a re-sizing function,

while photo editing programmes like Paint Shop Pro also help you to resize your images. Even if you don't resize them yourself, WordPress will upload them and you can choose how big you want them on your blog. If you are worried about copyright, you should consider watermarking your images. I also use the plugin WP-Protect which prevents people from dragging images, selecting text and right clicking.

Interacting with your readers

When people comment on your blog, you should whenever possible respond to them. If you want to grow your readership it is good practice to follow other people's blogs and leave comments. Interaction is the key. I am part of NetworkedBlogs which encourages others to find your blog and recommends blogs you might want to follow. You can install the NetworkedBlogs widget on your blog which enables visitors to click and follow you. Another good way to build links is also to write a guest blog on someone else's blog and allow others to write a post on yours.

resources

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