

What Is a Grande Guide?

You know what the typical day is like for marketers. Between brainstorming and strategy sessions, last-minute requests and impromptu meetings, and trips to meet customers, you can barely find time to breathe—never mind keep up with the latest marketing trends. That's why Oracle Eloqua developed the Grande Guide series. The Grande Guides were developed to give you the opportunity to become proficient in a key marketing topic—in this case, B2B Blogging—with a minimal investment in time.

Let's turn to the often praised but poorly understood strategy of B2B blogging. And we brought in the expert. [Mark Schaefer](#) is the author of *The Tao of Twitter* and the recent *Return On Influence*, a faculty member at Rutgers University, and commentator who has appeared in *The New York Times*, CBS This Morning, *INC Magazine*, MSNBC, and *BusinessWeek* to name a few.

He also runs the blog [{grow}](#), which has emerged as a must-read, go-to blog for all kinds of marketers—especially B2B marketers. Mark shares his secrets to B2B blogging, and how your business can use blogs to drive awareness and demand.

What's the Difference Between B2C and B2B Blogging?

Building a B2B blog is very different from blogs that are geared toward consumers. Understanding the needs of these two very different audiences will help your company build a blog that's right for your stakeholders.

Not surprisingly, the goal of a consumer-facing blog is to drive the sale of products or brand awareness. They work in much shorter sales cycles where emotions often guide the buying decision.

B2B blogs have a uniquely different set of challenges and attributes: they're relationship-driven, deal with much longer sales cycles and focus on long-term ROI. Blogs are a top-ranked source for information in the B2B world.

39% of B2B marketers say:
Blog posts are their most valuable content asset.

55% of B2B professionals say:
They turn to blogs for business information.

Your customers are hungry for information. A blog is a great way to deliver. Also, because the sales cycle is much longer and more relationship-focused for B2B companies, a blog offers a great way to nurture prospects and lead them down the path to making a purchase.

These are the same things your sales team does each and every day. And now, you can supplement and support this activity with a blog.

Why Should My Business Care About Blogging?

Although there are a lot of benefits to blogging, it all boils down to one thing ... making money for your business!

Believe it or not, blogging can play an important role in your company's sales and marketing efforts.

A well-crafted blog will help you to drive awareness of your brand and stand out among your competitors. And, once you capture the attention of your stakeholders, your blog offers an incredible opportunity for them to interact with you and your brand.

Continual interaction is a key to shortening lengthy sales cycles. The average B2B sales cycle can range **from 117 to 156 days**. You need to produce and share compelling content to keep buyers engaged over that time. At the same time, business leaders want content that helps them solve problems, but not in a way that overtly sells your product. 75 percent of business executives want solutions providers to "curb the sales messaging," **according to DemandGen Report**.

Bloggging offers an excellent way to demonstrate your brand's leadership, building trust over time through smart content rather than slogans and product pitches.

9 Big Benefits of B2B Blogging

A blog is a powerful weapon to have in your marketing arsenal. As you decide whether a blog is right for your company, it helps to understand some of the key benefits of building a blog or how to enhance the one you already have.

1 IMPROVE SEARCH RESULTS

Search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo reward sites that contain fresh, relevant content. By adding a blog to your website, you are increasing your ability to be “found” online. [Fresh content helps boost your ranking in search](#), and a blog is a terrific way to consistently publish new content.

2 DIFFERENTIATE YOUR BRAND

Do your competitors blog? If not, then this might be the best reason to start one! Blogging can help you stand out in your niche and establish yourself and your company as an industry expert.

3 EXTEND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

You might not be able to visit customers as frequently as you’d like, but a blog is an excellent way to provide a constant drip-drip-drip of communication to remind them of your products, services, and why you’re special. For those that don’t read your blog, re-purpose the blog content in customer newsletters and sales materials.

4 DRIVE SALES

Your blog offers prime real estate for (soft) selling. For instance, you can advertise products or services in your blog’s sidebar. You can also blog about how to use your product in new or different ways, or even feature customer success stories.

5 GENERATE LEADS

Featuring opt-in content on your blog is a fantastic way to turn readers into prospects. From there, you can [nurture your leads](#) down a path towards purchase. (We’ll discuss this in greater detail a little later.)

6 TEST IDEAS AND GET FEEDBACK

Many companies use blogs as a way to engage customers to solve problems and create new ideas. Sometimes, crowd sourcing ideas can even lead to new products or service lines.

7 GET MEDIA COVERAGE

Because blogging positions you as a thought leader, it offers the potential for reporters and media outlets to turn to you as a source for articles and stories. This rich content can generate massive reach for your brand.

8 COMMUNICATE DURING A CRISIS

A blog is a critical channel to explain the facts amid chaos. It offers a medium to distribute important information to your employees, key stakeholders and even the press as company responses on blogs are often quoted by mainstream news sources.

9 BUILD COMMUNITY

Although building an engaged community through a business blog can be extremely difficult, it is possible. If you do it right, your blog can become a conversation hub for your industry.

The Anatomy of a Perfect Blog Post

In addition to creating relevant, timely content, you need to pay attention to some of the mechanics around building a strong blog post:

WRITE A POWERFUL HEADLINE

Your title is the first thing people see in their blog readers, emails and on social media channels, and it may very well determine whether somebody reads your post. The goal is to grab attention to make people stop and read what you have to say. A good headline should be short and impactful.

INCLUDE VISUALS & MULTIMEDIA

Pictures, graphics and other visuals help draw readers in and make the page more appealing. Spend a little money on stock photography or search through [Flickr's creative commons](#).

KEEP IT SHORT AND TO THE POINT

Business people are pressed for time, so keep your articles brief—usually, less than 600 words. It also helps to use bullet points, lists, and sub-headings also help the reader digest your content.

MAKE IT SHAREABLE

If you want your content to spread, you need to make it easy for your readers to share your blog posts via email and the social networks they use most. Plus, social sharing icons offers the validation that your posts deserve to be read.



FIGURE 1. WHAT MAKES A PERFECT B2B BLOG POST?

How to Place a Guest Blog Post

Guest blogging gets your brand, thought leaders and voice in front of new communities and prospects. From a B2B perspective, it's one of the most valuable outcomes of a blogging strategy. Many people are unsure how to approach an influential blogger, though. When the proper approach is taken, securing a guest post becomes a much less daunting task. Here are 6 tactics for improving guest blog article placement.

BECOME KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY

The absolute best piece of advice is to first establish a relationship within the community. Spend at least a month reading and commenting on articles, sharing the blog's content socially, and interacting with the blog community members before ever broaching the topic of guest posting. Going in blind with no established relationship is a surefire way of getting your request ignored.

THINK THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, NOT SEO

Don't pursue a guest blogging strategy simply to accumulate SEO-friendly links. This practice will backfire. Instead, learn what makes this community unique and the types of articles that perform well, and model your approach after that. An inbound link is not the reason to make your request, it's simply a secondary benefit.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Every blog or publication has a unique set of guidelines for guest contributions. It's your job to find them, understand them, and make your pitch conform to them. Be concise and thorough. Make the job of approving your request a simple one by providing a title and abstract for your article, links to other guest blog posts at reputable, known blogs, and your social profile and contact information.

Jeremy Victor, the founder of Make Good Media, is well-known source of knowledge on B2B blogging as the Editor -In-Chief of B2B Bloggers.



KILL THE FORM EMAIL

We all love saving time, but popular blogs and traditional publications get pitched daily. If your first email starts, "I found your blog this morning and it looks to have some interesting content," it likely will be deleted before the reader gets to the next sentence. This is where point number one becomes so important. Once known within the community, a form email is not needed. You'll stand out because of your existing relationship and previous contributions.

CREATE BEST EFFORT, QUALITY CONTENT

This point should go without saying, but since your post is going to be living in someone else's domain, it's worth reiterating: the blog owner has final say over all editorial. Devote the appropriate amount of time to produce a quality piece and remember the intent is to create a piece that benefits the community, not your company.

OPTIMIZE YOUR ARTICLE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Make sure the article fits in terms of style, length, and, of course, topic. Remember, there is as much value in getting the post shared by the community as there is in getting the article published. Study the blog's most successful articles from a social sharing standpoint and work those elements into your article to mimic their success.

What Do I Need to Start (or Revive) a Blog?

Although you may be convinced to plunge headfirst, you need to take a step back to determine whether a blog fits with your company's objectives, culture, and resources. There are several questions you need to ask first, like:

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Let's look at your business objectives first. Like any marketing initiative, you need to have goals in place to drive the success of your efforts.

So, what do you want to achieve with the blog?

Build awareness? Generate leads? Improve conversions? Increase sales?

It's critical to answer these questions before you get started so you know how blogging will fit into your overall marketing strategy and how to measure the success of your efforts. The good news is that it's relatively easy to generate extensive metrics covering virtually all aspects of a blog's performance. You just have to put in the hard work of interpreting the data and applying it to your blogging strategy.

DO WE HAVE THE RESOURCES WE NEED?

Blogging can take a considerable amount of time, so you need to take a close look at the resources you'll need to get the job done.

Do you know who will be responsible for content and planning? How frequently will you post fresh content? What is the approval process? Who handles comments and community? How will you promote your blog—through email, social, or search?

Having the answers to these questions upfront will save you a lot of pain later! At least in the short-term, it might make sense to bring in some outside professional resources to help guide you and keep you on track until you get into the rhythm of blogging. Many companies sprinkle in outside guest posts on a regular basis.

DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT CULTURE?

Many B2B blogs fail because of a lack of corporate support. Blogging is an engaging, content-rich effort that requires the willingness to share valuable information and respond to feedback and criticism. Unfortunately, not every business embraces (or anticipates the need to embrace) those ideas.

There are some warning signs that you don't have a culture in place to support a sustainable blogging strategy. Perhaps your top executives are unwilling to be personally involved in the content planning or respond to readers' feedback. Or you may have to jump through too many hurdles (legal, HR, management, etc.) to get approvals. Or you could even have influential people lobbying against the effort from the outset.

If you don't have buy-in from the top, you may need to push the pause button until you have the support needed for the effort to be successful. Your company might need an education about the benefits of blogging before executing.

B2B Blogging Success Stories

CATERPILLAR

Can't imagine somebody from a road construction crew logging in to read a blog? Think again.

Caterpillar established separate blogs based on industry (construction, electrical, marine) with sub-categories under each industry (products, safety, problem-solving).

This company does a remarkable job engaging customers, using the community to solve problems, and rewarding customer ideas.

HINDA INITIATIVES

Hinda Initiatives is in the reward and incentive industry, and they thought their blog could raise awareness and drive traffic to their site.

It worked. In a short period of time, they reached more than 1,000 visits a month with subscribers from at least 30 different countries. Their overall website traffic also increased by 15 percent.

Their blog has also served as a critical PR tool. When a major competitor pulled out of the industry, many turned to the Hinda blog to learn their company's position on the issue. And, their blog post was also quoted by other blogs, which reinforced their position as a voice of authority in the industry.



KINAXIS

Kinaxis, a supply chain management company, has done a few things that many B2B blogs are unwilling—or too afraid—to do. For instance, they have opened up their blog to outside bloggers and now, five industry experts blog alongside the 18 Kinaxis employee bloggers.

They're also not afraid to inject humor into their blog. A number of their posts include cartoons or silly photos, proving that entertainment is important.

And, the results have paid off. Between 2008 and 2009, they experienced a 2.7 times increase in web traffic, a 3.2 times increase in conversions and a 5.3 times increase in blog traffic.

MANPOWER

Using traditional research methods, the temporary employment agency discovered that their customer's biggest information need was keeping up with the confusing topic of employment law.

In response, Manpower created a blog specifically on this topic. Although not directly related to selling temporary services, it has differentiated the company as they established themselves as a voice of authority on a strategic level. It also created powerful SEO benefits in the process. If you search for many employment law topics, it's likely you will be led back to the Manpower blog.



How Does Blogging Tie to Lead Generation?

Building a relevant audience for your blog and connecting with them is important, but the ultimate goal is to move customers and sales leads to the bottom line. How do we convert blog visitors to leads, and ultimately, sales?

- Keywords are the phrases your customers are using to find you. Look at Google Analytics to find common words people are using to find your company and products. (Don't forget to hunt for competitor keywords too!) Do these phrases match your content subject matter? Be sure to make this a continuous and dynamic process.
- Understand the buying cycle and the keywords used at various points in that cycle. Help customers find useful content based on where they are in that cycle.
- After developing your keyword list, be methodical about creating keyword-laden content. Your content writers should know about the basics of Search Engine Optimization and how to leverage it throughout their work. Remember to use the keywords your customers use, not internal buzzwords.
- Consider your blog as just one piece of an information ecosystem constantly pointing sales leads to your products and services. Your blog posts can feed Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook updates. YouTube videos and SlideShare decks can be featured on your blog. All should eventually point back to a call-to-action on your website.
- Use your research to create killer offers that speak to the needs of your audience. For instance, you can develop eBooks, white papers, case studies, webinars, exclusive videos, and other free content that your audience can receive by opting-in to your email list. These offers can easily be promoted on your blog with ads, calls-to-action, or links in your post. And, once they opt-in, you now have a warm lead that you can nurture toward a sale.

How ShipServ Blogged for Leads

ShipServ is a leading e-marketplace in the maritime industry. In 2008, the company turned to the social web to help them through several marketing challenges—limited budget, perception as being out of touch, and to help their traditional customers see the value of e-commerce.

ShipServ partnered with an outside marketing firm and their CRM vendor to create an integrated social media plan that focused on leading the creation of an online community, developing outstanding blog content and using social media channels to drive new sales leads through their website. In particular, they used the blog as a way to establish conversations in the industry and regularly feature their customers.

As a result, **website visitors increased by 59 percent and page views increased by 70 percent**. They also received 1,000 downloads of a whitepaper.

THIS APPROACH ALSO IMPROVED LEAD GENERATION:

- 1. Increased contact-to-lead (landing page contact) conversion by 150 percent.**
- 2. Increased lead-to-opportunity conversion by 50 percent.**
- 3. Increased number of sales-ready leads by 400 percent.**

Break-even on the \$30,000 social marketing media investment was achieved in three months. The company estimated the results they achieved would have cost \$150,000 through traditional media.

B2B Blogging DOs and DON'Ts

When you look at the most successful B2B blogs today, there are a number of common characteristics. But there are also all-too-common cases of businesses producing lame content that is little more than press releases. Here's what to do and not to do when it comes to blogging.

DO...

1 ADD VALUE

This may go without saying, but good blogs know how to add value to their readers. This means forgoing the promotional content and focusing on solving problems, answering questions, and offering useful information that helps your contacts make money, save money, or make their jobs easier.

2 ENTERTAIN

With so many voices vying for our attention, providing entertainment value is an important consideration. Mix it up and add video, photos, interviews or reviews. Be surprising to keep your readers tuned in. In an information-dense world, entertaining content will help cut through the noise. This is a challenge for many companies, but increasingly important as the "noise level" continues to rise on the social web.

3 BE ORIGINAL

Blogs that are willing to take a stand and offer a strong point of view stand out amongst the crowd. Write posts that only your company can write. Being a parrot is not a great way to get noticed.

4 BE REAL

People like to connect with people. That's why it helps if your blog has a human face to it. Have the courage to be imperfect.

5 TELL STORIES

Stories sell. Whether you're sharing stories about your customers, employees or advocates, it offers a great way for people to connect with you and your brand.

6 WRITE WELL

People will spend more time with you if they enjoy your writing. Take the time to read your post aloud—it's a great way to ensure it has a natural, conversational tone.

7 PROMOTE YOUR POSTS

You don't have to turn into a used-car salesman to promote your articles. Email it to customers or prospects that are struggling with the issue you solved in the article. Share it on social networks. Post it on a forum or group relevant to your topic. If you don't share your content, it will be hard to gain traction.

DON'T...

1 OVERSELL

Although your blog can be used as a vehicle to drive sales, non-stop promotion will send readers running in the other direction. Focus on solving your audience's problems and the sales will come.

2 USE CORPORATE SPEAK

Your blog shouldn't sound like it came from the legal department. Talk to people like human beings and lose the cliché-laden copy.

3 IGNORE NEGATIVE COMMENTS

It's not fun to get negative feedback, but it presents an excellent opportunity to turn a critic into an advocate. Listen to concerns and see what you can do to fix the problem or better understand their viewpoint. Because most businesses tend to ignore criticism, you'll stand out if you respond the right way. Sometimes a prompt and thoughtful response to a critic is a way to create an advocate.

4 FORGET TO MEASURE

You can only manage what you measure. In other words, track your efforts and tie them back to your overall goals. That's the only way you can determine if your blog is successful.

5 FAIL TO PLAN

An editorial calendar helps your blog stay on track by plotting out the topics and dates you will post new articles. Without planning, your blog may quickly gather cobwebs.

6 POST INFREQUENTLY

If you only blog once or twice a quarter, it will be hard to sustain your readers' attention. At the very least, you should post a new article every month and, preferably, once a week. This is why planning is so important.

But What Should We Write About?

Your reader's needs should always be on your mind. If you're consistent and interesting, your audience will find you.

To stay on top, try a mix of different types of posts and content, such as customer HOW-TOs, industry trends and events, commentary on the market, customer success stories, and company news.

If you're in need of inspiration, here are a few surprisingly easy places to look:

- 1. Existing content.** Videos, whitepapers, PowerPoint presentations and company speeches are all great ways to leverage the investment you've put into other content.
- 2. Questions from your customers.** Think about the questions you get through your blog comments, meetings, and customer service requests. This should give you a good idea of customer interests and needs.
- 3. Forums.** Look at a relevant LinkedIn forum. What are people asking about? Write an answer to their question and you have a ready-made blog post!
- 4. Comments.** If you leave a comment on industry journals, blogs or trade magazines, you can expand on your thoughts in a blog post. This is a great way to establish your voice of authority on an issue.
- 5. Internal communication.** Is there news from internal communication activities that might be relevant to your audience? If so, include it on your blog.

B2B Blogging Resources

BLOGS

B2B Ideas@Work Blog: B2B marketing musings from an award-winning creative firm.

B2B Lead Roundtable Blog: A team of writers from MECLABS share ideas and insights about marketing and lead generation.

BtoB Marketing Magazine: The industry standard for news in the field.

Content Marketing Institute: A content-rich site that helps you integrate content marketing into your organization.

{grow}: Mark Schaefer applies practical B2B experience to the social web.

Savvy B2B Marketing: A consortium of writers focus on social applications to B2B marketing and selling.

PODCASTS

JontusMedia PodCast: Jon Buscall's weekly podcast offers online marketing and communications tips for better content marketing.

Social Pros PodCast: Each week, Jay Baer leads an interview with social media strategists who are doing work for real companies.

Six Pixels of Separation Podcast: Mitch Joel interviews industry leaders and authors to talk about online marketing.

TOOLS

WordPress: One of the most widely used blogging platforms.

Blogger: Owned by Google, this is another easy-to-use blogging platform.

Tumblr: One of the new kids on the block, Tumblr has risen as a fast way to publish content.

Kapost: Synchs with other blogging platforms to help coordinate, organize, optimize and publish your content.

Compendium: Content Management System that helps with blogging collaboration, optimization and publishing.

Zemanta: Provides suggestions and tools as part of the blog creation process.

Google Analytics: The most turned-to source for measuring and capturing the performance of your blog.

Omniture: Owned by Adobe, many businesses turn to Omniture for analytics.

Outbrain: Helps businesses make their content more discoverable, particularly through search.

Technorati: A searchable space for finding blogs and articles by topics. Also, lots of research on blogging.

Google Blog Search: Google's search capabilities applied directly to blogs.

BlogLevel: Made by Edelman, this tools helps find and rank blogs by topic.

PhotoPin: Free photos for bloggers under the Creative Commons rules.

iStock: A searchable photo archive for purchasing images.

Getty Images: Tons of photos, sounds, and video for purchase.

