

Start Your Own Blog and Add Some Spice to Your Retirement Years

It's so easy to start up and doesn't cost a penny. Thousands are doing it...many of them retirees...and having the time of their lives. How about you?

First, let's lay to rest the principal myths that are holding you back:

- I don't have the technical skills or knowledge
- It probably costs more than I can afford
- I'm not a real news junkie
- I don't have the time to spend adding new items

Hogwash! Anyone with a modicum of intelligence, a bit of curiosity and two or three hours a week can turn out a fine blog and have an enriching experience doing it. And it's free. With easy-to-follow guides like Google's www.blogger.com, you can have your blog up and running within an hour. What a great way to keep your mind active by writing after retirement and to develop contacts with others who share your interests.

Write on Your Favorite Subject

Blogs are circulated on almost any subject you can imagine. At the end of this article, you will find a listing of several blog directories that will show you the broad cross-section of topics discussed. It will also help you find and view other blogs that deal with the subject you've chosen. That way, you can get a better idea of how others are presenting information. Some blogs are simply personal ramblings and diaries. Others tackle serious issues from politics to hobbies. There are no restrictions. It's up to you.

Today there are in the area of 30 million active blogs worldwide. In addition to personalized diaries, they represent a key source of news, knowledge and opinion. They are stealing readership from newspapers and print magazines. They have become major selling tools for businesses and excellent sources of information for surfers.

The blogosphere is magical. Despite the massive number of blogs in existence, you can attract large numbers of readers to your own. You have the opportunity of competing with your biggest and wealthiest competitors because with this great, no-cost innovation, the playing field has been leveled.

Obviously, it requires a good deal of time and effort to make yours one of the leaders of the blogosphere. The top bloggers constantly research current events and trends and post daily. Some do it hourly to compete with other news media. But unless yours is a news or political blog, there is no need to post that frequently.

You can reach out to literally millions of viewers on the World Wide Web with a schedule of one posting a week or better yet two or three. But you have to be willing to maintain that routine meticulously.

For example, I post once a week to my blog www.retirement-writing.com/blog and include four posts covering news of the publishing industry plus an instructional column in writing and publishing. If I preferred, I could have reduced the number of articles I add at a single posting, but increase the number of times I post to three or four a week. I tell you this only to demonstrate the flexibility you have as a blogger. But whatever schedule you select, you must follow it exactly.

Setting It Up

As I pointed out earlier, launching a blog can be simple and cost free. Click onto www.blogger.com to find Google's do-it-yourself guide. With just the few easy steps, you can create your own unique blog. If you're unsure of your ability to do this or want your blog to have a more professional appearance, you can choose to hire a professional designer to set it up.

Enter "Blog Designers" on your favorite search engine to find professionals to assist you. I have used Premiss Design (Philadelphia, PA) and Neighborhood Webmaster (Piscataway, NJ) for some of my work. They are very cooperative, highly skilled and their fees are modest.

Ten Ideas to Help You Gain the Most from Your Blog

Content Rules. No matter what else you do to make your blog appealing, the key is the quality of your content. Keep it relevant or you'll lose readers. As an expert in your field, you should have no problem finding ideas for articles. As an author you should have no difficulty presenting them in an interesting and easy-to-read manner.

Provide the Information Readers Want. The blog is an amazing place to find information because posts are archived. But it is up to you, the writer, to be sure the information you include has real meaning.

Keep it informal. The key is to relate personally to your readers, try and keep your copy relaxed and informal as you write. It should reflect you and the way you think and talk. No hard sell even though one of the principal reasons for maintaining your blog may be to sell books (or e-books, coaching, etc). The blog is not the place for heavy promotion. It is more a center for information, exchange of ideas and a link to your web site.

Brand Yourself. The blog is a great tool to establish your credibility and demonstrate your expertise on the topic you have chosen to discuss.

Personalize Your Business. The purpose of what I suggest in the above paragraphs is to personalize your business, to create an intimacy, to break down the barrier between the reader (potential buyer) and you (salesperson). The result should be a greater degree of confidence on the part of the reader for your integrity and knowledge.

Offer Interactivity. Make sure your blog offers your readers the chance to comment on your post. I also encourage readers to send in questions on any aspect of writing, publishing or promoting either through a post or by writing to one of my e-mail addresses charles@retirement-writing.com. We try and answer within 24 hours.

Send Potential Buyers to Your Web Site. Mentioning your products in places where they relate to the subject you are writing about is fine. But keep it soft sell, and refer your readers to your web site for the heavy push. You can promote on your blog, but do it with a light touch, not a hammer. As an example, when I moved a large box promoting my new book *The Writer Within You* from the main section of my blog, decreased the size and boldness appreciably and relegated the promo to a column on the side of the page, sales increased. That may conflict with many of advertising's basic premises, but the blog is a unique place where readers are looking for opinion and information.

Post Often. Regardless of how difficult it may be to add content continuously to your blog, it is essential if you are to keep readers coming back. Major blogs update throughout the day. But this isn't necessary if you aren't aiming your blog at news junkies. Three times a week is a very comfortable schedule. I post a new blog weekly.

Don't Wander. People reading your blog are specifically interested in the subject you cover. Don't wander off to other issues. Stay on topic. However, whenever you can, hook your topic to some current happening to make it even more interesting to your reader. The hook may be the result of an event of major importance, it may be the weather, a holiday, whatever. But it must be relevant.

Become Active. Now that you are a member of the blogging community, participate actively. Make a list of blogs that relate to your topic, and periodically view them and post comments. (Find them by perusing the list of blog directories at the end of this article.) As you participate, you'll find your own blog will gain more attention. Having your name on a comment in a highly successful blog with a wide audience will motivate a portion of that blog's readers to see what you are all about.

Follow these suggestions and when you become more skilled, you can install an RSS feed and even bookmark some of your posts with sites like Digg or Del.icio.us.

To help you locate blogs that cover your subject, try these blog search engines.

www.blogsearch.google.com,

www.globeofblogs.com,

www.blogcatalog.com