

Blogging tips for media advocates

Blogging can be a powerful communications tool for media advocacy. Blogs can help you establish your online identity, build credibility on an issue, share expertise, discover new allies, bring new viewers to your website, and, ultimately, advance your social change goals.

Whether you are just getting started or have been blogging for years, here are some tips and tricks to help your organization build and maintain a better blog:

Content production

- When deciding what to write, consider what's already in the news. Piggybacking off of a major media story and adding a new angle to it is a great way to drive traffic back to your site.
- During slow news weeks, create your own news. Publish a Q&A with a thought leader in your field, blog about the release of your organization's latest report, or post an evergreen piece — one that will remain useful regardless of the time of year or the news cycle.
- Develop a publishing schedule. Whether you post daily, weekly, or monthly, use an editorial calendar to keep track of important dates, events and blog ideas.

Headline, teasers and lead

- People decide within seconds whether or not to read a blog; use descriptive, compelling headlines to grab their attention. To craft an effective headline, try these tricks:
 - use active verbs and strong adjectives (e.g. Soda exec proposes unthinkable solution to diabetes crisis);
 - include a number (e.g. 7 reasons why soda is the next tobacco);
 - convey expertise (e.g. How advocates can leverage the media to create change);
 - make an original argument (e.g. Why we should stop using the word "obesity");
 - pique curiosity: (e.g. The shocking video the NRA doesn't want you to see); or

- ask a thought-provoking question (e.g. Are you reinforcing your opposition's argument?)
- To further spark interest and draw readers in, include a 1-2 sentence "teaser" after the headline.
- Don't bury your main point. Make it quickly — usually within the first two paragraphs.

Length and user experience

- Don't agonize over length. Short sentences and paragraphs are more important than overall length.
- Use headings, lists and bold text to break up large blocks of text and make content easier to scan.
- Use images, video, or audio to make content more engaging, but don't allow video or audio to auto-start.
- Develop a style guide to maintain consistency with punctuation, capitalization and other elements of style. For example, when abbreviating "United States," will you use US or U.S.? This is a matter of preference but should be the same across all blog posts. Consistency is key to establishing your organization's online identity.

Tone and writing style

- Avoid making blog content too self-promotional. It can decrease credibility.
- Use plain, simple language. Avoid jargon, acronyms and other insider language as much as possible.
- Keep sentences active. Let verbs do the work!
- Avoid clutter by cutting unnecessary words. For example, instead of "added bonus," say "bonus." Instead of "a large number of," say "many."

Engagement and promotion

- Keep content fresh by sticking to the blogging schedule you've set for your organization. Updating content regularly gives readers a reason to return to your site.
- Place key words in the headline, subheads, tags and hyperlink text to increase search engine visibility.
- Give credit where credit is due: Always source your content appropriately.
- Cultivate relationships. Link to other places, comment on other groups' blogs, and allow readers to comment on yours. Encouraging comments — and responding to them — is a great way to build a following.
- Make it easy for others to read and promote your content. You can do so by offering an RSS feed and including share buttons for social media channels like Twitter and Facebook. Your blog isn't effective if no one reads it!

Have a great blogging tip that you don't see here? We'd love to hear about it. Send your ideas to info@bmsg.org or message us on Twitter @BMSG.