# The Updated Playbook For Blogging Best Practices That Drive Leads

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At this point, every business knows that it should be blogging. Yet many aren't, and most that do blog are doing it poorly.

For those that try and fail, it's not always their fault. There's still a belief that what stands between most businesses and a productive blog is *time* – that all it takes is a free hour to crank out 500 words. It doesn't require skill or strategy. Anyone can do it, *if they have the time.*

While that line of thinking is misguided, five years ago it was somewhat true. And five years before that, it was absolutely true.

But the digital landscape has dramatically changed. Everything has evolved, from the amount of content available and how people consume it to how search engines rank it.

These changes have caused a shift in blogging best practices. While technology still makes it possible for anyone to blog, it doesn't guarantee that everyone will be successful. Today, it takes more strategy, skill and effort to create a successful blog that resonates with readers and search engines.

In many cases, it also requires outside support and expertise.

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**This guide is designed to:**
- Discuss the nine best practices for effective blog posts
- Provide a framework for a successful blogging program
- Offer quick tips to blog like a pro
- Explore the benefits of in-house vs. outsourced content creation

## The Benefits Of Blogging

When businesses talk about blogging, it's often fueled by a desire to improve organic rankings. In many ways, this mindset is a holdover from several years ago, when all you had to do to rank for a topic was churn out a couple of blogs a week.

Today, however, nearly everyone blogs. In fact, billions of blog posts are created each year, and four million posts are published every day. Clearly, not every one of those posts can rank on the first two pages of search engine results pages (SERPs), where most clicks take place.

**But even if the blogging gold rush is over, there are several reasons beyond organic rankings to undertake a serious blogging program. From a marketing perspective, there are seven great reasons to blog:**

1. **To increase organic traffic:** Yes, you're competing with millions of other posts. Most of them are garbage. Quality blog posts still have the ability to rank well and drive traffic.

2. **To educate prospects:** Whether they reach your blog via search, social media or other channels, it's a good way to educate prospects on key topics related to your business.

3. **To guide prospects through the buyer journey:** Blogs often serve as key content early in the buying journey, but a good blog can guide prospects deeper into that journey.

4. **To establish credibility and thought leadership:** A blog can be your soapbox, a platform for innovative ideas that others in your industry trust, follow and turn to for answers.

5. **To nurture existing customers:** Blogs can help you keep in contact with existing customers, provide a great ongoing experience and nurture them for future sales.

6. **To support brand differentiation:** Every business needs a unique brand message; blogs offer a platform to build on it and go deeper than a snappy headline can.

7.  **To improve the overall SEO of your website:** Good blogs drive visitors to other content and site pages. The increased engagement often leads to better search engine optimization (SEO) for the whole site.

Blogging, especially when strategically done and well executed, has an upside that goes beyond ranking well for desirable keywords. But there's the rub: It requires a thoughtful approach and a fair amount of skill and effort.

To realize the most return from your blogging investment, you'll need to do more than just churn out the same short, shallow, copycat content most businesses create.

## 9 Best Practices Of Effective Blogging
**To undertake an effective blog program that continually produces desirable results, follow these nine best practices:**

1.  Think user first
2.  Think of keywords as market research
3.  Focus on quality over quantity
4.  Make it readable and scannable
5.  Include multimedia
6.  Add links
7.  Use calls-to-action (CTAs)
8.  Don't forget the page title and meta description
9.  Remember that blogs are just one part of a content strategy

## 1. Think User First

It sounds simple, but always write for your readers – their wants, pains and needs. However, digital marketing has often ignored that basic tenet.

**Historically, businesses primarily wrote blogs for one of two audiences:**

1. **Search engines:** Solely concerned with ranking for specific keywords, some blog authors cram those keywords into posts, often at the expense of crafting engaging and informative content.
2. **Themselves:** Seizing the opportunity to broadcast their thoughts, many businesses use blogs to write about topics *they* care about, which aren't necessarily the same topics their prospects care about.

But today, more than ever, you need to focus on your audience. Whether you're blogging to improve SEO, establish thought leadership or nurture prospects, success will depend on whether readers engage with your writing.

That is particularly true of modern SEO.

Whereas you could once rank well based on keyword density (the amount of times a keyword was used relative to total number of words), search engines now measure user engagement as a means of determining the quality of the content and whether readers like it.

**Some of these engagement metrics include:**

- Time on page
- Pages per session
- Clicks
- Bounce rate
- Backlinks

Since people don't engage with or share content that isn't useful, these metrics offer insight into how informative it is and whether it should be recommended more often through a higher ranking.

It's easy to get caught up in SEO trends and tactics. *Don't.* Time and again, search engines have emphasized their goal is to recommend great content that answers the audience's questions.
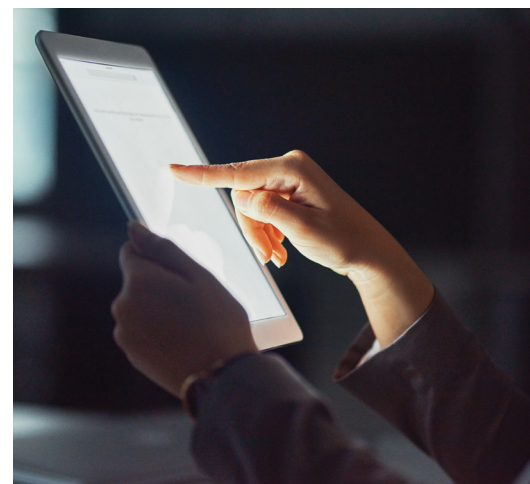
First and foremost, that should be your primary goal as well. It will not only benefit your SEO, it will improve your ability to engage with prospects and establish your credibility.

> **Tip: Chances are you engage with content and buy things often. Flip the script and put yourself in your audience's shoes. Create the type of content you'd want to see.**

## 2. Think Of Keywords As Market Research

Yes, keywords still matter, just not in the same way or to the same degree that they used to.

Keywords used to be the only factor in organic rankings. That's not the case anymore. Search engines still use them to match content to queries, but they can also identify synonyms and related terms.

Consider a blog about the importance of using an accountant. Previously, you had to use the term *accountant.* Now, search engines recognize that terms like CPA or *tax professional* refer to the same topic.

Have you ever gotten a search result that doesn't include the keyword you searched? That's natural language processing – a type of AI (artificial intelligence) – in action.

**So, yes, use keywords. They still help search engines match the right content to search queries. But use them naturally, as you would in conversation. For instance:**

- **Exact match keywords aren't necessary:** Google knows "IT solutions" and "solutions for IT" are the same.
- **Don't keyword stuff:** You wouldn't repeat the same word in every sentence while speaking, so don't do it in your blog either.
- **Forget keyword density:** Should you use a keyword 10, 15 or 20 times? There's no magic number. Use it as often as is natural and necessary.
- **Use synonyms and related terms:** If you're writing about fall, use the term *autumn.* It helps keep your copy fresh and connects your content to a broader pool of terms people are using for searches.

## How Should You Select Keywords?

How to do keyword research and selection is a deep topic, and it would be a disservice to try and cover it here.

However, one thing to consider when looking at keywords (whether in a list provided to you by an SEO professional or in a keyword tool you're using for research) is that they represent information that people want to know more about.

When you see questions and topics related to your business with lots of search volume, don't think of it as abstract data. Think of it as market research related to real people, their wants and their needs. It is clear, quantifiable insight into what your audience wants to know about.

Give it to them. By doing so, you're also following the first rule: Think user first.

**Tip: Content pros use pillar pages to capture desirable keywords and organic traffic. Create one with a long-form blog that integrates lots of supporting assets.**

## 3. Focus On Quality Over Quantity

A major shift in blogging best practices relates to quality vs. quantity.

Not long ago, it was advisable to blog three to five days a week. At that time, the recommendation made sense – fewer businesses blogged, and doing so frequently allowed you to cover more topics and rank for more keywords.

Today there's more competition for both readership and rankings. And with search engines signaling a preference for engaging content, it's become necessary to invest more time, thought and effort into blog posts.

**To write blog posts that will get attention from readers and search engines:**

- **Create unique content:** Offer a different experience; present information in a new way by including graphics or video.
- **Say something original:** Do more than rehash other copycat blogs; offer a new perspective that isn't being covered.
- **Go deeper on the topic:** Most blogs are short and thin; explore the topic more fully to better answer potential questions.

If you can publish five original, high-quality posts every week, do so. But most businesses don't have the resources. When choosing between quality and quantity, go with quality.

It's better to publish one great blog a month rather than 12 substandard ones. There's no return on investment (ROI) in poorly written content that doesn't rank, isn't read and doesn't educate prospects.
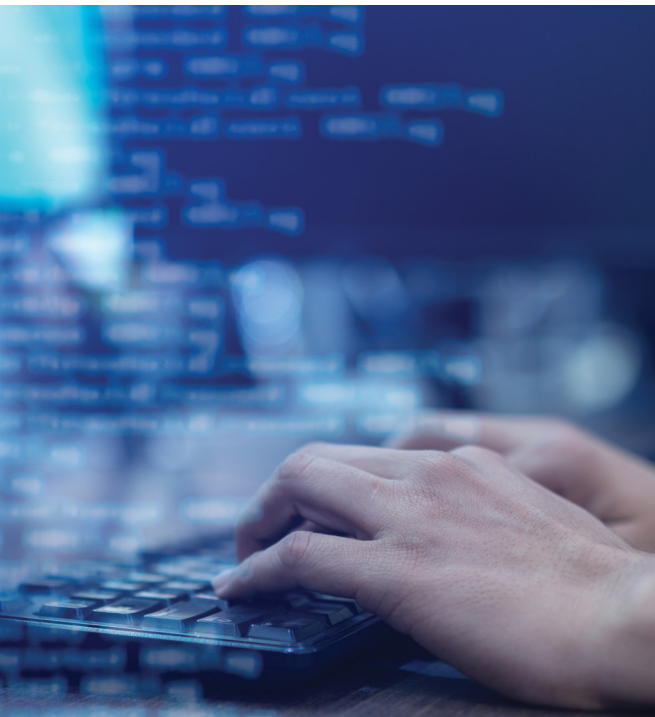
## How Long Is A Quality Blog?

It's perhaps the most-asked question about blogging. There is no easy answer, other than make it long enough to answer your readers' questions.

Sometimes that can be done in a few hundred words or less. It depends on the intent of your post. If it's to announce news, length isn't a consideration. If it's to answer a very specific question with a very specific answer, short and sweet may also work.

However, many topics require exploration. In those instances, data shows that longer tends to be better. Top-ranking blogs typically run in excess of 1,200 words, with many topping out at over 2,000 words.

Why? Because readers don't want to have to keep jumping into search results to get answers to all of their questions. They'd rather get them all in one place. Blog posts that can do so engage with readers for longer periods of time, signaling to search engines that they're useful.

That being said, don't write more just for the sake of increasing word count. Nobody wants to read filler, and adding it may cause your audience to prematurely exit.

Write enough to satisfactorily answer your audience's questions – no more, no less.

**Tip: Tools like SEMrush offer topic features that recommend how many words a blog post for a specific topic should be, and at what reading level it should be written.**

## 4. Make It Readable And Scannable

With digital content, user experience is about more than just the content. Equally important is how it's presented. People don't read online the way they do offline. While long blocks of text are fine in print, they can be hard to digest on a screen.

That is especially true on mobile devices, where a seemingly innocent paragraph can turn into an imposing block of text and an endless scroll.

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**To help readers better engage with your content:**

- Keep paragraphs short (five lines or fewer) to break up text
- Use subheadings to break up text and call out subtopics
- Include bullets, numbered lists and bolding where possible to call out important information and make it scannable
- Integrate images and graphics that offer a rest from reading

These practices not only break up copy and provide relief from cognitive strain, they allow readers to easily scan posts to find information. They also make it easy for search engines to crawl your content and determine what it's about.

**In addition to breaking up text, you can make life easier for readers by writing copy that's easy to digest and understand:**

- Eliminate jargon
- Limit the use of acronyms
- Refrain from overly technical writing

**Tip: Use keywords related to your topic to build out subtopics within your blog post. Be sure to use those keywords in the appropriate subheadings.**

## 5. Include Multimedia

A basic rule of blogging 101 is to always use at least one image in every post. Images increase engagement and help tell the story you're trying to tell.

**But you don't have to stop there. Use multiple images in long posts or include other media elements, such as:**

- **Charts:** Show statistics and data that support your story and offer readers an opportunity to go deeper.

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- **Graphics:** Call out key data points or quotes; illustrate complex ideas that are easier to understand visually.
- **Videos:** Embed videos that capture the essence of your post in under two minutes.
- **GIFs:** Add GIFs as a fun and engaging element.
- **Embedded media:** Embed podcasts and webinars for further learning in other formats.

**Including other forms of media in your blog post offers three key benefits:**

1. It keeps visitors on page, driving up those engagement metrics and signaling to search engines that you've created strong, useful content.
2. It allows you to reach a wider audience. Not everyone prefers to learn through reading; using different mediums helps you speak to more people.
3. It provides opportunities to guide prospects deeper into the buyer's journey.



**Tip: To generate a wider variety of assets, pull pieces of micro content, such as tip sheets, checklists and infographics, from long-form content.**

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## 6. Add Links

Links serve as key drivers of traffic between content and site pages. Think of them as guided access points to the roadways you want your visitors to travel. Without them, your visitors may struggle to take the next step, or worse, go no further.

There are two types of links – internal and external.

**Internal Links**
**Internal links are links from one page of your website, such as a blog post, to another page on your website, such as a piece of content or a service page.**

They improve user experience by guiding visitors to relevant and related content and/or services. Internal links can be used to:

- Take visitors to a related topic they might be interested in
- Give visitors an opportunity to learn more about a topic touched upon in your blog post
- Direct visitors to related services or solutions you offer that visitors may wish to learn about

By providing links to these resources, you're also leading visitors deeper into your site, increasing session duration, pages per session and dwell time, while decreasing bounce rate – all of which improve SEO.

Additionally, internal links help search engines more easily make sense of your content by indicating which website pages are about which topics.

As a rule of thumb, only link to the same page once in your post.

**External Links**
**External links are links that go from your website to a page on another website. They can be used to link to:**
- Source material for statistics, data or quotes, similar to a footnote
- Related or supporting content created by someone else that may deepen your visitors' understanding of the topic
- Services or solutions being referenced in your blog post that visitors might be interested in

Linking to trusted external sources can help build your credibility in the eyes of visitors and search engines. Prioritize internal links over external links, but feel free to use external links when they would provide value to your readers.

**Tip: Avoid linking to spammy sites. If you promote quality content visitors can trust, you'll enjoy increased credibility by association.**

## 7. Use Calls-To-Action

Calls-to-action (CTAs) help you guide readers to the next step in their customer journey. They can be used to direct them to highly relevant and related content, such as a buying guide, webinar or case study.

CTAs are often placed at the end of your blog post. It's recommended that this CTA be a graphic banner promoting a piece of content or a consultation.

**The Complete DIY Playbook**
Create Your Own Killer Video Content From Home
**Get My E-book →**
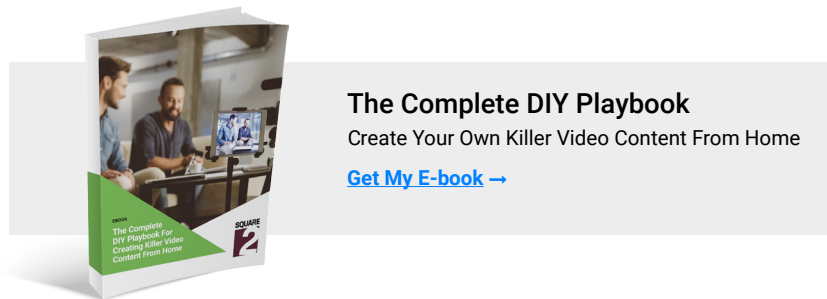
If banner CTAs aren't an option, use a text-based CTA (called anchor-text CTAs). Even if you have the capability to use graphic CTAs, you may want to consider using a text-based one in the middle of long blog posts – HubSpot found they outperform banners.

If you use an anchor-text CTA, make sure the text stands out with a different color or font size, so it doesn't get lost in the body copy.

*Accelerate Your Digital Transformation*
*Learn How To Expand IT Operations Without Adding Complexity*
*Download My E-book*

To increase your chances of a reader clicking on your CTA and converting, try to connect the next step you're asking them to take to the content they just read.

**Tip: Use language that speaks to your target persona's pains and calls out the benefit the offer will provide.**

## 8. Don't Forget The Page Title And Meta Description

After investing much time and effort into a thought-provoking blog post, you may be ready to call it a day. But there's still one last bit of business left: the page title (sometimes called a meta title) and meta description.

These are what appear in search engine results. Together, page titles and meta descriptions serve as an ad for your content.

www.square2marketing.com › services › inbound-mark...  ▾
Inbound Marketing Agency - Square 2 Marketing
Turbocharge your lead generation. Our integrated **inbound marketing** services help you attract potential customers and engage them throughout the buyer ...

Although they don't *directly* help SEO, page titles and meta descriptions can entice clicks and drive traffic, which can improve SEO.

If you don't provide them, Google will fill them in for you, using the blog title and selected copy from the page. To ensure you have control over what's shown to searchers, take the time to write your own.

**When writing page titles, follow these best practices:**
- Keep page titles to 60 characters or less to avoid having copy cut off in search results

- Include your primary keyword in the title
- Give readers a strong sense of what the post is about and why they should read it
- Make sure your target keyword and the essence of your topic are conveyed in the first 65 characters

Your page title is typically the same as the title of your blog post, but it doesn't have to be. For instance, if your blog title is long, you could use a shorter version for the page title.

Meta descriptions are the descriptions that appear under the URL of your page in organic search results.

While search engines won't always display what you write there, you should still write them. They are your best chance to control what users see when encountering your posts in search results.

**Meta descriptions should:**
- Be under 160 characters
- Clearly and accurately describe the content of your post
- Offer users a compelling reason to click
- Include your target keyword

**Tip: Use a value statement in your meta description to let users know the benefit you're providing them.**

## 9. Remember That Blogs Are Just One Part Of A Content Strategy

Effective blogging offers many benefits. However, even if you follow every one of the preceding best practices, it still may not be enough to generate results.

That's because blogging should be just one part of a comprehensive content strategy that leverages a variety of mediums – from videos, webinars and podcasts to interactive assessments and one-on-one consultations – across your ideal prospect's entire buyer journey.

While blogs can serve a lot of purposes, they typically provide education in the early stages of the buyer's journey.

To generate real leads, you must also address the other parts of the buyer's journey. That requires a comprehensive digital strategy that many in-house teams don't have access to.

**Tip: Before starting a content strategy, perform a content audit to identify what you have, where it fits in the buyer journey and where you have gaps that need to be addressed.**

## Final Thoughts: In House Vs. Outsourcing

While it's possible to handle your own blogging, there are some reasons to consider engaging with a digital marketing agency:

**Budget:** Hiring an internal content team isn't always financially viable. Outsourcing allows you to realize the benefits of content creation while managing costs.

**Resources:** Not every business has the luxury of a professional content team. Even those that do may not have the time to pursue a comprehensive blogging program.

**Quality:** Content is competitive. To improve your chances of driving organic traffic and engaging with prospects, you'll need high-quality blogs that fit into a larger strategy.

**SEO:** Effective blogging is tied to an SEO strategy. You may need to partner with someone that can provide expertise, even if it's just keyword research and selection.

**Strategy:** Blogging should be part of a larger content strategy that touches other tactics and sub-strategies, such as SEO, persona development, buyer journey mapping and lead nurturing.

In-house and outsourcing aren't binary options. Many in-house teams opt to engage with digital agencies to augment their capabilities with specific expertise and capabilities.

**Tip: To gauge an agency's capabilities, consider the quality of their website, their content and the work they've done for clients.**

## 7 Things To Look For When Outsourcing Content

1. **Strategy first:** Content alone won't drive results. Its creation and use needs to be guided by a thoughtful and comprehensive strategy.
2. **Quality is a priority:** Plenty of agencies churn out content, but the first priority should be the quality. Today, quality outperforms quantity.
3. **Quantity is an option:** If it's high-quality content, there's nothing wrong with wanting lots of it, especially if the agency can produce many great assets in a short time.
4. **SEO expertise:** Your content strategy should be built, at least in part, on a strong SEO foundation that aims to generate new prospects through organic search.
5. **Needs to know your business:** To create effective content for you, any agency should insist on becoming intimate with your business and your target prospects.
6. **Short-term and long-term support:** All agencies offer long-term monthly retainers, but do they offer short-term options for immediate needs?
7. **Speed:** When you have a pressing need or a time-sensitive opportunity, you need an agency that can quickly produce the assets required to meet your goals.

## ABOUT SQUARE 2

Square 2 is a full-service revenue growth agency designed to produce results for clients. We help businesses understand the changing buyer journey and how revenue is directly related to marketing, sales and customer service execution.

More specifically, we help our clients with strategy, tactics, analytics and technology to build revenue generation machines that produce month-over-month revenue growth in a scalable, predictable and repeatable way, so their business grows.

We use our Cyclonic Buyer Journey™ model to help clients map their prospects' buyer journeys to the right sales, marketing and customer service tactics. We use our AI-powered recommendation engine software, MAXG, to drive a more scientific set of recommendations for our clients.

In addition, we provide clients a dedicated team in which one client team works with only one client at any time. This allows us to deliver six months of work in just 30 days, and it allows us to accelerate results for our clients from months to weeks or even days.