

Creating Your Blog

A blog can be the difference between your success and failure.

It can be the difference between top-paying quality clients and bargain basement work.

It can be the difference between scratching around for morsels of work or sitting back and letting quality referrals come to *you*.

Creating a blog should be a top priority if you want to establish yourself as successful freelance blogger. It will open up a world of opportunities that would have not otherwise been available to you.

While this course is a guide to freelance blogging rather than a guide to creating a successful blog, you will find a comprehensive overview of the process below. If you would like to learn more about creating a successful blog then I highly recommend [How to Start a Blog That Matters](#).

Why Should You Create a Blog?

It is possible to make money as a freelance blogger without having your own blog in the same way that it is possible to get a job with a poor résumé. You'll never maximize your earning potential as a freelance blogger unless you create your own (relatively successful) blog.

There are a number of compelling reasons as to why creating your blog is such a valuable step in establishing yourself as a successful freelancer.

It Positions You as an Authority

I recently spoke with Ruben Gamez, the founder of [Bidsketch](#) and a client of mine. I asked him what he looked for in freelance bloggers and his answer was simple: a platform.

That single requirement is a simple yet effective filter for determining who is and isn't capable. The chances are that if you have built a successful and relatively popular blog, you are a capable writer and understand the nuances of blogging. His logic is simple: why would hire a blogger who doesn't even have their own blog?

So much of one's success in freelancing is down to a perception of value. If two writers are well-matched in terms of technical writing ability, the one with an established blog is going to get the job every time.

It'll Make You a Better Blogger

A blogger should always be seeking to improve his or her craft, and there is no better way of doing so than by running a blog.

It seems obvious, yet there are plenty of would-be freelance bloggers out there who are trying to make a living without having their own blog. It doesn't make a great deal of sense if you think about it.

Running a blog is an ongoing education. Not only will your writing skills improve over time, you'll begin to learn a huge number of complimentary skills that will put you in good stead with potential clients.

Most blogging clients are not just looking for someone who can write an article. They want someone who can source images, do basic formatting, and perhaps even a little promotional work. If you run your own blog you'll learn all of these skills *and* you'll have clear evidence of your abilities.

It Can Serve as a Client Referral Machine

I recently used [99designs](#) for the redesign of [Leaving Work Behind](#) and mentioned that I had used the service in a blog post. Just a couple of hours later I received an email from the PR Manager for 99designs asking if I would be interested in writing for their blog.

This is one example of how a blog can serve as a client referral machine. In reality there are a number of different ways in which potential clients can discover your blog and subsequently seek out your services.

Whether it's word of mouth, a link from another site, a search engine referral or social media, a blog can serve as a highly effective referral machine for your freelance blogging business.

It Gives You An Opportunity to Build a Network

Back in February 2012, when my freelance blogging career was in its infancy, I published a list of top blogs called the [LWB 100](#). One of the bloggers I mentioned in that list got in touch and asked if I would be interested in writing for his blog. I ended up working with him for eighteen months and made well over \$4,000 during that time.

Although I didn't fully understand it at the time, that list I published represented a fantastic networking opportunity. It enabled me to reach out to and become familiar with far more bloggers than I already have *and* led to a not inconsiderable volume of work.

If you are a freelance blogger without a blog then you have no reason to reach out to people other than to tout for work. But if you have your own blog, you have every reason to nurture organic relationships with any number of people in your niche. And that can be very beneficial in the long

run -- every new contact you make could become a client or refer clients to you.

It Creates Other Opportunities

While we are going to focus on your blog as a client referral machine in this guide, it can certainly grow into something bigger in time.

That's certainly what happened with Leaving Work Behind. It started off as an accountability journal for my efforts in quitting my job, then grew into a source of referrals for my freelance blogging business, then grew again into a source of passive income (through affiliate marketing and product sales).

While freelance blogging is a highly lucrative and fun way of making a living, you don't have to stop there. We'll talk about where freelance blogging can take you later on in the course, but for now, keep in mind that creating a blog can do far more for you than just refer clients.

Don't Make Your Blog a Time Suck

It is all too easy to spend countless hours on your blog, but to do so is to dilute its value. You must not let the creation of your blog overshadow your journey to freelance blogging success.

I've already mentioned that this portion of the course provides a comprehensive overview of the blog creation process. It is certainly not a warts-and-all guide to successful blogging, for which I would recommend [How to Start a Blog That Matters](#). However, below you will find everything that you *need* to know in order to create a successful blog for your freelance blogging business.

I've drilled down to the essentials, which is all you need to worry about. There's no need to do any more. While you can of course work more on your blog as you grow, you must always be sure that it isn't distracting you from your main focus: becoming a successful freelance blogger.

A Caveat

The advice contained within this section of the guide is geared towards building a blog as a referral machine for your business. More specifically, the one key action I will recommend that you attempt to prompt from visitors is to enquire about your writing services.

If you are looking to build a following and have ambitions for your blog to be more than just a referral machine (as is the case with [my blog](#)), you will need to carefully consider how you approach the conflict of having two desired outcomes (i.e. subscriber / prospective client).

Having said that, I have been able to strike a good balance with my blog in that it generates income

both directly via affiliate income and product sales, and indirectly via freelance client referrals. It is possible.

How to Choose Your Niche

A lot of freelance writers make the mistake of thinking that their blog should be about blogging or freelance writing, but in reality you can blog about whatever you like (within reason).

However, keep in mind that the topics you blog about will shape the type of client you attract. If you write poor quality posts regarding less than lucrative subject matter you can expect to receive enquiries from clients of an equivalent quality. You don't want to attract clients of all shapes and sizes; you want to attract the type of pre-qualified client that you are enthusiastic about working with. And if they are approaching you, *you* are in the position of power when it comes to negotiations.

So choose your niche carefully. You should be covering respectable subject matter – the kind of subject matter that you would love to be paid to write about. Ideally, the subject should be relatively mainstream which should ensure a steady flow of client referrals. Frame your content around the type of client you would like to attract and you won't go wrong.

You must be certain that people are actually hiring in your chosen niche. One easy way to do this is check the "blogs that pay" and the "junk-free jobs board" section -- are there blogs in your niche in it? Also, think about it practically -- does it seem like the kind of topic that businesses and profitable blogs are built out of?

Note also that even if a topic is written about and writers are paid for it, they may not be paid a lot. The key is to consider the commercial viability -- i.e. can people make money from what you write about? In the case of say social media, the answer is definitely yes.

Don't be intimidated if you feel like you know little about your chosen niche. I knew nothing about WordPress when I started. That's the beauty of freelance writing -- you can start by earning a low rate and use it as a learning experience. That's precisely what I did with my first client, [WPMU](#). Then as you gain experience and demonstrate that experience in your writing, you can ramp up your rates, improve your blog and gain more clients.

Action Step

Write a shortlist of potential niches that you could write about. Set a time at which you will make a decision and spend the next few hours/days (at your discretion) considering the topics. Do not procrastinate!

How to Create Your Blog

If you have not created a website before then do not fear -- the process is not particularly intimidating. While you may run up against some stumbling blocks during the process of building your site, there isn't anything that you will not be able to overcome.

In this part of the guide I am going to give you an overview of the most important elements relating to the creation of your site. In digesting the information in this chapter you will be well equipped to make light work of the key decisions relating to your new site.

Your Blog's Name and Domain Name

The value of a blog's name should not be underestimated. It is often what people see first and can play a pivotal part in persuading them to read on or alternatively (and less desirably) abandon ship.

With that in mind you want to choose something that is memorable. Your blog's name should stick in the mind after being seen just a handful of times. It should also be evocative of the subject matter you cover. Leaving Work Behind, [Healthy Enough](#) and Paid to Blog are all examples of this.

In terms of technical considerations, shoot for either .com or .net -- it's not that big a deal. I use .net for Healthy Enough. I wouldn't recommend .co for a blog -- although I've used it for this site, I wouldn't use it for a standalone blog due to people's relative unfamiliarity with it.

Avoid the use of hyphens and numbers within your domain name. They look bad and can be confusing or difficult to remember. Keep your domain short too -- no more than three words. [leavingworkbehind.com](#) is pushing it.

Finally, make your domain name flexible and timeless. You may feel the need to pivot in the future, so make sure that it is not so specific to be inflexible to your changes in direction. For example, Leaving Work Behind started as an accountability journal for my efforts in quitting my job, but has since developed into a community for people who want to quit their jobs. By giving my blog a somewhat ambiguous name I was able to run with its evolution without worrying about the relevancy of the domain name.

Action Step

Choose a domain name for your blog. Choose from .com, .net or .org extensions.

Hosting

I implore you not to choose a free blogging service for your freelance website. The reasoning behind

this is split into two main points:

1. Few clients are likely to take you particularly seriously if you demonstrate that you are unwilling to shell out a few measly bucks for a domain name and hosting.
2. Free blogging platforms are restrictive and offer reduced functionality when compared to the client blogs that you will be working on.

If you're serious about your freelance business then you shouldn't be too concerned about \$10 or so per year for a domain name and another \$5 per month for hosting. Don't shortchange yourself on the things that matter.

If you are concerned about costs mounting up then don't fear – you *can* launch your business on a shoestring budget. An investment in a domain name and hosting is the only "necessary" expense that I advise throughout this book.

My personal recommendation for both your domain name and hosting is [WestHost](#). I have used a number of the big-name hosting providers in the past and have been consistently disappointed but WestHost has never let me down in all the time that I have been with them. They offer a 100% satisfaction promise, 60 day money back guarantee, 99.9% uptime guarantee, free daily backups, peerless support and much more. And despite all of the above, their prices are still comparable to the cheapest hosting providers out there. I can't praise them highly enough.

Action Step

Sign up for a web hosting account.

Your Blogging Platform

I have just one recommendation when it comes to blogging platforms: [self-hosted WordPress](#). I make this recommendation for three reasons:

1. I consider it to be the best blogging platform available.
2. The majority of your clients (or possibly all of them) will use it.
3. It is completely free.

WordPress is by far the most popular Content Management System (CMS) in existence and deservedly so. Gaining experience in WordPress can only be good for your freelance blogging career and can open up even more potential business opportunities over time.

Whilst WordPress can be overwhelming at first it doesn't take long to become proficient. It is far

beyond the scope of this book to teach you the ins and outs of creating a blog in WordPress but the basics are easy to get a grasp of. I would recommend that you start by consulting the [Beginner's Guide to WordPress](#) on the WordPress.org Codex.

In a time when online freelance writers are coveted for as much as their ability to create and publish content within a CMS as their actual writing ability, it is important that you take the time to get to know WordPress. However, please don't feel overwhelmed – in reality a good grasp of the basics will carry you a long way (and elevate you over a great proportion of your competitors).

Action Step

Install WordPress on your domain.

The Importance of Design

It should come as no surprise that the quality of the content on your blog will have a direct impact on the quality of client that you attract. But do not neglect your design, as the same logic applies.

I'm not saying that you have to drop a thousand bucks on a custom theme design, but your site should convey professionalism and competency, which may require some financial investment. My blog's original design was a customized version of [WooThemes'](#) Canvas framework, which at the time of writing was available for \$70.

If you are on a tight budget just focus on keeping your design simple and clean. Default WordPress themes such as [Twenty Eleven](#) and [Twenty Twelve](#) are adequate to start with. Once you are making a bit of money, you should consider reinvesting that into your business by polishing your blog's design.

Please take my advice (which bears repeating) and focus on a simple and clean design. If you are new to WordPress then the chances are that you will do more harm than good by trying to customize your theme in anything more than a basic manner. A carefully selected theme is all you need to make a start.

One final note on design – do not place advertising on your blog. It looks unprofessional and is not becoming of someone seeking to sell their writing services.

Action Step

Choose a theme for your blog. If in doubt, keep it simple. Make any tweaks to the design that you see fit, but don't spend too much time doing so at this point. Don't let the aesthetics of your site

distract you from your main aim: to attract clients!

The Key Elements on Your Blog

The bulk of your site's content will of course be your blog posts – they are the 'gateway' by which prospective clients will enter your site. However, once prospects *have* arrived they need to be pointed in the right direction, which is when certain key elements of your site need to do their job.

Getting someone onsite and providing them with good content is just the first step – you then need to convert that person into a prospect. This chapter focuses on doing just that.

Your *Hire Me* Page

Arguably the most important element of your blog is your *Hire Me* page. This is the place where you convert a prospective client's idle interest into an active desire to work with you.

The construction of a *Hire Me* page, and exactly what should go in it, is arguably down to personal preference. Having said that I have a very firm view on how one should be put together and I am going to share that with you.

Focus on Benefits, Not Services

On a fundamental level your prospective clients aren't looking for a writer – they're looking for someone who can increase their bottom line. As such, that is what you should focus on.

Let's take a look at what the introductory blurb on your *Hire Me* page should *not* say:

I offer freelance writing services for bloggers.

Doesn't seem too bad, right? It gets straight to the point and explains your core service. That may be so, but it does not clearly communicate the benefit to a prospect. Here is an example of something that is likely to be far more effective:

I specialize in creating blog posts that can improve traffic to your site, boost conversion rates and increase your bottom line.

Put yourself in a prospective client's shoes. Which pitch sounds more appealing?

Whilst a clear communication of the service you offer is important (after all, no one is going to hire you if they don't know what you do), it is vital that you focus on the benefits of your service. Avoid using generic phrases such as, "I will take your business to the next level." Instead, focus on

measurable outcomes, such as an increase in traffic.

Also, if you feel that you have any Unique Selling Points (USPs), include them on your 'Hire Me' page. Here are a few examples:

- "With unlimited revisions, I guarantee satisfaction."
- "I have specific and extensive expertise in fashion [include proof]."
- "I understand that speed is important and guarantee to always respond to your emails within 12 hours."

Do Not Reveal Your Rate

Although it may seem tempting to do so, you absolutely should not reveal your rate on your *Hire Me* page (or anywhere else on your blog, for that matter).

The reasoning behind this is simple – it removes your ability to judge each client on an individual basis and quote accordingly. I have lost count of the number of clients I have worked with who have paid me more than I would have advertised on my blog.

When it comes to assessing clients on an individual basis there are a number of reasons as to why you would want to adjust your rate. The proposed job could:

- Offer no benefits beyond the pay itself
- Not particularly appeal to you
- Be a one-off

I have been at a stage for a few months now where I do not really want to take on any more work. That means I can be highly selective with the clients I work with and not hesitate in charging a premium rate for my work. Not disclosing a rate on my *Hire Me* page gives me the freedom to quote as I please.

There's also a secondary reason for not quoting your rate – it stops all of the 'bargain basement' clients from contacting you and wasting your time. Far better to consider a handful of quality referrals than a bucket load of time wasters.

Snippets and Samples

Any prospective client arriving cold at your website will want to see examples of your work.

The first thing to consider is this – everything on your blog is a showcase of your abilities. As such you should only publish posts of the highest quality. Every single one is a potential referral machine.

But beyond that you will want to include samples of the work you have previously done for clients. Typically speaking you would include links to these on your *Hire Me* page as evidence of your abilities.

The great thing about freelance blogging is that every post you write for a client immediately becomes a potential sample of your work. Non-disclosure agreements don't generally exist in the blogging world. However, be aware that the posts you link to will likely dictate prospective clients' assumptions as to your particular field of expertise. If you don't want to be pigeonholed as a fashion writer, make sure that some of your samples cover alternative topics.

If you have 4–5 examples of your work across a number of topics that you would like to write about, this gives clear direction to a prospective client. If on the other hand you are keen to be known as someone who writes about one specific topic, you should focus all of your samples on that one topic and dispose of the rest.

What if You Don't Have any Samples?

It is possible to get work without any samples beyond the posts on your blog. I say this from personal experience – my first job applications simply referenced some of my best blog posts as samples.

However, it will be far easier to source clients if you have examples of work you have already done beyond just the posts on your blog.

Fortunately, attracting such samples is a piece of cake – you just need to start guest posting. Not only will guest posts published on other sites result in samples that you can use to showcase your talents, they also bring a number of other benefits to the table. They drive traffic to your blog, can be great for building experience (don't be afraid to ask for feedback), and can even lead to paid positions. One of my highest paying jobs so far was writing posts for a site that I used to guest post on.

Testimonials

Ultimately a client is unlikely to take a punt on you unless you have some kind of proof of your abilities. Good samples represent proof, but testimonials are also a wonderful way of showing your worth. There is nothing quite as compelling to a prospective client as validation from people who have already used your services. That is especially the case if you can get hold of glowing recommendations.

But how do you get testimonials? That question should be pretty easy to answer once you are well established (i.e. ask your clients), but getting hold of testimonials when you are first starting out can

seem like an impossible task. Fortunately it is not.

Your first stop should be bloggers that you have guest posted for. Just because they didn't pay you for your services doesn't mean that they can't give you a great testimonial and most will be happy to do so.

Secondly, consider any testimonials that you can get hold of from existing professional connections. The testimonials do not necessarily have to be related to your writing services – for instance, you could ask a co-worker to write a testimonial focused on your work ethic and/or organizational skills. Once you throw these in with a couple of good writing-related testimonials you'll have a good mix.

Finally, you may find that your social media networks are a source of potential testimonials. Has anyone ever told you how great a writer you are or how much they enjoy your blog? That is proof of your ability as a blogger as much as anything else. Whilst I wouldn't major on testimonials from your blog's readers, they can be a useful addition to the mix.

My overall point is this – if you are not yet in a position to get testimonials from clients, don't be afraid to think outside of the box. There are opportunities if you care to look hard enough.

Means of Contact

You may run across debate amongst bloggers regarding contact forms and email addresses. One camp will argue that people want to use their own email client to contact you and the other will argue that a contact form is a quick and immediate way of getting in touch.

The simple answer is this: include both on your blog. Whilst your blog will have a *Contact* page (discussed later), you should include a contact form and your email address at the bottom of your *Hire Me* page. Don't make it any more difficult for prospective clients to contact you than it has to be.

Action Step

Create a comprehensive Hire Me page, incorporating all of the elements above as appropriate. Come back to this step if you don't yet have all the information to hand (e.g. testimonials).

Your About Page

In the long run your *About* page will be one of the most popular pages on your blog – only the most viral and evergreen of posts will attract more traffic over an extended period of time. Furthermore, it will be one of the most-clicked pages when people first hit your blog.

And that makes sense – just consider your own behavior. If you hit a blog and like what you see, one of the first things you will want to know is more about the person behind the words. It's natural

human curiosity.

Your 'About' page effectively acts as a gateway for new visitors. They may hit one of your posts first, but your *About* page is probably going to be the next step and the job that page does of engaging with the reader defines whether or not they stick around. With that in mind, it is important that you treat your *About* page as another opportunity to attract prospective clients.

People make the common (and understandable) mistake of thinking that an *About* page should be about them, but that is not the case – or at least, it should not be your primary focus. In a similar vein to the approach I advise with your *Hire Me* page, your *About* page should focus on the benefits that the blog has to offer the reader. In your case, that communication of benefits should be targeted at your prospective clients.

Putting together an engaging *About* page isn't difficult. Here is a simple template:

1. Engage directly with your target audience and assure them that they are in the right place.
2. Summarize what your blog has to offer and how it will benefit them.
3. Fill them in on your personal story (and if possible, how it relates to what can benefit them).
4. Finish off with a reminder of why they are there followed by a call to action.

If possible you should also sprinkle some testimonials throughout your *About* page – they will help to validate the reader's decision to spend time on your blog.

The call to action at the end of the page should relate to whatever your primary objective is with your blog. In your case it will be to attract prospective clients. Therefore, your call to action should be a link to your *Hire Me* page.

I cannot take credit for this template. I first learnt about it from Derek Halpern of [Social Triggers](#), and he learnt it from [Copyblogger](#). Click on those links for two examples of great *About* pages.

Action Step

Create your About page using the above template.

Your Start Here Page

The blogging medium is somewhat limited in its ability to promote your best content. People are used to seeing your most recent posts on the home page, not the most popular. And yet when it comes to attracting prospective clients, you want them to see your best content.

This can be done in part by including a *Recommended Posts* widget in your sidebar (which is a great idea). But if you really want to give new visitors to your blog a helping hand you should have a *Start Here* page.

The intended effect of a *Start Here* page is simple – to give new visitors direction. You do that by succinctly explaining the benefits that your blog has to offer, followed by listing a small selection of your best posts to get them started. You should finish off your *Start Here* page with yet another call to action linking to your *Hire Me* page.

Your *Start Here* page is almost as important as your *About* page. On [my blog](#) the *Start Here* page has attracted just 4% less visits than my *About* page. Despite this, many bloggers do not even have one. Don't make the same mistake.

Your *Start Here* page shouldn't be used in an overt attempt to convert the visitor into a prospective client – it should be seen as more of an "engagement gateway" to draw people further into your site. Use it wisely.

Action Step

Create your Start Here page. If you're feeling overwhelmed at this point then you can skip this step, but I do recommend that you come back to it.

Your Contact Page

In a nutshell, your *Contact* page should make it extremely easy for prospective clients to contact you. While you will have included a contact form and your email address on your *Hire Me* page, you should not assume that every prospective client has seen it (or will use it, even if they *do* see it).

Email is still a primary means of contact so you should provide a link to your email address at the top of the page. You may also wish to include links to your social media accounts. Adding a telephone number is something that I would recommend – it adds an element of professionalism. If you're concerned about receiving business calls (or calls from strange characters who stumble across your blog) on a personal phone, just purchase a cheap cellphone on a Pay As You Go contract and use that. You can then check the phone periodically for messages.

Finally, your *Contact* page should include a contact form asking for a name, email address and message (all mandatory fields). You may wish to include additional fields but err on the side of simplicity. No one likes a long form and you don't want to discourage people from contacting you.

Action Step

Create your Contact page.

Your Sidebar

A good sidebar should be functional and uncluttered. For a freelance blogger, I recommend that your sidebar be populated with four elements:

1. A mini bio (with a photo) that links to your *About* page
2. A small selection of your best posts
3. A small selection of your best testimonials
4. A prominent link to your *Hire Me* page

Each of these elements serves to reinforce your credentials in the eyes of a prospective client and point them in the right direction. There are other elements you might choose to include within your sidebar (such as a newsletter subscribe box or social media profile links) but I consider the above four to be your must-haves.

Filling your sidebar up with too many widgets will only serve to confuse and frustrate your visitors, so keep it as clean and simple as possible.

Action Step

Populate your sidebar as you see fit (you can do so from Appearance > Widgets in the WordPress dashboard).

Your Posts

Your blog posts will (collectively) be your most visited pages on your site – attracting more traffic than your homepage by a comfortable margin. In the long run, more people are likely to hit your site via a blog post than any other page. As such, it pays to make sure that each and every post you write offers an opportunity for prospective clients to discover that you are a freelance writer.

Beyond the basics of writing engaging and interesting blog posts, you should consider including a direct call to action at the bottom of each post. This call to action should prompt readers to consider your freelance writing services and direct them to your 'Hire Me' page. Here's an example:

If you enjoyed reading this post, why not hire me for your own blog? [Click here](#) for more information.

Many people who hit your blog will never get past one post (even if they enjoyed it) – you only have to consider your own reading habits to understand that likelihood. With that in mind, it can pay to

promote your services prominently.

Whilst you don't want to ram your "I'm a freelance writer" message down readers' throats, you should never forget the blog's primary purpose. If you have to irritate a minority to get your message across to those that truly matter (i.e. your prospective clients), so be it.

Promoting Your Blog

The subject of blog promotion is a big one, but as a freelance blogger it is not something you can afford to spend a huge amount of time on. With that in mind I am going to drill down to a small set of actions you can take that will give you the best return. Perhaps the best thing about the following strategies is that they help you in multiple ways (beyond simply promoting your blog).

Blog promotion is typically made out to be like some kind of arcane art, but there are just two key fundamentals:

1. In order to reach people, you must go to where they are (not expect them to come to you)
2. Effective networking = effective blog promotion

The "build it and they will come" strategy does not typically work for blogging. You must identify your target audience, figure out where they hang out (online and/or offline), then place yourself in front of them. In simple terms this is best done by creating and developing relationships with your peers (i.e. those who already have established audiences that you can seek to leverage).

These fundamentals may not immediately be plainly obvious, but as we go through the different blog promotion strategies all will become clear.

Guest Posting

We have already discussed guest posting as a means of getting samples, but as you are no doubt aware, it is also an effective method of blog promotion.

Guest posting is perhaps the best example of the two fundamentals of blog promotion in action. First of all, by having a post published on another blog (which should of course attract an audience that shares some characteristics with your own target audience), you are going to where the people are. Secondly, by writing a post of quality for another blogger, you are establishing or boosting a relationship with them.

But what else can guest posting do for you?

1. It will send you a number of visitors (anything from approximately 50–500 in the first few

days after the post is published and even more on standout occasions)

2. It can boost your blog's authority in the eyes of search engines (because of the link back to your site)
3. It increases awareness of you as a known entity in the blogosphere
4. It boosts your credentials as an authority on your topic
5. It gives you a chance to engage with people outside of your direct audience (via comments)
6. It will further your learning of what makes a successful blog post

I will leave you with one vital piece of advice relating to guest posting – the quality of your posts is of vital importance. You will only get out what you put in. The opportunity to be published on someone else's blog is an opportunity to blow away their audience with the quality of your writing. If you are published on a blog with a good readership but do not attract many referrals, you only have yourself to blame.

In-Post Promotion

In my opinion, what I call "in-post promotion" is one of the most effective forms of blog promotion around.

The concept is simple – people like to be mentioned and flattered. If you cater to someone's ego (in a genuine and thoughtful manner) you are likely to see a positive return.

A good example of this is my own [LWB 100 post](#) in which I listed my favorite 100 blogs that I felt could help people quit their jobs and build a better life. The two editions of that list have accounted for well over 15% of my total page views since the first edition was published in February 2012 (at the time of writing). That is a staggering number, given the amount of other posts on the blog.

There were two keys behind the success of the LWB 100:

1. I put together a genuinely valuable list of blogs
2. I asked each and every person mentioned to share the post

That is just one example of in-post promotion. Another would be the 'round-up' style post, in which you ask a number of bloggers for their opinion or thoughts on a certain topic, and then publish them collectively as a post. A roundup post I did, [22 Success Stories Reveal The Moment When They Knew They Were Capable Of More](#), is my fourth most viewed post (at the time of writing). Again, the key is to (a) put together something of genuine value and (b) individually ask each and every person

featured to share the post.

This method is great at driving traffic (as the people you feature share your post amongst their audience) but can also be a wonderful way of establishing and/or building relationships with fellow bloggers. I have a rule of thumb that every roundup post you publish should result in at least one genuine new connection.

Link Bait

Link bait is content that attracts links from other blogs. It does so by being compelling. That is the basic, uncomplicated premise.

The LWB 100 list above was a form of link bait (and attracted many links), but link bait posts are not always list posts.

A great way to determine how to produce good link bait in your niche is to find other bloggers that curate links. Many blogs have periodical "link mashups" which contain a select number of posts. [Kikolani's "Fetching Friday"](#) is a good example of this. The posts you see in those collections are generally examples of good link bait.

Link bait posts typically share one or more of the following characteristics:

- Comprehensive
- Controversial
- Informative
- Unique

Link bait should not be a cheap or shallow form of content production. As always, you should set out to provide something of true value.

Here are three more examples of successful link bait posts that I have produced:

- [Show Your Love for the Top 100 WordPress Plugin Developers](#)
- [The Top 100 WordPress Plugins For Your Site](#)
- [5 Reasons Why Responsive Design Is Not Worth It](#)

Writing good link bait is a difficult thing to teach – each niche has its own unique characteristics and what works for one may not work for another. With that in mind the key to producing good link bait is

to observe what others are doing and experiment.

Action Step

Put a provisional plan together that details how you intend to promote your site. Treat this as a work in progress to be honed over time rather than a set-in-stone strategy.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

I have very deliberately left SEO until last in my coverage of blog promotion methods as I think it receives far too much attention amongst bloggers. While search engine traffic can account for a significant proportion of referrals to your site, it is a volatile and extraordinarily competitive environment. While a huge investment of time can yield relatively poor results, an application of basic tactics and patience will result in a good flow of traffic from search engines.

If you're interested in digging deeper into the intricacies of SEO then I highly recommend the [Point Blank SEO](#) course.

I preach a concept that I like to call "incidental SEO." The idea is simple – all of the work you do to optimize your blog and its posts for SEO is beneficial in more ways than just SEO. My incidental SEO strategy can be broken down into seven steps.

1. Produce a Keyword List

You can grab a list of keywords relating to your niche using the free [Google Keyword Planner](#). Just head over there and type a "root" keyword that best reflects your niche (so if your niche was cars, that would be your root keyword). The keyword tool will spit out up to eight hundred related keywords. You can download the resultant keywords in a spreadsheet file for later use.

If you are looking for something a little more sophisticated I thoroughly recommend [Market Samurai](#).

2. Choose Keywords

The keyword list you produced in step one should be used as a reference whenever you are writing a new blog post.

Take for example the "cars" example I used above. If I were to write a post regarding the common potential pitfalls when purchasing a second hand car, I would reference my keyword list and discover that 'second hand car' and 'second hand cars' are both popular keywords.

Whilst those keywords are undoubtedly competitive, we are not generally looking to rank for the

competitive keywords. If you base your blog post around competitive keywords, you are likely to attract "long tail" keyword traffic. So in the above example, you might receive very few visits from people searching for "second hand cars," but you might receive a healthy handful from people searching for "second hand car buying tips."

So when it comes to writing a blog post, you should pick out any keywords from your list that are applicable to your chosen topic. You should target one primary keyword (which will be your main focus) and one or more secondary keywords.

3. Your Post's Headline

The headline of your post should be short (ideally less than 65 characters) and descriptive. I recommend that character limit so that the headline does not get truncated by Google in its search results.

Search engines tend to add weight to words at or near the beginning of a headline so you should (when possible) include your primary keyword at the beginning (e.g. "Second Hand Cars: 5 Key Buying Tips").

Having said that, you should never sacrifice the quality or readability of your headline in an attempt to optimize it for SEO. As I mentioned earlier, you should write for your readers first and for search engines second.

4. Your Permalink

Before you do anything, make sure that your site's permalinks are set to match your post names (i.e. <http://www.yoursite.com/your-post-headline/>). You can do this by navigating to *Settings > Permalinks* in your WordPress sidebar and selecting the *Post name* radio button on the resultant screen.

A post's permalink should match your chosen primary keyword, and possibly a secondary keyword if it seems appropriate. So in the above example the permalink would be "second-hand-cars," or possibly "second-hand-cars-buying-tips." It is generally wise to strip out superfluous words that would not benefit in terms of SEO (e.g. "5" and "key").

5. Links

Search engines like to see links within web pages – it demonstrates context. With that in mind, all of your posts should contain links pointing both to other posts on your site and to external content.

Do not be stingy with linking out in the fear that you will lose traffic – you will only lose traffic in

doing so if your content isn't good, and if that is the case the external links aren't the issue.

6. Formatting

Not only is good formatting important for readability and engagement, it can work wonders in terms of SEO.

So use plenty of sub-headers, bold, italics, and other graphical elements (lists, tables, etc). When appropriate, include your primary and secondary keywords within these graphical elements. However, never try to shoehorn keywords into a blog post – keep it natural.

7. Images and Other Media

Images offer another form of context for search engines, so you should make it clear what images in your posts relate to.

In the same way that your permalink is named to reflect the primary and secondary keywords, your image should be too. So images included within your used car tips post could be named *second-hand-car.jpg* or *used-car-tips.png*.

Furthermore, you should add alt and title tags to each image that are both relevant to the image and keyword rich.

Finally, embedding related video and audio is a great way of enriching the user experience, and will do you no harm in terms of SEO either.

Action Step

If necessary, create an SEO check list for you to refer back to when writing blog posts.

Leaving Work Behind: A Case Study of a Successful Freelance Blog

When I launched [Leaving Work Behind](#) back in June 2011 I had no ambitions to be a freelance writer, let alone use the blog as a referral machine. Yet over time it became an integral part of my freelance business as it is to this day.

By reading and putting into action all of the advice contained within this book you have every chance of producing a blog that will operate effectively as an ongoing source of referrals for your freelance business. However, I am aware of how helpful it can be to review real life case studies which is why I am including an account of how my blog has helped me in my freelance career to date.

Successful Freelancers' Blogs

But before we get onto that I want to make one key point: freelance blogs come in all shapes and sizes. To demonstrate that point, here is a selection of blogs created by successful freelance writers:

- [Kikolani](#)
- [Writers In Charge](#)
- [Careful Cents](#)
- [Alexis Grant](#)
- [Carol Tice](#)

As you can see, these blogs cover a wide spectrum in terms of style, design, and content. There is no "wrong" way to create a blog for your freelancing business – there is only *your* way. However, I would of course advise that you create your blog with the advice contained within this book in mind in order to give yourself the best possible chance of success.

How Leaving Work Behind Worked for Me

I started Leaving Work Behind as an online accountability journal of sorts back in June 2011. At the time I had a full-time job in property management and development and had only just decided that I wanted to create my own online business and quit my job.

The only problem was that I had no idea *how* to create a successful online business. I was starting truly from square one and had nothing to work with apart from a burning desire to achieve my goals. That led to nearly six months of fruitless efforts to establish income-producing websites in which I lost money (quite the opposite of what I had intended).

It was more out of sheer frustration than anything else that I submitted a handful of pitches to the [ProBlogger Job Board](#) in September 2011. I used nothing more than my blog posts as samples in those pitches as I had nothing else to show!

I managed to land a job writing for [WPMU](#) as a result of that first batch of pitches and a job with [ManageWP](#) followed in November. I decided to quit my job at the end of 2011 on the assumption that I could land more clients – fortunately I was right.

It was only after I had quit my job that my blog really came into its own in terms of generating leads. Although I had originally planned to do a lot of outreach and cold calling in order to find clients, my third client actually came to *me*. Following that I picked up work with a number of other clients who

all contacted me via my blog. I never had to submit another pitch or seek out another client – my blog did all the work.

Why My Blog is Such an Effective Referral Tool

I believe there are three reasons why Leaving Work Behind is such an effective referral tool:

- It showcases the quality of my writing
- It advertises the fact that I am a freelance writer
- It features glowing testimonials

When it comes to creating a successful freelance business a strong focus on the fundamentals is all that you need. A good demonstration of your writing ability and positive testimonials from clients is all that most people want to see in order to make a decision to get in touch. Everything else that you do is really just an attempt to increase the likelihood of more (or better quality) clients getting in touch.

My blog is also effective as a 'gathering point' for prospective clients. Every single article I write across the web (both on LWB and on client blogs) serves as a little outpost with the bylines linking back to my blog. If clients like what they read they can immediately click through to my blog, find out more about me, and get in touch.

To put it simply, the more you write, the more likely you are to attract a greater number of prospects. When you appreciate that every piece you have published is effectively an advertisement of your writing ability and salability, it gives you that extra motivation to make sure that you always write to high standards.

Focus on the *Quality* of Your Clients, Not the Quantity

As a freelance blogger I work on the basis of securing long-term gigs. I want to work with a client for a year, not a month. Fortunately, blogging lends itself to long-term gigs as people always need new blog content. So what I look for is a good *quality* of client rather than quantity.

In reality I probably average just 3 or 4 referrals per month to my blog, but that's all I need. With six clients on my books I am at my ideal capacity, working around 3–4 hours per day with an hourly rate of just under \$100. I have been in a position for some time where I have turned prospects away unless they have a particularly interesting job to offer.

I would advise that you take the same approach in securing quality, long-term clients. In this way you won't constantly be scratching around for the next piece of work – there's nothing quite like the

security of having a bunch of long term gigs to hang your hat on.

Do It Your Own Way

I wanted to tell my story to serve as inspiration for your own journey but I do want to stress that your blog should be unique to you. In reality I would have created something entirely different (and more effective) as a referral tool if LWB had originally been intended for that purpose, but as it was I 'retrofitted' it and it has done a great job for me regardless.

So please take what I have done and build upon it – do a better job than me!

Conclusion

I want to close by offering a single piece of advice relating to your freelance business as a whole – not just the subject of creating a blog. It is arguably the most important thing you should learn and understand in order to become a successful freelance writer.

My advice is this: your business will only be as successful as your writing allows it to be. At the end of the day, everything comes down to your writing. It matters little if you have a great-looking blog and glowing testimonials if the quality of your writing leaves little to be desired. Although I will always preach the effectiveness of using a blog as a referral tool, those who learn to write exceptionally will never be short of work. If there is anything that you should put effort into, it is the quality of your writing.

Blogging is a unique form of media. To write in an uncomplicated and conversational style is a little more challenging than it might initially sound. But if your writing is top notch then you will find that your blog's effectiveness as a referral tool is quite astonishing. Please do not neglect the talent that makes up the heart and soul of your freelance writing business. Your words are more valuable than everything else put together.