

“Guide to Blog Promotion”

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"Guide to Blog Promotion"

In chess, promotion occurs when a pawn reaches the eighth square. At that point, your opponent is challenged because this simple pawn takes on all the powers of a Queen—the deadliest piece on the board. Of course, the pawn may be promoted to bishop, rook, or any other piece but why? This only clues the other player in to your secret plans. That being said, however, promotions to knight can often be strategically useful depending on the situation.

Let's not get too lost in metaphor. Suffice to say, the circuitous game of promoting one's blog in the blogosphere (without the proper armament) can often seem as difficult and unrewarding as a day-long chess match that ends in a draw. If you play your game right, however, that pawn can hit the big time. Ideally, the simple act of blogging in and of itself would attract enough traffic to please the author but there are cases in which more is better.

Blogging Technique Suggestions

This part of the traffic-grabbing techniques is a little more persnickety and not as readily activated. The basic gist of this section of methods is "If you build it well they will come." You'll need to incorporate the other aspects of self-promotion, but it's true that writing a great blog goes a long way towards repeat visitors and word of mouth blog.

Write quality content and do it well.

Jen Garrett (http://www.angelfire.com/grrl/jen_garrett/) demands that you use proper punctuation, capitalize letters when appropriate, and don't overuse the ellipsis. She's being a bit of a grammar bitch, but she has a point. If your "style" is bad writing, worse grammar, no punctuation, and an ugly design, that might be okay for a niche crowd. But the idea here is to get a big crowd so fix yourself up a bit, pull it together man, have some respect for your readers, and discover a style that shines brightly through good blogging.

Publish regular updates.

Danah Boyd (<http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/once>) told me that she intentionally wanted to lower the traffic to her blog and she found the easiest way to do it was to stop posting so frequently. (Danah is an odd one, that's why we love her.) The reverse of her experiment is also true: the more regular you blog, the more traffic you will get. You've got to think about it like watering a plant—do it every day and the plant will grow. Hopefully your blog is not like the plant in *The Little Shop of Horrors*. That would be bad.

Think of your audience.

A good way to build an audience is to cultivate one. When you keep your audience in mind, you are focusing your writing. This helps you develop a stronger voice and is instrumental in creating the brand that is you as put forth through your blog. Again, this is more of an overarching, long-term technique for building traffic and won't have immediate results. Nevertheless, focus goes a long way toward repeat visitors.

Keep search engines in mind.

Note that sometimes your "audience" is whoever stumbles into your site from a web search. Search is a great way to bring in new visitors and there are a few things you can do to make your blog more search engine friendly. Use post titles and blog page title tags along with your post page archiving. This will automatically give each of your post pages an intelligent name based on the title of your post. Also, try to be descriptive when you blog. A well crafted post about something very specific can end up very near the top results of a search. For example, a Google search for "[Book Cover Design](#)" features this blog post: <http://www.kottke.org/03/03/book-cover-design> by the illustrious Jason Kottke complete with reader comments.

Keep your posts and paragraphs short.

Note the brevity of the aforementioned Kottke post. People will come back daily to read your fresh new work but spare them the one thousand word diatribes. Strive for succinct posts that pump pertinent new information into the blogosphere and move on. Keep it short and sweet so visitors can pop in, read up, and click on. Think of you blog as a cumulative effect. This doesn't mean you should never practice some long form writing now and then, it's just something to keep in mind.

Marketing Action Suggestions

The part of promotional techniques are simple actions you can take to publicize your blog. This category is theoretically unlimited. You could build your own blimp and spell out your blogspot subdomain in twinkly holiday lights across the side, that sort of thing. Instead, I've limited these suggestions to more obvious, grounded tactics. (If you do got the blimp route, please: use helium, not hydrogen.)

Put your blog URL in your email signature.

Whenever I see a blog url in an email signature, I always click on it to see who I'm dealing with. Especially if it's someone I've never met. Email gets forwarded all the time so even if you only send out a five notes a day to friends, the potential number of people clicking over to your blog is in the thousands. (That is of course completely theoretical, but you get my drift—it's worth it.) I can't give you specific instructions on how to edit your email client's signature because I don't know which one you use, but poke around. It's somewhere in the settings.

Submit your address to blog search sites and directories.

People look for blog content at <http://www.Technorati.com> every day, are you on their list? You should be. Submit your blog's url to <http://www.Technorati.com>, <http://www.Mybloglog.com>, <http://www.Blogcatalog.com>, <http://www.Daypop.com>, and any other site of that ilk you come across. With the exception of Technorati, many of these sites are hobby or graduate student projects but they continue to gain visitors looking for interesting blogs to read, bookmark, and revisit. Not all of them have the power to crawl ever blog in existence so you can help them help you by dropping your url in the appropriate field.

Participate in meme games.

A meme is an idea transmitted from person to person like a virus. If the flu was a blog, it would get crazy traffic. With all the sickness and disease analogies, blog induced memes are actually fun and can win you some extra traffic. How do they work? Basically a blogger will propose an idea like "Hey, let's post the first sentence of our favorite book!" and it will catch on like crazy with people linking to each other's submissions obsessively until the game dies down. A favorite meme for years was the [Friday Five](http://fridayfive.org/index.php) (<http://fridayfive.org/index.php>), if you're looking for something new, try [The Daily Meme](http://thedailymeme.com) (<http://thedailymeme.com>).

Advertise.

If keyword advertising were affordable enough, I'd say go for it. For now, free is a good way to go. [Adlcons](http://www.rebitran.com/adicons-for-wordpress) (<http://www.rebitran.com/adicons-for-wordpress>) is a plugin for Wordpress that lets you easily add and manage favicon ads on your blog. Host ads, place ads, it's all traffic. Adlcons blend right into your site and are fully customizable. You can join the [Adlcons network](http://adicons.net) (<http://adicons.net>) of favicon-based blog advertisers soon - launching in a few days. If you need some exposure now, consider advertising on <http://thethinkingblog.com>. Bloggers can place ads for exclusively low rates for the moment, while sometime in the near future real advertisers will have to dish out to get noticed.

Link to other blogs.

This is a great way to get traffic. Here's what happens when you link to another blogger: she sees you in her referral logs, checks out your blog, and then very likely links back to you or at the very least makes a mental note to do so. Links are the currency of the blogosphere and it takes money to make money so start linking. Don't be shy folks, it's not actually cash. Not yet anyway—who knows what bloggers will come up with.

Be an active commenter.

Try to leave comments on the blogs you read every day. This is in the same vein as linking. Leaving a comment on someone's post can make their day. Nothing beats getting those email notifications that whisper tacitly out at you from the screen, "You're thoughts have struck me dead in my tracks. I simply must acknowledge you and your greatness" (Or something to that effect.) Most comment systems also provide a way for you to leave a link back to your blog which begs a visit at the very least. So if you feel inspired, leave a comment or two in your blog travels. It behooves you.

Pitch your posts via email to other bloggers.

This is a touchy technique and should be approached with caution. Blogger [Eugene Volokh](http://volokh.com/2003_04_27_volokh_archive.html#200202312) (http://volokh.com/2003_04_27_volokh_archive.html#200202312) has published a short treatise on how best to pitch one's blog via email and it's filled with great tips and advice. Assuming your blog is actually worth pitching (of course it is), here are some tips from Volokh:

1. Pitch the post, not the blog.
2. Include the full text and your URL.
3. Submit only your best posts.
4. Don't only pitch to high traffic blogs.

Print your blog URL on cards, stickers, etc.

Basically, if you plan to have anything printed up, put your blog on it. These days, more and more business cards have blog addresses listed on them along with email and phone number. I wouldn't be surprised if I started seeing bumper stickers with blogspot addresses on them soon. There's a lot of traffic on the 101, that bumper in front of me is prime advertising real estate.

Speaking of the 101, maybe you've spotted the giant orange SUV with the license plate that says **BLOGGER** while driving south towards San Jose? No, that's not [Evan Williams](http://www.evhead.com) (<http://www.evhead.com>) as you would suspect. It is, however, a nice piece of creative publicity. If there's one thing we've learned from my Labor Day investigation of blog promotion it's this: Don't be that guy with the **BLOGGER** license plate but think like him. That's the kind of take-charge technique you should open your game with. That's how you can turn your pawn into royalty.

Of course, you need a create a blog in order to promote it. See my beginners [Guide to Blogging](http://www.thethinkingblog.com/2006/12/guide-to-blogging.html) (<http://www.thethinkingblog.com/2006/12/guide-to-blogging.html>) if you already don't have one.

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