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Technical Blogging

Turn Your Expertise into a Remarkable Online Presence

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Technical Blogging

Turn Your Expertise
into a Remarkable
Online Presence



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You may not know it yet, but blogging has the potential to change your life.

I didn't know it either when I first began writing online many years ago. I thought blogging would be a way to perform a brain dump of my thoughts from time to time. Perhaps I'd toss together some essays here and there; maybe something would come out of the whole blogging thing, but I wasn't holding my breath. Boy, was I wrong.

The positive impact that blogging has had on my career, income, and life in general is what persuaded me to share my knowledge with you through this book and to show you just what a meaningful impact blogging can have on your own life.

This book teaches you the art and science of technical blogging and shows you how to be a successful blogger. Whenever possible, I've tried to back up all assertions with past experiences, stats, and even case studies.

Nevertheless, this is an opinionated book. It's the distilled form of what I've learned from trial and error over the course of the past eight years through several blogs I started, both in English and Italian. As you read it, you may disagree with me, much like the readers of my blogs sometimes contest a point I've made in one of my posts.

That's OK.

My goal is to provide you with a road map to achieve success with your own blog. I'll supply you with step-by-step instructions, starting with the planning phase and going all the way to creating, promoting, benefitting from, and maintaining your blog. I won't shy away from expressing my opinion about what you should do and what is best avoided.

This is a team effort, so I also want to get you thinking in new ways, experimenting, and ultimately reaching your own conclusions about what does and doesn't work for your technical blog. I'll be your mentor, gently guiding you in the right direction while still allowing you to find your own way.

What Is Technical Blogging?

The most generic definition of *blog* (an amalgamation of the words *web* and *log*) is a site that contains a series of posts organized in reverse chronological order. This sterile definition doesn't quite convey what people really think when they hear the word *blog* though.

In the collective mind, *blog* often calls forth a picture of a writer in pajamas, talking about his or her daily life or (at the other end of the spectrum)

breaking news stories before the media reaches them. Yet those two are by no means the only kinds of blogs on the block.

Many of the concepts we'll explore in this book will be beneficial to those who are interested in starting such a personal blog; however, our focus is specifically centered around technical blogging.

A technical blog is a nonfiction blog, the main subject matter of which is technical—rather than personal—in nature. Generally you won't delve into what you had for lunch or include pictures of your newborn nephew. Instead, you will use your blog as a way to share your expertise with others in your field. Examples of some of the most popular technical blogs you may already be familiar with include *TechCrunch*, *Gizmodo*, *VentureBeat*, *Smashing Magazine*, *Joel on Software*, *Signal vs. Noise*, and *Coding Horror*,¹ to name just a few.

As a developer and entrepreneur, I imagine my ideal readers to be developers and technically-minded entrepreneurs who are blogging about software development and business-related subjects, respectively.

Fitting into one camp or the other is not a requirement though. You may be launching a blog about biotechnology, dentistry, or photography, and the content of this book would still apply to you.

Blogging Isn't Dead

You may have heard that blogging is dead and thus are wary of investing your time and effort in an activity that's about to go the way of the dinosaur. Don't be. The blogging ecosystem has never been more vibrant and alive. What you are witnessing is just the evolution of the medium.

To adapt a famous quote by Mark Twain, rumors of blogging's death have been greatly exaggerated. If you follow sensationalist tech pundits, you may have been misled into believing that the emergence of microblogging services (like Tumblr and Twitter²) have marked the end of traditional blogging.

Among other reasons, microblogs are popular for the fact that they often take a minimal dose of effort on the author's part and are easy to follow from the reader's standpoint. With such sites you can share a link or a short thought with your readers in a matter of seconds. Conversely, a well-written article

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1. techcrunch.com, gizmodo.com, venturebeat.com, smashingmagazine.com, venturebeat.com, joelonsoftware.com, 37signals.com/svn, and codinghorror.com/blog
 2. tumblr.com and twitter.com, respectively.

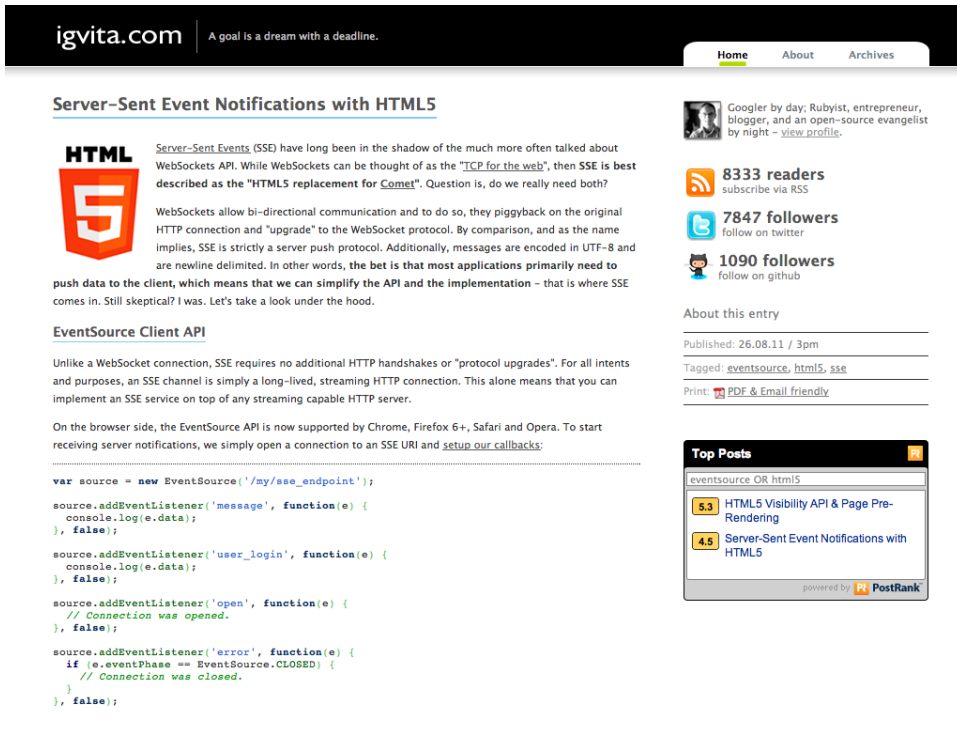


Figure 1—A sample technical blog

for a traditional blog could take hours to craft. Microblogs can be seen as one evolutionary branch of blogging, targeted toward an Internet audience that's stereotypically perceived as having a short attention span.

As a technical blogger you have nothing to fear from this family of microblogs. One hundred forty characters is sufficient to enable you to share what you're watching on TV, link to an article, quote a famous person, or share a quick thought, but it is ill-suited for essays or HOWTOs on technology. Instead, think of microblogging as a complementary way of blogging and broadcasting your messages. Later in the book we will explore how to take advantage of services such as Twitter in that capacity.

Blogging as a Megaphone

An established blog is like a megaphone: it amplifies your voice, allowing it to reach a wider audience. Creating such a following takes time and hard work, but the payoff is that the audience you've built up is going to be there for you when you need it.



Joe asks:

How Many Blogs Are There?

Exact blogging statistics are hard to come by, but at the time of this writing, blogpulse.com has over 170 million blogs indexed, with about 70,000 blogs and 1 million new posts indexed in the past twenty-four hours alone. As numbers like that clearly show, blogging is indeed alive and well.

This megaphone has also the wonderful advantage of coming with a built-in echo generator, as your audience may rebroadcast your message through social networks or their own blogs, helping you reach an even larger pool of interested readers.

It's up to you to decide how to use such a megaphone, but you'll be surprised by just how handy it is to have the same circulation as a local newspaper. Announcing a new project or product? Looking for a new hire? Having an issue with some cutting-edge open source project or perhaps with a company that is ignoring your valid complaint? Fear not; your audience can help.

Case in point: one time I had a problem with a computer store chain that wouldn't repair a brand-new but defective laptop that I'd just purchased for my wife's birthday. I wrote about the situation on my technical blog, and after a few days the story had been read by over a hundred thousand visitors. Among these readers were members of the traditional media, some of whom became interested in my story and wanted to interview me. After the whirlwind of attention that my story generated, the company had no choice but to cut their losses and reluctantly repair the laptop under warranty.

As with all situations in life, don't abuse your position of power. But whatever you use this megaphone for, know that thousands of tuned-in readers will be there for you. At times, it may feel as though you have an unfair advantage in this respect, and that's because you do.

Blogging as a Conversation

Blogging is not just about broadcasting a message to thousands of readers, it's also an ongoing conversation.

Most blogs have a comment section for this specific purpose, and that's definitely a positive thing, as your readers will want to interact with you by leaving comments (that you will often reply to as a means of further engaging your commenters). Some readers may even contact you directly by email or link

back to your post from their blogs. Other discussions about your content may pop up on sites or communities such as Twitter, Facebook,³ Reddit,⁴ Hacker News,⁵ or Slashdot.⁶

Thinking of blogging as a conversation can also be freeing because you don't need to have all the answers before approaching a subject you intend to write about. You are not expected to.

A blog post is a conversation starter that can lead to lengthy discussions that have the potential to spread far and wide across the Internet. It's important that you treat blogging as a conversation that will help you grow and learn, and not just as a megaphone.

As a blogger you are part of the blogosphere, a world with its own expectations, most of which are based around the idea of a community of bloggers and commenters interacting with one another.

Be part of this conversation by replying to comments wherever they're posted on your site and by linking to other blogs that are relevant to your articles. In doing so, your blog stands a very good chance of growing and quickly attracting a community of like-minded individuals. To boot, you may establish new professional relationships and make new friends in the process.

Bloggers with Benefits

As an author I'm aware of the fact that each reader has a different expectation of this book and different goals for his or her blogging activities.

Some readers may solely be interested in sharing their knowledge with the world. Writing and expressing thoughts for such readers is enough reward and motivation to blog on a regular basis.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are readers who are mostly interested in learning how to make a second income for themselves or how to better market their company's products via blogging. Regardless of where you stand on this line, I'm going to assume that you have something worthwhile to say and that you have a honest, noble intent to share your expertise with an audience.

3. [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com),

4. [reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com)

5. news.ycombinator.com

6. [slashdot.org](https://www.slashdot.org)

Yet you'll see throughout the book a great deal of information on how to build a large audience and how to benefit to the fullest (including economically) from the success of your blog. One reason for covering such topics in detail is to satisfy those who may have different goals than you. Another good reason is that there is a natural audience for what you have to say, and it would be unfortunate and probably demoralizing for you to never reach it.

And consider this: any time you spend blogging is time you're not spending on paying pursuits or, more importantly, with your family. There will come a time when that weighs on you. Believe me; you will blog better, more consistently, and longer if your blogging pays for itself. So please don't think I'm being mercenary if I explain how you actually can get paid for doing what you want to do.

With that clarification out of the way, let's briefly list what some practical and tangible benefits of blogging are. Most such benefits, you'll notice, derive directly from your blog being the effective megaphone and conversation tool we discussed above.

- Blogging can advance your career. You could land a dream job or great consultancy gigs if you are a freelancer. If the latter applies to you, then blogging could help you be more in demand and therefore able to command a higher rate.
- Blogging can help you become notorious—in the best possible sense—in your field. You might receive invitations to speak at conferences, receive an offer to write a book on the subject you blog about, or have the awesome benefit of being able to quickly bring attention to your latest projects with a single post. As well, if you're into technical books, be prepared for the free review copies you'll be offered by publishers.
- Blogging can help you earn extra income. This can range from pizza money all the way up to thousands of dollars a month. Blogging is by no means a get-rich-quick scheme, but it has the potential to handsomely provide you with economic rewards, both directly and indirectly.

In addition to these benefits, if you are blogging to promote a business, you can also expect to achieve the following:

- Find new customers. Blogging is an extremely cost-effective marketing tool (often referred to as inbound marketing); it can definitely help you attract a large number of new customers to your own products.
- Build loyalty. Customers who regularly interact with companies tend to develop greater loyalty to those companies, their brands, and their prod-

ucts. A blog that allows for comments and an approachable social media presence are the ideal means by which to keep that communication channel open and operating smoothly.

- Find new employees, partners, and investors. When you put your business out there through a blog, you have the chance to meet an array of people online, including prospective hires. With a bit of luck, you may even catch the interest of potential business partners and investors. Blogging can enable you to network with the right type of people to help bolster the growth of your business.

[Chapter 10, Making Money from Your Blog, on page ?](#), [Chapter 11, Promoting Your Own Business, on page ?](#), and [Chapter 12, Taking Full Advantage of Your Blog, on page ?](#), will show you how to obtain all of these benefits.

How to Get the Best Out of This Book

Before proceeding with this journey, I feel it's important to highlight how this book is intended to be read.

If you don't have a blog yet, it's worth reading this book from cover to cover, as you'll be provided with a complete set of steps that you can take to become a successful blogger. After reading each chapter, write down the steps you plan to take for your site. To take full advantage of the book, you must actively put some of the advice within it into action.

If you already have a blog, you'll still benefit from reading the book in its entirety, but doing so isn't as mandatory. You can focus on the chapters that interest you right now and come back to others whenever you need assistance with a specific topic.

Regardless of whether you are a new blogger or not, think of blogging as an experiment. You'll try suggestions from this book, and most of them will work for your blog, though a few may not. By using traffic statistics and user feedback, you'll be able to validate what works for you and what doesn't. Then iterate, constantly improving your blog with small enhancements. As you gain more experience, you'll be able to come up with your own hypotheses, experiments, and improvements.

Finally, remember that everything we do as bloggers is intended to showcase our content. Yet this book contains many chapters that focus on other aspects of blogging. These other chapters will help you maximize your ability to promote and benefit from your content. As you approach each chapter, however, you should remember the mantra "Content first." The underlying

So Many Links!

This book contains a huge number of links. This was done in an effort to make the book as useful as possible.

Depending on how you're reading this book, the act of typing in the URLs can get tedious pretty quickly. So I've created a list to help you easily access all of the links included in this book. You can find the list at technicalblogging.com/links.

assumption throughout this book is that you are reading these pages with the intent of producing the best content you can.

Brilliant content that isn't promoted will likely be discovered and shared ...eventually, however suboptimal the approach. Conversely, mediocre content that is heavily promoted will still remain mediocre and unremarkable even if hundreds of thousands of people see it.

This book is written in the belief that each of us has something worth sharing. Each of us has a blogger within. I'm here to help you let your blogger out.