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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



Antonio Cangiano

Edited by Michael Swaine



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The team that produced this book includes:

Michael Swaine (editor)
Potomac Indexing, LLC (indexer)
Molly McBeath (copyeditor)
David J Kelly (typesetter)
Janet Furlow (producer)
Juliet Benda (rights)
Ellie Callahan (support)

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At this point, you've determined the style and topic of your blog, as well as validated the existence of a sizable audience. Now you should start thinking about answering a question that many of your visitors will ask themselves, Why should I subscribe to this blog?

I phrased that question so as to intentionally imply a subscription to your upcoming posts via feed or email, which is something that's common among a technical readership. For less technical readers who don't use subscription tools, the question may become, Why should I come back to this blog?

Whatever the exact question, you need a convincing answer. What's the reason your blog exists? Why did you start it in the first place? What's your compelling story? Answer these questions and you'll have a much clearer picture of what your blog is really about and why visitors will want to return.

The Elevator Pitch

In the business world there is a concept called the *elevator pitch*. Its name derives from the hypothetical scenario of finding yourself in an elevator with a potential investor. In such a context, all you have is between thirty and ninety seconds or so to summarize what your product or company is all about. While you don't need to raise money for your blog, this is still a worthwhile exercise.

Tip 4

Focus your elevator pitch on the why, not the how.

Your elevator pitch should quickly summarize the essence of your product or company. Why does it exist? What problem does it solve? What's its value proposition?

We are dealing with a blog here, but the same principle applies. Characterize your blog in one or two sentences at most and give a reason why people should come back and visit again.

Case Study: Popular Tech Blogs

To help you with this task, let's briefly take a look at a few blogs (listed by URL) and analyze the compelling reasons behind their existence.

- rubyinside.com: The most important news, events, and releases in the Ruby community. Reason to read it: To stay up-to-date and keep a pulse on the Ruby ecosystem.
- daringfireball.net: News and opinions about Apple by an unrepentant advocate of Apple products. Reason to read it: It provides fresh insight, interesting controversy, and news about Apple and its competitors delivered by an established community pundit.
- thedailywtf.com: Daily examples of bad programming. Reason to read it: To learn more about anti-patterns in programming, and for the amusement.
- igvita.com: HOWTO articles on cutting-edge open source technologies. Reason to read it: To learn how to use some of the coolest technologies around and apply them to real-world problems.
- sethgodin.typepad.com: Marketing ideas and opinions. Reason to read it: To improve your marketing skills with the aid of a leader in the marketing world via thought-provoking ideas and insight.
- techcrunch.com: News about startups, technology, and VC investments. Reason to read it: To stay up-to-date with the world of technology and startups.
- engadget.com: News about gadgets. Reason to read it: To stay abreast of exciting news pertaining to technological gadgets.
- flowingdata.com: The visualization and statistics blog of a PhD statistics student. Reason to read it: To learn, in the blog's words, "how designers, programmers, and statisticians are putting data to good use." It's a must for those who are interested in data visualization and statistics.

In each and every example above, the reason why it makes sense to follow these blogs is pretty obvious and can be stated in a single sentence.

Come Up with Your Blog's Reason for Being

Your goal is to make it just as obvious, to yourself first and then to readers, why your blog is worth following. Remember the elevator pitch we discussed earlier. You only have from a few seconds to a few minutes (at the very most) to effectively win your readers over. You want to state your blog's intent through your title, tagline/motto, About blurb in the sidebar, and the About section, in as direct a manner as possible (rather than being subtle about it).

In the example of the CoffeeScript niche, we could set our sights on becoming the *Ruby Inside* of CoffeeScript, thus becoming that one-stop resource for

folks who are interested in CoffeeScript news. Alternatively, we could make the blog about tutorials on how to accomplish various tasks in CoffeeScript or, again, create a blog that's dedicated solely to converting from JavaScript to CoffeeScript programming. What about one that is devoted to documenting your journey as you try to become proficient in CoffeeScript?

Pick the idea that suits you best for your own subject; pretty much any will do as long as you give it an angle and clearly communicate the point of your blog to your visitors.

Over time you'll find that many other elements corroborate with your effort to make your blog compelling for your readers. These include the design of your site, having catchy headlines, the quality and usefulness of your articles, your professional credentials, the type of comments and commenters your blog manages to attract, and so on. We'll examine each of these in detail in the coming chapters.