Extracted from:

Technical Blogging, Second Edition

Amplify Your Influence

Second Edition

Technical Blogging

Amplify Your Influence

Antonio Cangiano

edited by Michael Swaine

Technical Blogging, Second Edition

Amplify Your Influence

Antonio Cangiano

Pragmatic Bookshelf

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book, and The Pragmatic Programmers, LLC was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in initial capital letters or in all capitals. The Pragmatic Starter Kit, The Pragmatic Programmer, Pragmatic Programming, Pragmatic Bookshelf, PragProg and the linking *g* device are trademarks of The Pragmatic Programmers, LLC.

Every precaution was taken in the preparation of this book. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages that may result from the use of information (including program listings) contained herein.

Our Pragmatic books, screencasts, and audio books can help you and your team create better software and have more fun. Visit us at *https://pragprog.com*.

The team that produced this book includes:

Publisher: Andy Hunt
VP of Operations: Janet Furlow
Managing Editor: Susan Conant
Development Editor: Michael Swaine
Copy Editor: Molly McBeath
Indexing: Potomac Indexing, LLC
Layout: Gilson Graphics

For sales, volume licensing, and support, please contact *support@pragprog.com*.

For international rights, please contact *rights@pragprog.com*.

To my incredible wife, Jessica. And to all the kind souls who helped us in the aftermath of losing our home in an arson fire.

The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.

➤ *Mark Twain*

Introduction

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, well over a decade ago. I thought blogging would be a way to perform a brain dump from time to time. Maybe something would come out of it, but I wasn't holding my breath.

Boy, was I wrong.

Every day we face many decisions. Most of them turn out to be inconsequential, but occasionally a choice ends up shaping our future. Starting to blog did just that for me.

In fact, I count blogging as one of three decisions that drastically affected my career and personal life: the other two being leaving Italy—my home country—in 2003 and getting into the Ruby programming language before Rails was released to the world.

You might think I'm overstating the impact blogging has had on me. Allow me to briefly recap some highlights that might convince you otherwise.

- My manager found me through a post on my programming blog. I moved to Canada, my wife's native country, as a result and I've been employed by IBM for over twelve years now.

- Blogging has afforded me extra income, every single month, for more than a decade.

- I've received dozens of technical books and other freebies over the years.

- When we lost our home and virtually everything we owned to an arson fire in October 2016, a crowdfunding campaign was set up on our behalf. Simply posting it on my blog (and also on my wife's blog) led to a staggering 297 donations.[1] Family, close friends, and colleagues all generously helped and we were very appreciative. What surprised us was that the majority

---

1. programmingzen.com/programming-zen-will-be-on-a-hiatus-due-to-tragic-circumstances/

of donors were blog readers and friends we'd made through blogging. My wife received numerous care packages as well. What a great help to receive such an outpouring of support during a time of complete loss.

- Last year I sold one of my blogs about mathematics to a British company and used the profits for the down payment on a new house.

The positive impact that blogging has had on my career, income, and life in general is what persuaded me to write this book. I'm certain that by the end of it, you'll have the skills required to benefit from sharing your knowledge online.

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 my assertions with direct experiences and statistics.

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 fourteen years through several blogs that I started, either in English or 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 roadmap 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, benefiting from, and maintaining your blog. I won't shy away from expressing my opinion about what you should do and what is best avoided.

But you're not me, and 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, the word *blog* sometimes calls forth a picture of a writer in pajamas, talking about his or her daily life. Many of the concepts we'll cover

in this book will be beneficial to those who want to start 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'll use your blog as a way to share your expertise with others in your field.

Examples of some popular technical blogs that you might already be familiar with include *TechCrunch* (tech news), *Engadget* (gadget news), *Joel on Software* (programming), *Signal v. Noise* (entrepreneurship), *Coding Horror* (programming), *Troy Hunt* (tech security), and *Seth's Blog* (marketing),[2] to name a few.
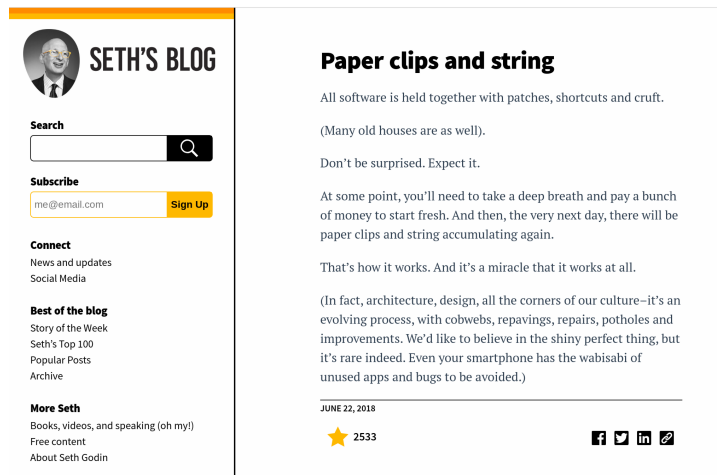

Figure 1—A sample of a popular blog

As a developer and web 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 isn't 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. In fact, you could be using the information from within this book to promote a mom-and-pop type of shop, and you'd still be able to derive useful guidance to succeed in your content marketing efforts.

---

2. techcrunch.com, engadget.com, joelonsoftware.com, m.signalvnoise.com, blog.codinghorror.com, troyhunt.com, and seths.blog, respectively.

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 obsolete. Don't be! To adapt a famous quote by Mark Twain, rumors of blogging's death have been greatly exaggerated. The blogging ecosystem is now extremely mature and well established. Individuals and companies continue to reap incredible benefits from blogging, and if anything they have fewer competitors willing to invest the time and energy required to produce longer content. So they're more likely to stand out.

Among many reasons why publishing quick content on social media (say, on Twitter) is so popular is the fact that it takes minimal effort to do so. You can share a link or a short thought with your followers in a matter of seconds. Conversely, a well-written article for a traditional blog could take a couple of hours to craft. Some see platforms like Twitter as an 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 these microblogging platforms. They don't compete with your blog. They are a complementary tool to reach your audience. A maximum of 280 characters is sufficient to enable you to share what you're watching on TV, crack a joke, link to an article, or share a quick thought, but it is ill-suited for essays or HOWTOs on technology (long Twitter threads notwithstanding). Instead, think of social media as a complementary way of blogging and broadcasting your message. Later in the book, we'll outline a complete strategy to take advantage of such platforms in that capacity.

By the way, exact blogging statistics are hard to come by; but using available numbers from some of the larger players like Tumblr and WordPress, it's quite likely that there are well over 500 million blogs in the world. This number has roughly tripled since the first edition of this book, published five years prior to this second edition. Blogging is indeed alive and well.

Blogging as a Megaphone

An established blog is like a megaphone: it amplifies your voice, allowing you 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 (as I've literally experienced firsthand).

This megaphone also has the wonderful advantage of coming with a built-in echo generator, since 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 this type of 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 a company that's ignoring your valid complaint? Fear not; your audience can help.

Here's a case in point: I once had a problem with a computer store chain that wouldn't repair a brand-new but defective laptop I had 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 people. Among those 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 agreed to do the right thing and reluctantly repaired the laptop under warranty.

As with all situations in life, with great power comes great responsibility. Don't abuse your position of influence, but know that thousands of regular readers will be there for you when you need them. 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 with a portion of them.

Most blogs have comment sections for this specific purpose, and they're definitely good for relationship building and engagement. Some readers may even contact you directly by email or quote you on their own blog. Other discussions about your content may pop up on sites or communities such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, or Hacker News.[3]

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.

---

3.   news.ycombinator.com

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 whenever 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 good chance of growing and quickly attracting a community of like-minded individuals. To boot, you may establish professional relationships and make new friends in the process.

Bloggers with Benefits

As an author, I'm aware that different readers will have different goals and, consequently, different expectations of this book.

Some readers may be solely interested in sharing their knowledge with the world. Writing and expressing thoughts for these kinds of readers is enough reward and motivation to blog on a regular basis. It's their way of giving back by sharing a part of themselves for the benefit of others.

At the other end of the spectrum 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.

This book is meant to be useful regardless of where you land on this spectrum. The only common assumption I make is that you have the honest intent to share your expertise with an audience and aren't afraid of working toward that goal.

Throughout the book you'll find a fair bit of information about how to build a large audience and, in the process, benefit to the fullest (including economically) from the success of your blog. I don't think anyone reading this book will object to attracting a large following, but a minority might not be interested in the monetary benefits of blogging. That's OK. Bear with me or feel free to skip those parts. Just understand that I've covered such topics in detail to satisfy those readers who may have goals that differ from your own.

And consider this: any time you spend blogging is time you're not spending on paying pursuits or, more importantly, with your family/loved ones. A time may come when this weighs on you. You're likely to blog more consistently and longer if your blogging pays for itself in some form or another (even if the reward isn't directly monetary).

With that clarification out of the way, let's briefly list what some practical and tangible benefits of blogging are. Most benefits, you'll notice, derive directly

from your blog being the effective megaphone and conversation tool we discussed earlier.

- Blogging can advance your career. You could land a dream job, improve your standing and visibility within your current company, or book more consultancy gigs if you're a freelancer. If the latter applies to you, then blogging could also help you be more in demand and therefore enable you to command a higher rate.

- Blogging can help you become well known 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. And, if you're into technical books, make some room on your shelves for the free review copies you'll likely be offered by publishers.

- Blogging can help you earn extra income. This can range from pizza money all the way 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:

- Finding 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 for your products.

- Building loyalty—customers who regularly interact with companies tend to develop greater loyalty to those companies, their brands, and their products. A blog that allows for comments and has an approachable social media presence is the ideal means by which to keep that communication channel open.

- Finding 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 11, Advancing Your Career with Blogging, on page ?, and Chapter 12, Promoting Your Own Business, on page ?, will show you how to obtain all of these benefits.

How to Get the Most 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 undertake for your site. To take full advantage of the book, you must actively put at least some of the advice housed within it into action.

If you already have a blog, you'll still benefit from reading the book in its entirety, but doing so is not quite 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're a new blogger or not, think of blogging as an experiment. You'll try suggestions from this book, and many of them will work for your blog (though a few might 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 test your own theories to discover what helps your blog grow.

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 are necessary because they'll 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 assumption throughout this book is that you're reading these pages with the intent of producing the best content you can.

If you've already read the first edition of this book, welcome back. The world has changed in the past five years, and so have some of my blogging recommendations. I'm confident that you'll find the updates throughout the book, and the additional content, well worth reading this second edition for.

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.