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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Blogs as the Ultimate FAQ page: the Holy Grail of Marketing for Tax & Accounting Professionals

Visibility + Credibility + Reassurance = New & Repeat Business

Michelle Golden • Mar. 19, 2012



I've publicly called blogging a potential holy grail of marketing for CPA. That might sound sensationalized, but it's not. See, what works for marketing today is the same formula that worked 50 years ago before CPAs could advertise and long before there was ever an Internet.

Visibility + Credibility + Reassurance = New & Repeat Business

Visibility: You've got to be found. Word of mouth still reigns just like it always has. Fortunately (or not) mouths are a lot bigger now with the social Web.

Credibility: When people find you, they need evidence that you're trustworthy and capable. You saying so isn't enough: it's got to be demonstrated by you, and echoed by third parties.

Reassurance: When someone buys from you, and every day thereafter, they want to be confident in their decision. When they lose that confidence, they move on.

Expertise is the best way to accomplish all three. Like speeches or articles, blogging has terrific potential to distinguish you as an expert. And exponentially more people can see your work; some will subscribe to your content updates (replace pesky, expensive newsletters) while your content also perpetually attracts Web searchers.

Many authors use their blog as an easy-to-search intellectual capital archive of their past content. I tapped some of my past posts for this very article. Also, I often forward posts to prospects or referral sources—they offer a good reason to follow up with someone I've just met.

Think about how sending a post you'd already written about whatever you just discussed will underscore your expertise in a complex topic. Suddenly your claim of knowledge is backed with evidence. And for CPAs with a specialty, there's no greater demonstration of subject-matter expertise and passion than a well-regarded blog dedicated to your niche.

Blog writing is shorter and less formal than traditional articles. View a blog as a solid FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section of your website, not a QWWYWA (Questions We Wish You Would Ask) page that is a thinly veiled sales page, usually regurgitating a firm's brochure language.

A blog should provide content that addresses technical questions or issues that your clients struggle with and seek information about. It's better to be micro, not general, in how you field these questions or issues. Cover things like: FIFO vs LIFO, dealing

with asset disposal, treatment of donations, inventory woes, and repairing financial stability before seeking capital.

The biggest mistake I see with most of the accounting blogs out there is that the bloggers are dumbing down their content way too much. If you actually want business owners to read it, write it for the executive-level person, not the green bookkeeper. Content at the 101 level won't hold a sophisticated business owner's attention at all. Yet the new entrepreneur or novice bookkeeper will certainly rise to read the sophisticated, executive-level stuff.

Think about how no one, not even the newbies, want to attend the "beginner" class at a conference, everyone piles into the advanced track. We want to skip ahead to the good stuff. So do your readers. Post for them; post and write strategically.

Another mistake I see is writing on obvious stuff like record retention and mileage rates. A rule of thumb is that if you can search and find info out there already, you shouldn't write it anew. If you're compelled to share that info, just link to an existing article giving the original source credit for a great piece.

Focus the bulk of your energy on providing content that isn't already on other financial websites. Or if you find info out there but think you can add information to make it even more valuable or more relevant to your particular readers, then link to it along with your thoughts; this is called "continuing the conversation."

This sort of linking to other people's stuff is a welcome practice. You're sending traffic to them—always appreciated—and putting yourself on their radar screens as someone they possibly share common interests with. They just might start reading you and linking back to you.

My book *Social Media Strategies for Professionals and Their Firms* (available on Amazon and other online booksellers) has chapters dedicated to blog best practices and writing for the web with a whole section on content inspiration. But here are four quick blog-fodder ideas:

1. Search Twitter, Google, LinkedIn, Slideshare, and YouTube for articles and news in your topic areas using keywords and phrases. Experiment with searches, tweaking search terms to refine results if you get too much junk. Save your searches as feeds in Google Reader so you don't have to recreate them, new results will feed to you automatically for you to periodically review.

2. Comb through “sent items” in your email to see what questions you’ve already answered. Find emails sent to clients, prospects, and even coworkers. Sanitize the answer, reframe the original question providing more context, add “...in this particular situation...” (your CYA) and poof: instant blog post! This is my favorite way to find good, relevant content. You’ve already done the work!
3. Feature clients, prospects, and referral sources. Highlight neat stuff they are doing, particularly on ways they make a difference to others. When you feature clients, talk about successes they’ve had. Don’t overtly mention your role in those successes, your involvement is implied. Featuring referral sources is a great way to “repay” referrals you aren’t otherwise able to reciprocate.
4. Seek guest blog authors—experts in your featured industry—inviting them to write once or periodically. Most are happy to have the platform and your association with them elevates your credibility. A big bonus is when they distribute links to their posts across their social networks; it increases your reach.

Blogs are free or inexpensive to set up. I recommend an open-source program called WordPress. If you’re a little tech-savvy, you can set it up yourself or if you need help, WordPress programmers are inexpensive. In fact, using WordPress for your entire website is a great idea. It permits you to have easy access for text changes and gives the added benefit of increased search-engine optimization (SEO) over static websites.

Curious what constitutes a great blog? They run the gamut in style. Three main types are blogs that you’ll see are:

- 1) 100% Original: where all the content is authored by the blogger
- 2) Aggregated Info: where the blogger curates content from other sources (websites, blogs, or even print) and shares links to the attributed sources, usually with excerpts from the linked posts and at least a sentence or two of contextual commentary from the blogger
- 3) Hybrid: a mix of aggregated and original content

Accountingbloglist.com houses a comprehensive list of CPA blogs. Some excellent blogs started by solos or small firms are:

- FarmCPAToday www.farmcpatoday.com
- Homeschool CPA <http://homeschoolcpa.com/blog>
- Catalyst Center for Nonprofit Management

<http://centerfornonprofitmanagement.blogspot.com>

- Reed Tinsley (Healthcare) <http://rtacpa.blogs.com>
- Good Loans www.lindakeithcpa.com/blog.htm

When your competitors and media read your blog, you'll know you're on the right track. When clients or prospects comment on how helpful the site was, or they actually contact you because of it, you are definitely doing it right.

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