



6 TREATMENTS FOR A SICKLY BLOG

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I've been blogging since 2011 and my blog is the single biggest driver of traffic to my website – around 36,000 page views per month. Given that all of my clients come to me via Google and two online directories, having a strong web presence is the difference between being booked up six months in advance and being unemployed.

Those visitors end up on my blog for three reasons:

- They want to hire me because of the job I do (copyediting fiction books)
- They want to find out how to do the job I do
- They're already doing the job I do but are stuck



BIG-PICTURE FOCUS

This booklet *won't* focus on the technical minutiae of whether to use Wordpress or Weebly, filling in metadata, writing great headlines, breaking up text with pictures, adding in calls to action, SEO keywords, paragraph length and so on and so forth.

That's not because all the micro stuff isn't important, but because none of it will amount to anything if the macro issues aren't in order.

Instead, I focus on **six reasons why blogs become poorly**, and offer some medicine that will turn them, and the websites hosting them, into vibrant resource centres that drive our businesses forward.



PROBLEM 1: THE BLOG DOESN'T SOLVE PROBLEMS

Some of the blogs I wrote between 2011 and 2015 are a technical disgrace but they worked – and still work – because the content is helpful and shareable.

A blog that doesn't solve problems is a written exercise in self-indulgence and won't make us the go-to professionals for anything. At best, we'll be instantly forgettable; at worst, people will talk about us for all the wrong reasons.

A colleague recently told me about a piece of video content he'd watched: 'After 10 minutes I'd lost the will to live. After 20, I'd lost the will for the vlogger to live.' I trust my colleague, whereas I don't know or trust that vlogger. Consequently, I didn't watch the video.

There are a ton of online examples of desperate business owners employing attention-seeking methods to get eyes on their content. It can work once, maybe twice. But if we rely on shock, surprise, upset or gaining sympathy with our audience, and no solution, our content-marketing successes will be short-lived.

Don't puke over the reader

We all have problems – that doesn't mean we have to vomit over our audience with our content. Plus, shock and controversy have a short shelf-life. Today's audiences are easily desensitized and quickly bored, so high-quality problem-solving content will trump the shock factor every time.

Nothing should appear on our blogs that doesn't help the reader move forward in some way. And if we can't solve a problem, we should hold off, research and rewrite.

Only once we have a solution should we publish.

When we *do* solve problems, we make ourselves valuable. People are more likely to talk about, share, like and comment on our blog content.

And that has huge SEO benefits over time because the search engines love seeing evidence of a **great user experience**. Focus on solving the audience's problems from the get-go and we are well on the way to building a platform that puts us top of mind and discoverable in the search engines.



PROBLEM 2: THE BLOG IS PUBLISHED IRREGULARLY

Lack of regularity is probably the most common reason for blog failure. We do it for a bit, then run out of ideas, or time, or passion.

This is how a reader perceives a blog that publishes content irregularly:

- The blogger doesn't know their stuff well enough to solve problems
- The blogger isn't committed or can't be bothered to solve problems

Those feelings don't inspire trust. If your window cleaner couldn't be bothered to clean your windows on a regular basis how quickly would you try to find a replacement? It's the same with blogging. No one's going to talk about or share our content if we can't be bothered to create it regularly.

Earning the rankings and referrals

We have to earn the right to be top of mind for referrals and benefit from our colleagues' and clients' SEO-driving activity.

And without those likes and shares, Google won't recognize us as business owners who are actively engaging. That will impact negatively on our rankings.

Build a blog plan

If you don't have the time or commitment for blogging, that's absolutely fine. Don't do it – focus on making your business visible in other ways. Blogging is just one option.

However, if you do want your blog to be your primary content platform, the solution is to build a blog plan beforehand.



Here are four **initial steps** for your plan:

- Identify your audience. Consider colleagues as well as clients.
- Create 52 draft titles for problem-solving content. If you plan to publish once a week, that's a year's worth of content ideas; twice a month and you'll have two years' worth.
- Decide on your publication schedule.
- Draft your promotion schedule.

Here are four ideas for how to **generate content**:

- Take inspiration from your job. What do your clients and colleagues struggle with? What have you struggled with? Answer those questions on your blog.
- Take note of the questions people ask in your industry's forums and at conferences. Answer those questions on your blog.

- Invite questions on your website via a box or pop-out.
- Review products, apps, courses, books, tools, forums and conferences related to your industry.

Here are four ideas for how to **save time**:

- Write efficiently – create batches of articles around a theme.
- Repurpose existing content (e.g. from slideshows, presentations, case studies, reports, guest articles, books, meetings and conferences) as blog posts.
- Update stale content using your existing knowledge base. Blogging is a journey and it's perfectly acceptable to revisit old topics; you're demonstrating your readiness to review and adapt.
- Set aside time in your working week for your blogging.



PROBLEM 3: THE BLOG IS UNNAVIGABLE

No one searches online for a blog. They search online for **solutions**. If they click through to our websites, the first place they'll head for is unlikely to be the blog tab. And even if it is, will our visitor find the answer to their problems in the content that's visible on the first page of the blog?

If we only have 10 pieces of content, yes. What if we have 40? How about 500?

Second homes

The solution is to create second homes for our blog content – libraries, hubs, resource centres ... call them what you will.

I have two on my website – a **self-publishers** page and an **editor resources** page.

There is not one single piece of fresh content on those pages. They're libraries of titled images that depict what problem I'm solving. However, if you click on the images you'll end up reading the full articles on the blog.

These libraries help my audience find my very best content – the stuff that's most likely to be talked about, get me known, and make my visitors think I'm helpful and knowledgeable.

I only started creating content for one of those libraries in May; it's already the fourth most popular page on my site ... and that's because it's obvious what's on offer and whom it's for.



Few business bloggers funnel their content through to other pages, and it's the biggest lost opportunity I can think of. Do this and you will stand out from your competitors for very little additional effort.

Here, we're using our blog content to turn our websites into resource centres rather than all-about-me-and-how-great-I-am sites.

PROBLEM 4: THE BLOG IS SHALLOW

My marketing coaches Andrew and Pete preach the art of creating content that makes people fall in love with you. I love this idea because it focuses on **emotion** – of getting under people's skin, making them *feel* something.

This sits nicely with the problem-solving principle discussed above. When we solve

problems we make people feel something – happy, grateful, relieved, empowered.

Emotion *born from solutions*

Just to be clear, those emotions should be evoked as a result of our solving a problem. For example, our funnies alone won't be enough to make anyone subscribe to and share our content in the long term. No one will waste time reading a funny photographer's blog if he or she doesn't solve photography problems too. That's because if all we want is a laugh, Dara Ó Briain and Rich Hall will do it better.

Tone *on top of solutions*

Even if our content is technically good, we have competition. Readers need to hear our voices and our personalities in our posts so that we stand out. I tend to go for warm and friendly.

Other tone options might include cheeky, funny, blunt, swearsy or ranty. All of that stuff is great but bear in mind that it's just dressing at the end of the day. It should always hang on a body of solutions.

Going deeper with solutions

There are already a bajillion blogs with the basics just, about everything. Repeating the same old stuff is boring, and boring blogs are a killer. We need to bring our blog posts alive with case studies (made-up ones if necessary), and stories based on our own experiences, so that our readers have gravy on the meat and two veg.

That kind of deeper detail draws people in, makes them feel like we're really talking to them, not just stuffing our websites with keywords. That is not to say we shouldn't aim our content at beginners or focus on the basics

– far from it. Rather, our content needs to have personality and detail. When we go deep we make an old subject sound fresh because it's rich with our voices and our experiences.



PROBLEM 5: THE BLOG DOESN'T FULFIL AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

I don't visit a dentist's website expecting to find a treatment for the verruca on my foot. I'm there to sort out my teeth. A blog needs to have a recognizable and understandable *raison d'être* too.

We're busy and none of us has time to read everything, join every group, watch every vlog, listen to every podcast, do our jobs, and have a life. Blogs that don't give people a *very good* reason to be there are doomed. They won't be bookmarked, subscribed to or shared. If a

reader doesn't understand why they should bother, they'll quickly lose patience and go elsewhere.

There are two reasons why an audience could become confused and disengage:

- **The content is coherent but isn't aligned with the business creating it.** This happens when the blogger has misunderstood the audience's expectations even though there are myriad specialist solutions that could be offered.
- **The content is incoherent and there are too many audiences.** This can happen when a business – usually a product-based one – can't sustain long-term content creation around the product alone. To compensate, the blogger covers multiple topics for multiple audiences whose

problems are already being solved in depth by relevant specialist bloggers elsewhere.

Here are two examples where those problems have been solved.

Coherent and aligned: The pro presenter

There's plenty one can write about presenting, and that content can be targeted at non-presenters who need to tackle the process, and those who want to run a presentations business.

Relevant content might cover the following: dealing with stress, introversion, lack of confidence, speech impediments, organization and planning, which software to use, which venues are best, managing acoustics, scheduling, equipment, payment terms, contract problems, learning resources, apps and

plugins to aid preparation, training opportunities, marketing a presentations business, getting published, creating engaging slides, finding and retaining clients, and so on.

The presenter is blogging about topics aligned to their core service and targeting an audience with problems related directly to it. The blog is therefore coherent and aligned.

Coherent and side-aligned: The condom company

There's only so much one can write about condoms. Durex knows that it will not be able to sustain its audience's interest in latex and lube, and there are only so many flavours and colours.

However, it also knows that its audience *is* interested in sex, otherwise people wouldn't need condoms.

Durex has created a blog called *Love Sex* that offers all sorts of tips about perfect massages, advice on STDs, relationships, other forms of contraception, orgasms, positions ... you name it, it's there.

It's a very clever way of creating content about a related but more interesting issue.

If you can't sustain long-term content creation around your product or service, shift your thinking sideways but make sure it's focused on your audience's problems.

Durex isn't blogging about condoms, but it's still focusing on content that's related sideways to its core product. Its blog is therefore coherent and side-aligned.



Nudging with a name

Naming our blogs can help signal purpose. Mine's called *The Proofreader's Parlour*, which should be an indication that my focus is on words.

I also publish a lot of content about marketing, but it's marketing for editors and proofreaders. And I offer content about training, but it's training for editors and proofreaders. It's not as interesting as the Durex blog but it solves my clients' and colleagues' problems and that's all that matters!



PROBLEM 6: THE BLOG IS INVISIBLE

Blogging without blog promotion is a supreme waste of time. It matters little that we've nailed all of the above if our blog's invisible. We could

spend hours crafting beautiful content for our target audience, but if we don't invest the time or effort in making it visible it will have no purposeful business or economic value.

Superhero delivery

There are numerous ways to promote a blog, and what works for you might not work for me. One thing's for sure though – **social media** is *the* superhero when it comes to content delivery.

Three huge platforms – LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook – offer a superb suite of tools to help us get seen out there.

What clear is that it's about more than just posting links and pretty pictures, now more than ever. Indeed, we have to work increasingly hard on these busy platforms with their ever-shifting algorithms.

However, persistence pays and there is no faster way to get your blog content, and your business, in front of people than by embracing social media.

Automating to make space for crafting

Content should be scheduled regularly because on some platforms, Twitter especially, the feed moves so fast that your blog-post links are more likely to be missed than seen. I post on Twitter ten times a day, seven days a week.

Automate your evergreen posts. That will free up time for posting manually on your core platforms. Manual posting allows us to craft our posts with the algorithms in mind.

An example: Crafting for Facebook

Here are some of the ways in which you might promote your blog content on Facebook:

- Upload blog posts **natively** (direct to the platform) rather than linking.
- Create **mini summaries** of a blog post on a Page that invite conversations. Place a link to the blog post in the first comment.
- Upload cute, shareable **videos** that summarize the core themes of a post.
- Run **chatbot** campaigns that include booklets repurposed from blog content.
- Upload **vlog** versions of blog content.
- If your broadband connection is stable, **go live** with a discussion of your content.
- Post links to blog posts in **groups** if that content answers a specific question. If in doubt check with the admins that this is acceptable practice.
- Join **blog carnivals** (threads of links to blog posts) in Facebook groups where the practice is encouraged. If it doesn't yet exist, suggest it to the admins.



SIX-TIP SUMMARY

- Be purposeful with problem-solving
- Build trust with regular publishing
- Spotlight your best content in second homes
- Infuse the key takeaways with deeper stories and case studies
- Align or side-align your content with your business so that it makes sense for your audience to bother with it
- Commit to promotion so that your hard work is visible

Good luck building a healthy blog!

Louise





ABOUT LOUISE

Louise Harnby is a professional fiction proofreader and copyeditor. She specializes in helping independent authors prepare their novels for market. Louise worked in-house for two international publishers for 13 years before setting up her editorial business. She has also published several books on the business of editing and proofreading. You can find out more about her at www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com

