

Blogging for Medical Writers

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Blogging in General

Blogs are web logs (the word “blog” is a portmanteau of the term “web log”) - online journals that are used for personal, informational, educational, and business purposes.

Blogging has become one of the most popular activities in general on the internet – serving as a great way to promote communication and conversation within any community.

The Uses of Blogging in Medical Writing

Its uses are similar to many of those in any field of writing/business:

- ***Provides a venue for sharing opinions and ideas:*** Blogging allows you to get your ideas across easily – often more easily than via a newsletter. This is because, unlike in newsletters, information posted online has a long shelf life - stays there “forever”, or at least until you remove it. It can also be added to or updated. Plus, your message won’t end up in someone’s spam email folder.
- ***Provides a platform for sharpening your writing skills:*** Although anyone can benefit from this, it can be especially useful for new medical writers who are trying to break into the field. You can never have too much writing practice.
- ***Builds a professional network:*** It’s always useful to network! This can be especially beneficial to new medical writers, or those just starting out as freelance writers.
- ***Acts as your online business card:*** Again, especially useful for freelance writers - these days you really can’t afford not to have an online presence (even if it’s just a static page website). Think of the last few times you were looking for any kind of service – likely the first place you started was “Google”! Many clients in search of medical writers use the same approach. Gone are the days when we would default to the telephone book to search for any kind of service provider.

- ***Allows you to showcase your talent:*** In concert with the idea of your blog serving as an online business card, it can also be an online portfolio where you can showcase samples of, or links to, your work. Additionally, if you post somewhat regularly, your posts will also help to show what you're made of. The advantage here is that they allow potential clients/employers to see your writing abilities – unedited! Whilst final samples might look fabulous, they've usually experienced some rounds of editing. Unedited writing samples, however, allow clients to get an idea of your “first draft” abilities.

Regular blog posting can be especially advantageous to anyone trying to break into the medical writing field. If you don't have any kind of writing samples to showcase in your online portfolio, your regular posts can be a start – you can create mock-up documents of the types of writing that you're hoping to do long term.

Throw in some testimonials too – adding some positive words to your blog from current or previous clients can help potential new clients gain some baseline level of confidence in your abilities.

- ***Can be a great marketing tool:*** In addition to allowing you to market your basic writing services, your blog can also be a useful place for you to advertise or sell other products (books, documents, publications, etc).
- ***Allows you to help others:*** Although many of us might not think we have much to offer others, we can never underestimate the power of contact. It's amazing how helpful it can be for others when they can reach out to someone in the same field – whether for business advice, some brainstorming, or even just for some social contact.

Starting a Blog

You can get a free blog instantly: There are numerous options for this – some of the household names include:

- WordPress.com
- Blogger
- Tumblr

Or you can pay to be self-hosted: This involves buying a domain name and using a hosting company to host your blog – you can do these two things separately, or you can just go directly to the hosting company – it may be cheaper to buy your domain through them. They will all charge a monthly fee for blog hosting (mine is about \$5-6 p/m), but that will likely include your domain name too. Another decision to make is whether to buy a premium (paid) blog theme, or to opt for a free theme.

So, first choose your domain name

Once you've figured out what to call your blog/business, it's time to choose who you want to host your site. There are numerous options here too, but some of the household names include:

- DreamHost
- BlueHost (I'm using BlueHost and things are going well!)
- HostGator

Do some research before choosing one of them – but when you're ready to go, simply make a start via the “sign up” button on their webpage.

Choose the theme that you want for your blog: I used a premium Genesis theme through StudioPress – you can use one of the free WordPress themes, but apparently they can be a bit more restrictive than the premium ones, so it might be worth considering a premium theme at some stage.

I found the following blog post useful, and I ultimately ended up using their service to transfer my blog from a free WordPress.com site, to a self-hosted one:

<http://www.blogtweaks.com/the-easiest-and-cheapest-way-to-get-a-beautiful-blog-design/>

If you feel savvy enough, you can set all this up yourself. I'm not though, so it was definitely worth paying to get an expert to do it for me!

WordPress.org (the paid WordPress option) also offers a guided transfer service for about \$100. So if you start off with a free site on WordPress.com, you can just have them transfer you to a paid, self-hosted site.

National Association of Independent Writers and Editors: Membership of this professional support organization can provide a creative way to start a blog. The annual fee is just \$99, and one of its numerous benefits is that they provide you with a hosted WordPress site. It has a pre-set, basic design (you can change this if you like) with a portfolio page. It also provides you with some instant exposure to the writing world because all posts to your blog will show up on the blog roll of the NAIWE's website - and the organization will tweet your posts too.

<http://naiwe.com/membership/benefits.php>

Blog Basics

Keep it simple – too many bells and whistles or a difficult-to-navigate site can be a turn-off. Some basic pages to include:

- **About:** A professional statement about you, with a photo [creates a connection], and contact information. Link up to your LinkedIn or Twitter profile pages too if you like.
- **Portfolio:** Links to your samples of your work.
- **Services:** What types of medical communications services you offer. Testimonials if possible.

Adding Photos to Posts

Photos add a little something extra to a post, and help to break up large chunks of text for easier reading. In this day and age of internet excess, you need to tap into any resource that helps to draw people in. Photos will serve as a visual bonus, and they can certainly help to hold someone's attention. Although your regulars might not worry about the presence or absence of a photo, throwing one in occasionally might be the difference between a new visitor sticking around or resuming their Google search.

I use a lot of my own photos in my posts, but even if you're not photographically inclined, there are plenty of resources out there for you. Although there are many options for acquiring paid images, there are also some that provide free images for you to download. When using these, however, do be sure to carefully follow the Creative Commons Licensing rules stated on the individual websites – basically, be sure to give attributions where required.

I typically use either MorgueFile (does not require attributions) or FreeDigitalPhotos (requires attributions) when I'm looking for images, but there are other options too. I've provided a few links below:

<http://morguefile.com>

<http://freedigitalphotos.net>

<http://everystockphoto.com/>

<http://flickr.com/creativecommons/>

<http://sxc.hu/>

http://google.com/advanced_image_search?hl=en

Blogs Worth Checking Out

A couple of successful general blogging sites that some of you might find interesting:

<http://www.copyblogger.com/>

<http://www.problogger.net/>

Some useful sites geared toward freelancing/writers in general. Many will especially offer great tips for getting into writing for magazines – so if you're someone who wants to break into that genre, you may find the first 3 on the list especially useful. Regardless though, you'll likely find something in some or all of them to pique your interest:

<http://makealivingwriting.com/>

<http://therenegadewriter.com/>

<http://urbanmusewriter.com/>

<http://allfreelancewriting.com>

<http://freelanceswitch.com/>

<http://freelancefolder.com/>

<http://aboutfreelancewriting.com/>

<http://blog.emilysuess.com/>

<http://writersdigest.com/>

A few blogs by medical writers. Please let me know if you find any other blogs (active blogs, not websites) and I will add them to the list:

<http://jsaconsultants.org/>

<http://makingwordsworkforyou.blogspot.com/>

<http://phreelancephreedom.blogspot.com/>

<http://editor-mom.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.hittmedicalwriting.com/hmw/blog/>

<http://chainthewolf.net/>

<http://tobintouch.wordpress.com/>

<http://kaplaninkmedical.com/blog/>

<http://www.parrymedicalwriting.com/>

<http://amwajournal.blogspot.com/>

<http://amwaconference.blogspot.com/>