

Las Vegas Quill Keepers Lesson 18: To Blog, or Not to Blog?

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So you have decided that what you really ought to do with your writing talents is to maintain a BLOG. If you have a website, chances are you have been 'blogging' all along. A blog is shorthand for the term Web Log, or Web diary. (B-diary just seems a bit less likely to be traipsing off of the tongue.) Most personal websites are already Blogs. They have updated texts, links, and offer a personal insight. There is a specific format used in maintaining an online diary, however, and this format is what is considered to be a true blog.

Blogs accomplish a number of things. First and foremost, it offers the writer an online home that is available to her readers. Some writers have used blogs to market themselves, while others use them to market their writings. Successful blog writers get mentioned in the New York Times, Publishers Marketplace, and even in conferences just about daily. The reason they are successful is that they know more about the way search engines work.

Search engines, web crawlers, and meta crawlers are those invisible software programs that seek information from the keywords, hidden tags on websites, and place links into databases. The databases are used as a depository for sites such as Google.com, Yahoo.com, and my personal favorite, Dogpile.com. When people type in requests for specific information, these websites pull the links from their databases, and display them.

If you have a blog, or even a website, already, and want to ensure that your information is listed in these engines you can use some professional tricks of the trade. The primary method costs nothing but time, and

ensures that you're at least listed on the more popular engines. Let me make this emphatically clear: **PAYING for search engine submissions** when you aren't selling multimillion dollars worth of products **is just plain silly**. You can submit your sites onto Google and Yahoo free of charge just by following their directions under the categories you think your site or blog is best suited. In fact, there is a website devoted to teaching people how to submit and one of the best articles, written by Danny Sullivan, is here:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/article.php/2167871>

The second most effective method of getting your name and blog out there is to trade links with people who share the same interests, or other commonalities. My site is the second site Yahoo listed for women in comedy. In fact, I've been listed on their databases since 1990, which means that I get requests from hundreds of comediennes around the world who want swap links. Why? My site is also one of the highest "ranked" on the search engine. Just for sheer persistent existence, my site is considered as better than even comics who have television shows.

Ranking is nothing more than the pecking order of websites. The VegasQuills.com site doesn't have a high ranking when someone is searching for "Writer's Groups". But, if you search for more relevant information, "Women's Writers Groups, Las Vegas", we rank as the first listing. The reason we are not quite in the highest pecking order of ALL groups is that we don't get as much traffic as Salon.com or MediaBistro.com, which have thousands of members, and paid advertisers, helping their search engine status to be higher up the writer's food chain.

Smart bloggers share links to well visited sites, which in turn, increases the power of their own web home. A shining example is Writing.com. This

site is certainly the least navigable, and hardly serves as the prominent writer's Mecca it potentially could be. It does, however, carry a high search engine ranking because of the number of registered users, and the paid advertisements the site owners invested in. If you view their home page, you'll find the bottom portion is filled with links to sites that have nothing to do with writing. This is a clever way to ensure better ranking in search engines. The secret is that they've managed to add keywords which attract the attention of the web crawling software populating those databases.

What are keywords?

Keywords are exactly what they sound like: terms, phrases, or simple words that give the search engines an idea of the content of your site. For years, before some of the better site-screening crawlers were available, webmasters would use sexual content in parts of the web pages hidden from viewers. For example, national banks would put sexually explicit acts in to the hidden web text so more people searching for "Experienced bankers" would find pages that listed "experienced hookers", or similar phrases. "Interest" seekers would find websites that listed "sexual interest" in the hidden text.

If you design your own websites, or have a webmaster, you can add Meta Tags to your site, or blog, to ensure that keywords exist. When a search crawler finds the word "meta" in the code, it reads that as a clue to what you want the world to know about you, or the site. If you are a writer of romance novels, but enjoy horror stories, you can have meta tagged keywords "horror, novels, romance, ..." and any other word that you feel describes the perfect YOU.

So what does all this have to do with blogging? Blogs work best when they are read by a greater number of people. Unless you are keeping a private journal, shared with only friends and family by password access, you probably want a lot of readers. There are sites that only host Blogs. You can sign up, and either for free, or for a nominal charge to ensure there aren't any pop-ups or annoying non-relevant advertising, you can start blogging immediately.

I have three separate blogs. The first is a private site that only those who have password access can read. One of my other blogs is a diary of the steps I'm taking in getting a book published that isn't exactly a top seller genre. You can reach it through this link:

<http://www.godlessgrief.com/wordpress/>

My third blog is a general writer's informational page that I really don't update as much as I should, and certainly gets less traffic than any other site I've had. This demonstrates the problem with blogs. If you cannot dedicate at least enough time to offer a weekly update, you should probably just stick to the idea of a standard living page: a website.

The word "blog" gives the reader an idea that the pages will be updated often. Unlike website pages, blogs also invite comments from those reading. It's as if you were writing daily editorials in a local paper, and people respond with a letter to the editor. This tool is perfect for those seeking information to add authenticity to a book or story. It's also a good way to get learn how your readers respond to ideas you have. Stephen King used his blog to decide how he would develop a character his fans had come to love.

It's smart to post your comments into blogs of other writers. If your favorite author allows, placing comments on her blog will give other readers an idea of how you write. Many comments include links to

websites or other blogs. When a search engine goes to your author's site, it will also take into account the links left there. This can improve your visibility online.

Some of those sites dedicated to linking one person to another, such as Friendster, or Tribe, offer blogging to it's members. This is a good way to reach out and network with people of similar interests, and discover other writers.

The failures of some blogs is through basic misunderstanding of how the process works.

- The writer doesn't update it often enough.
- The writer hasn't included information that her readers can respond to in any way.
- The blog reads as fiction, and doesn't cite sources for factual information.
- The blog URL is difficult to remember.
- There are no links to the blog from sources on the author's site, or through search engines.

There are free blog sites available, but if you have your own website, check to see if your web host provides blogging software as part of the hosting package. Most hosts offer blogging, guest books, and other goodies that will make your site more attractive to visitors, and more fun for you! Next week... Making a Great Author's Website

The Blog Drive

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

The Blog Spot

<http://www.blogspot.com>

About.com's Listing of Free Blogging Sites

<http://freebies.about.com/cs/freebloghosting/>

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