

By Deb Shinder

In a [recent article](#), we discussed 10 things you can do to become a better blogger. This time, we take a look at the other side of the coin: mistakes bloggers make that cause readers to turn away from their blogs in disgust or—possibly worse—apathy. There are blogs out there with one or even all of these fatal flaws that remain popular despite it all, but in general, if you want to attract and keep readers, you should think carefully before doing the following.

1 Be inconsistent

It's important for you to post on a regular basis. A blog you ignore for long periods of time will soon be ignored by readers, too. In general, blogs that focus on a particular subject or theme are most successful, so consistency in subject matter is important, too. But it's not enough just to post consistently and keep on topic—you also risk losing readers if you aren't consistent in your viewpoint.

Blogs often contain strong opinions, and readers like that. What they don't like are bloggers who change their opinions too often. Sure, the once-in-a-lifetime grand epiphany that causes you to change your perspective can and should be shared with your readers, but you're likely to lose fans if you flip flop frequently, as proven by many political elections.

Taking a firm stand may win you enemies, but trying to please all of the people all of the time is likely to drive away all but your most stalwart friends.

2 Allow too much advertising

It's a heady feeling: Someone is willing to *pay* you to put their ads on your blog site. It usually means your blog has reached a certain level of popularity, or at least that you've found a valuable corporate benefactor (or have a rich uncle who's taken pity on you). Accepting advertising is a great way to get some monetary compensation for the time and effort you put into blogging. But there's a right way and a wrong way to do it.

Most readers don't mind a few tasteful, well-placed ads. Problems occur when the ads get too numerous or worse, too intrusive. Popups particularly inspire hatred, and the ones that dance across the page and won't leave until they've finished getting their messages across can cause impatient readers to click away and never come back, no matter how brilliant your blog might be.

The real kiss of death, though, is when readers start to see the blog itself as nothing more than an advertising vehicle. If one of your advertisers makes a wonderful product that you want to share with your readers, it's okay to post about it—but it's definitely *not* okay to mention it in every other post. Readers quickly see through blatant product placement attempts. You won't fool them by incorporating the ads into your posts.

3 Use your blog to further personal vendettas

Because a blog, even a professional one, *is* a personal form of writing—usually done in first person, usually expressing opinions as well as facts, and often disclosing at least some personal information—some bloggers use it like a bludgeon to bash those they don't like.

This kind of blog can even be popular, especially with others who dislike the same people you do and follow the philosophy that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” But blogs that do nothing except criticize and castigate other people, whether those other people are national politicians or the blogger's ex-spouse, get a bit tiring after awhile.

More important, it makes you look like an angry, bitter whiner and complainer. Although a few big celebrities on both sides of the political aisle have built multimillion dollar careers on just such an image, it takes a real pro to get away with it. Most who try it just come off looking like unpleasant people with whom most readers wouldn't want to spend time, and they won't want to spend time reading your redundant rants, either.

4 Ignore your readers

If your blog contains posts that are informative, funny, profound, insightful, controversial, interesting and/or engaging, odds are that your readers will want to get in touch with you. It's human nature, when we read something we love or hate, to respond.

A blog that gives readers no way to do that may not achieve the popularity it would otherwise. If you post under a pseudonym or anonymously, provide no e-mail address, disallow comments, and otherwise shut your readers out and make it clear that your communications are a one-way street, you're bound to alienate some of them. They won't care as much about your posts as they would if they felt they "knew" you and could give you their feedback and input.

Does that mean you have to let your blog get all cluttered up with a bunch of comments or spend hours reading and answering reader mail every day? Not necessarily. But there are things you can do to create the illusion of closeness even if you don't actually want to get to know your readers.

If you must protect your real identity, at least give them a made-up name by which they can know you. Provide an e-mail address they can write to, even if you must include with it a warning that you aren't able to answer personal mail due to time constraints. Refer to a reader's message now and then in a blog post. Even if you don't answer readers' questions, it makes them feel that you *do* read and sometimes respond to reader mail.

5 Post about your personal life

There are many good reasons *not* to post about the intimate details of your personal life on the Internet. That includes your love life, your fight with your spouse, how annoyed you are by your next-door neighbor, the stupid thing your boss did last week, the great time you had getting drunk as a skunk and skinny dipping in the pool at a co-worker's birthday party, bailing your sister out of jail, and so forth.

First, who cares? Unless you're famous, your readers aren't likely to be all that interested in your romances, feuds, and exploits. But more important, posts that reveal intimate details can come back to haunt you. You don't know who may eventually read those juicy little tidbits. Are you comfortable with the thought of your minister, your parents, a potential love interest, or a possible employer reading your posts? Many companies now do background research on job candidates by searching the Web. And even if you use a false name, you may not be safe. The more personal your posts, the more likely it is that those who know you will be able to identify you.

6 Steal other people's material

The Internet makes plagiarism easy. Don't feel like doing a blog post today? You might be tempted to cut and paste something you read and liked from another blog or article. Using other people's writing without their permission is called copyright violation. Using other people's writing without their permission and putting your own name on it is called plagiarism. Both are against the law in most jurisdictions. Even if you're never sued or prosecuted for it, if you get a reputation for copying content, you'll lose the respect of your readers.

That doesn't mean you can't write *about* what someone else said. You can even quote them, if you do so within the parameters of fair use (see <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html> for information on what constitutes fair use under U.S. copyright law) or if you get the original author's permission. Since fair use usually involves quoting only a small amount of the original material, it's good form to provide a link back to the original (or a citation of the source if it's not online).

What if someone else's article inspires you to post on the same topic, but you don't want to quote them? Well, ideas can't be copyrighted, just the expression of those ideas. But just changing a few words around doesn't make your expression original. Use common sense and treat other writers and their material as you'd want them to treat you.

7 Spread FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt)

Gossip columns were popular long before the advent of the Internet, but passing along rumors that haven't been verified can backfire on you and destroy your credibility if they turn out to be untrue. This doesn't apply just to gossip about people, but also to rumors about companies and products.

Writing about your own bad experience with a software program that wouldn't run on your computer is one thing; writing that Program X is a piece of junk because you heard it from your aunt's best friend's neighbor who, after all, is a high-paid programmer and ought to know, is another.

A good rule of thumb is that if you're thinking about saying something bad about someone or something, check it out yourself first. Give the target of the rumor a chance to tell his or her side. Try the product personally. Write to the company about the alleged problem and ask what they're doing to address it.

Remember that just because you saw it on the Internet, that doesn't make it true. And just because you published it on the Internet rather than in the *New York Times*, that doesn't mean you can't be sued for slander, libel, or defamation of character.

8 Don't monitor comments

If you decide to allow comments on your blog, you become responsible for their content. Some bloggers, in the interests of free speech, allow an "anything goes" atmosphere to prevail, in which a few angry or provocative readers can take over and post inflammatory comments or even start a comments war.

Constitutional protections of free speech apply only to the government suppressing speech. On your blog, as in your home, you have the right to insist that others behave in an appropriate manner or get out. Unruly readers who post offensive comments can and should have their comments removed and/or be banned from posting on your site.

9 Don't look before you link

A surprising number of bloggers post links to sites they've never visited or which they've visited only briefly. Check out links thoroughly before putting them in your blog and make sure they're appropriate for your readership. If you're doing a blog for your church group, you probably don't want to include that link to a funny video if the site has advertising for porn shops, even though that particular video is completely innocent.

Another reason to check links is to make sure they actually work. That seems obvious, but it's not uncommon to encounter dead links in one-day-old blog posts. If your blog is a highly popular one that sees a lot of traffic, it's a good idea to ask Web site owners before linking to their sites. Someone who's running a site on a slow link can have their server brought to its knees by a sudden huge influx of traffic driven by your post.

It's also good netiquette to warn your readers if the site you're linking to has loud sounds or music. Some folks may read your blog from work or other locations where they'd appreciate the chance to turn the speakers down or hit the mute button before going to a site that blasts out the latest rap song at 60 decibels as background sound.

10 Worry too much about following the rules

This and other similar articles are designed to give you a set of guidelines about things that, in general, make blogs more or less attractive to readers. None of these "rules" are set in stone, and some bloggers have become wildly popular by breaking some or all of them. It's up to you to decide what you want to accomplish with your blog and the risks you're willing to take to do so. The beauty—and curse—of blogging is that there are no rules; there are (usually) no editors to tell you what to say or not say and how to say it or how not to say it. There are (often) no "money men" to worry about the bottom line, no attorneys to remind you about liability, no censors other than your own conscience to tell you that what you want to write is inappropriate. There are plenty of critics, after the fact, but there's no one to stop you from publishing anything you want.

He (or she) who controls the media controls the world. Thanks to today's technology, almost anyone can control a small piece of the media and own a bit of the power and responsibility that go with that.

Additional resources

- TechRepublic's [Downloads RSS Feed](#) **XML**
- Sign up for TechRepublic's [Downloads Weekly Update](#) newsletter
- Sign up for our [IT Career NetNote](#)
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)
- ["10 ways to become a better blogger"](#) (TechRepublic download)
- ["Keep your writing sharp and professional with this list of pointers"](#) (TechRepublic download)
- ["10 flagrant grammar mistakes that make you look stupid"](#) (TechRepublic download)

Version history

Version: 1.0

Published: October 10, 2006

Tell us what you think

TechRepublic downloads are designed to help you get your job done as painlessly and effectively as possible. Because we're continually looking for ways to improve the usefulness of these tools, we need your feedback. Please take a minute to [drop us a line](#) and tell us how well this download worked for you and offer your suggestions for improvement.

Thanks!

—The TechRepublic Downloads Team