

Blogging and Beyond: Brian Clark

Denise Wakeman: Hi, this is Denise Wakeman of the Blog Squad.

Patsi Krakoff: And this is Patsi Krakoff.

Denise: And you're listening to "Blogging and Beyond," the show about how to leverage the Internet to attract, sell, and profit. For the next thirty minutes, we're bringing you the best expert information on how to use the Internet to build your business.

During today's show, we're talking about the importance of blog writing and how effective writing can grow your business. We're speaking with the leading online expert on writing for your blog, Brian Clark of Copyblogger.com.

Patsi: That's right, Denise. Brian made a big splash when he joined the blogosphere. I think that was almost two years ago now. Up until that time, I think few people really addressed the special issues of writing on a blog, as that's different from writing for other web pages or for offline pages.

Denise: OK, why don't you introduce Brian?

Patsi: OK. Brian Clark is an Internet marketing strategist, content developer, entrepreneur, and recovering attorney. I like that. In addition to building three successful offline businesses using online marketing techniques, he has sold scores of products and services online via joint venture and affiliate arrangements. You can read his popular blog at www.copyblogger.com. Welcome, Brian.

Brian Clark: Hi, how are you doing?

Patsi: Good.

Denise: We're doing great, and we're glad that you're here today. We were talking before the show started that we had tried to have an interview with you a few months ago and you were sick, unfortunately. We're glad you were able to make it today.

Brian: That's true. I was completely voiceless the day we were supposed to do it, and I ended up with walking pneumonia. It got really nasty.

Denise: Oh!

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Brian: I'm much better now, though.

Denise: Good, good. OK. Why don't you start by telling us about why you decided to start blogging, and how you were able to build up such a big reader base so quickly.

Brian: Well, it's interesting because I'd been using blogs and blog software since roughly around 2001. I first started playing around with the software at its earliest stages, with things like Radiouserland, and then Blogger before Google bought it.

I wouldn't consider myself a proper blogger, but I was using the software because it had a lot of advantages. You know, it's a very easy content management system. It does very well on search engines. Even more so back then.

It was just a quick way to put up a site, or a facet of a site that was different from the rest of the site for updated content and whatnot. I've been using blogs for quite a long time, but I didn't officially start "blogging properly" until January of 2006. So it's been about a year and a half since I started Copyblogger.

I did that because my background in online marketing started out in the late '90s with email publishing. I started with email newsletters, and then I used email to build lead generation for a law firm. I then incorporated that with web-based strategies for a real estate brokerage. I just kept using online marketing to build offline businesses, because at that time people weren't really thinking that way. It was really a way to get a great competitive advantage.

But once I sold out of my real estate firm, I decided what was going to make me happy was focusing on what I loved, which is the actual online marketing itself. When you are successfully marketing a business online, you have to deal with the rest of the work of the business. I just wanted to cut out that part. I just wanted to do what I really enjoyed. I was lucky to be in a position to be able to do that.

So, I said, "OK, how do you do that?" My other business model that I had been segueing into was doing joint ventures and affiliate marketing, and it's always easier to enter into those kind of relationships with other people when you have some sort of presence. People know who you are. You're not just calling up or emailing cold.

When someone knows who you are and you have a reputation for being able to do something well, of course that makes life easier. So I said, "Oh, what can I do?" And I kind of saw a little niche there, because I taught myself copywriting many years ago to promote my own businesses.

It was obvious to me coming from that perspective that people who are into blogging can really benefit if they just applied some of those types of skills to what they're doing. It's not like advertising copy at all, but still. Even journalists use these types of techniques for

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headlines, such as not burying the lead, which is what's the most unique hook of an article.

Well, the same thing is true for bloggers. The same thing is true for marketers. And that was the idea for Copyblogger. It wasn't to promote myself as a copywriter, it was to teach people, to provide some value to people. I think that's what's at the heart of blogging. You've got to provide value to others, and then you'll get paid back in the long term.

So that was the idea, and I guess it went over pretty well.

Denise: I'd say.

Patsi: Can you give us the numbers? I've forgotten what they were, but you built up to some fantastic number in about two months.

Brian: Well, you know, it's interesting, because through the first year of blogging, I think I hit about 10,000 subscribers, give or take. Then six months later, I'm almost at 20,000. It's one of those things that once you get some momentum and you get well known, people link to you and the growth rate starts to go up a little bit. I think I'm somewhere at 18,500., or something like that.

Denise: That's terrific. So, you said that you started Copyblogger in order to educate bloggers specifically on writing for the web, or writing for their blogs. How has that evolved? How has the mission of your blog changed? I've noticed a few changes.

Brian: Well, it is interesting because like I said, when I first started, I wanted to be able to speak to and help bloggers because I wanted to be able to form relationships with other people that were involved in the same space and do projects together. That's how I make a living.

Up until recently, Copyblogger didn't make any money at all, despite the fact that that's what I was known for. But that's kind of the business model that I operate on. Now Copyblogger has enough of an audience where we actually just sold out all six of the sponsorship spots as of today.

Denise: Wow, great.

Brian: We've just done that in the last month. That has been a big change because that was never something I really anticipated.

In fact, if you asked me a year and a half ago if I was going to be selling advertising on

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the blog, I would have laughed because I don't even think about advertising. I'm the kind of person that says if I want to make money, I could just sell you something.

Denise: Right.

Brian: As long as that something has value and you have a choice in relationship and you think I'm a good guy, then that's how I would imagine I would make money. And of course, that will still be the case with my own products and working with people like yourselves. But the sponsorship thing was a welcome twist.

Denise: Well, I guess the way you're selling the value is the audience.

Brian: Yes. Yes, absolutely.

Patsi: And would you say a particular tipping point or a number that is wise to reach before one should even consider her selling that ad space?

Brian: You know, there are probably people who, again, could answer that question better for you because I'm not an advertising guy. I do have a relationship with D5 Media and they've been very helpful in that regard because that's not something I really want to think about. I'm focused on other things, not selling advertisements.

I think you can get ad revenue - if you're smart about it - with a much smaller audience if that's what you want to do. If we're talking about business blogging where people are blogging to promote their own businesses and lead generate, don't dilute your message with advertising. I see people doing that and it's tempting. I personally don't believe that's a good idea. I could be wrong, but when I had a business I was promoting online, the only thing that website promoted was my business.

Patsi: Right.

Brian: You don't want to distract people with other messages, especially people who may be competing with you.

Patsi: We agree with you, but we have seen that the ads in place on your blog are very tasteful and they're also very focused on your particular niche.

Brian: Yeah, I think so. It's been interesting. I was interested to see what the reaction would be, and nobody said anything. I think that was nice. It was interesting because

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during the first year I was blogging, I would literally get these concerned emails from people asking how I was making money. They were really desperately concerned.

Patsi: They were worried about you.

Brian: Well, I ended up doing a post on that because I don't think they were really worried about me. It didn't seem apparent to them why I was doing it, and the reason I was doing it was because of the relationships I could make and the name I could make for myself. That was completely clear to me, but to other people it wasn't. So one day I did a post where I said, "Hey guys, here's why I started the blog." And everyone was like, "Oh, I'm so relieved."

But now, again, six or eight months later, it's evolved beyond that. I've brought in other writers to try to make it into an even better resource to aid people on all facets of copywriting online.

Denise: Yeah. One of the biggest changes I've noticed is other authors on your blog. How is that being received by your readers?

Brian: Mostly very positively. The three people that are kind of regular contributors, I think have been very warmly received.

I did have a guest author last week that was on your show a couple of weeks ago. He wrote kind of a controversial piece, which I found very interesting, but a lot of people reacted badly to it. This was the first time I noticed my subscriber amount dropped. So, it's a different audience and I think I have a really good feel for them. I'm not sure everyone else does, and that's where you have to be careful.

As an editor, I have to make sure that just because I might find something thought provoking, other people may view it differently. I'm learning that as I go along. I like being an editor, though, I really do. I like making other people the star and maybe helping them out with a headline, or an edit or two. To me, that's a lot of fun because I don't have to come up with the whole post.

Patsi: Right.

Denise: I think it's been pretty seamless, because sometimes I'm reading the posts and I don't even realize until the end of it that it was written by somebody else.

Brian: Yeah, I've gotten that comment a couple of times as well. I wondered about that, but as with any transition, you just put it out there and see what happens.

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Denise: Right.

Brian: Sooner or later, people get used to it.

Denise: Well, I think that helps me accept other writers because it's somebody that's clearly able to convey ideas and concepts in a way that people have become used to, hearing them from you.

Brian: Right. That's why I think the people that have come on board are a good fit. They all have different writing styles, actually, and even different from me. Yet it's a similar enough approach to where it's congruent and I think that's very important. You don't want to radically shake up what the audience has come to expect.

What you'd like to do is add voices that add value and enhance the blog, as opposed to it just being a situation where people think, "Oh, that first guy is bailing out here." That's not the case. I think I'm actually putting in more time, because I used to only post once or twice a week.

Patsi: Getting back to blog writing, how would you say that blog writing is different from other kinds of writing?

Brian: You know, that's an excellent question and I think I've talked about it from time to time, or tried to. I don't think blog writing is different than a lot of what came before. I think that yes, there are nuances to it. But there's either writing that is focused on the audience's unique interest, and then there's writing that is something else.

I don't care if it's a blog, or email newsletter, or an article in the paper. It's either focused on the audience or on something that's interesting, and it's presented that way. Presentation is key. I think blogging actually started off at a disadvantage due to the popular conception that blogs are nothing but personal journals.

Patsi: Yeah.

Brian: They can be. They can be anything you want them to be. But if you're writing a personal journal, don't expect many people to read it. Now, there's always the exceptions that prove the rule. But people latch on to the Dooces and the Scobolds of the world who started a long time ago and say, "Hey, they're proof you can do it." And then I just say, "Well, look around lately. Those guys are still hanging on, but nobody knew."

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Patsi: Yeah.

Brian: Writing for a personal journal, you add your personality. Hey, that's a copywriting technique from way back, you know, having a real conversation as a real person. That's where blogging really shines because it gives business people license to do that, whereas in the past I think they felt they had to write in some stiff, gobbledygook manner. That was really horrible, some of the writing you might see on a corporate website, and people thought that's what it means to be professional. That's not true.

People want to do business with someone they feel an emotional connection with, someone who demonstrates credibility and authority. It is possible to do those things at the same time while still being a warm human being.

Patsi: Right. Well said. We're going to have to take a quick station break here. You're listening to "Bloggging and Beyond" with the Blog Squad, Denise Wakeman and I, Patsi Krakoff. Today, we're talking with Brian Clark, author of Copyblogger.com. You can find information about Brian at www.copyblogger.com. You can get information about the Blog Squad at blogsquad.biz. If you have a question for Brian, you can call in at 718-508-9559, or you can send an IM message via Skype to "dwakeman." And now, back to "Bloggging and Beyond" and our conversation with Brian Clark of Copyblogger.com.

Denise: Thanks, Patsi. Just before the break we were talking about how blog writing isn't really necessarily that different from any other good writing, that it involves letting your reader know who you are as a person, thus adding personality. That really resonated for me, because in school you're taught to write in a more formal manner, so it was really hard for me. It took me a long time to break that formal kind of writing and make it more personal, so that's always something to keep in mind. It's important, so thanks for articulating that.

Brian: Right, and that's a good transition to how it really is different. I'm not saying you can't write more scholarly articles. In fact, if there's any criticism of me, it's that I don't put enough of my personality in my writing at Copyblogger. I mean, there are touches of it, but it doesn't pervade. I did that on purpose because I wanted to make a point that you can become a popular blogger without necessarily injecting yourself so much into the process because it's really about the audience. If there's a theme of Copyblogger, it's "It's not about you, blogger. It's about the people reading."

Bloggging is, as a writing form, different. Aside from the core value, in many ways, those are some of the techniques that people pick up just by the act of bloggging. We can talk about it, but the best way to do it is to just get in there and do it.

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For example, something that a lot of people refer to is conversational blogging. Basically, you read what someone else has written that's relevant to your audience and you riff on it. You link to them, you quote them, and you give your own perspective. Too many people simply link and don't add to it, but if you're not adding to what someone else is saying, why doesn't your audience just leave and go read them?

Let me stop there and just say, don't ever be afraid to link out to other people. If you don't link out to other people, you are not going to really get anywhere because that's how things work. That's what's so incredible about the blogosphere, the willingness to send traffic here and there. It's always been that way online. Before blogs and traffic exchanges, there's always been that cooperation, even if you are competing on some level.

But the key to linking up successfully is to add a perspective. Add something that's unique and adds to the conversation. That's unique to blogging. You didn't really see that before. It's not email newsletters and static websites, which are not interactive mediums like blogging.

Denise: Right, right.

Brian: That's what's so cool about it, that's why the growth has been so explosive, and that's why I really think pretty much any small business needs to be blogging. Or else you might end up being invisible online, as far as I'm concerned.

Patsi: I think you raise some interesting and some important points, because many business people come into the world of blogging without really doing enough research on other blogs in their field, and they think the blog should be sort of a personal diary. And they're misled, really, into blogging about themselves rather than what's in it for the reader. And they wonder why they don't get traffic, or they wonder why their blog isn't successful or generating leads.

Brian: And then they give up.

Patsi: And then they give up.

Brian: It's just so frustrating and I feel bad about that, but yeah, it's key. You're entering a bit of an ecosystem, and if you don't know who the other players are, you're just a lonely voice all by yourself. It's easier than you think not to be isolated like that, and yet it happens time and time again. And then you tell a business person who's been around the block a few times, "Hey, you've got to link out to these other people," and he or she is going to go, "You're crazy". Right?

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Denise: Right. Yeah.

Brian: It's counterintuitive. But think about Google. Google is probably the leading company in the world right now by sending people away. Right?

Patsi: Yep.

Brian: Google exists to send people somewhere else to what they really want, and that is an interesting analogy for blogging because the relationship is where the value's at. It's not keeping them locked in, or, you know how in the '90s they used to say a website was sticky and therefore good.

Patsi: Right. Yeah.

Brian: That's the amount of time you spent there. And then Google came along and turned it on its head and sent people away and became a monolithic superpower. Right?

Patsi: And people are going to find the other competitors anyway.

Brian: Yes, they are. And they'll value the relationship if you're the one who's pointing out the cool stuff or the interesting stuff that's relevant to your niche. And that's a hard thing for people to get their head around, but it's really key. I mean, you've got to have great original content, I think, to attract people in the first place. But you can't be afraid to point out other things, because people will wonder why you didn't.

Denise: Right. That's one thing we always advise our clients. It may be counterintuitive, but people will look to you as their go-to resource as opposed to having to go search out the things you might be able to provide for them. And that's a value in and of itself.

Brian: Exactly.

Patsi: For the benefit of some of our listeners who may be new to blogging, or are just now considering starting a business blog, what two or three steps would you give for a beginning blog writer to do so that they can start out with relatively good blog posts?

Brian: One of the things I've tried to write about quite a bit is best encapsulated by a quote from David Ogilvie, the legendary advertising guy. We talked about copywriting, which is basically, how do you say things? And that makes a huge difference.

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His quote was, "What you say is more important than how you say it." And that's key. You have to be offering some valuable substance, but it's also key to go into the realm of Seth Godin, that you have a unique perspective. I mean, there's really very little outside of true technological advancement that's brand new, right?

Patsi: Right.

Brian: But people who get attention find interesting new ways to convey information. That may be the same substance of information that someone else is giving, but when you put that unique spin on it, the purple cow, how is this different and worth talking about, that's really the key to everything. This is only word of mouth marketing.

Patsi: Right.

Brian: At the beginning of commerce, all there was, was word of mouth and everyone knew each other and they lived in one little village and they traded. Then mass marketing came along and turned that completely on its head. To a certain degree, we're heading back in the other direction, except that it's worldwide and speed-of-light type stuff.

Denise: Right. The village is a lot bigger.

Brian: Exactly.

Patsi: We're into blog marketing.

Brian: Right. But having something worth talking about is the only way to get noticed in that huge amount of noise. But, you don't have to be noticed above all the noise. You just have to be noticed in your little niche. When people are looking for your particular brand of information, you have to be someone who shines. And the way you do that in the blogosphere and in search engines is getting people to link to you.

It's no accident that search engines value links from other people as a way to rank a site more highly because they're counting that as a vote.

Denise: Right.

Brian: You know, a link is a recommendation for your website or blog. So, you get traffic directly from other people by having something great that they link to, and you win twice. You end up ranking higher in the search engines because you got those links.

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So, one of the key things of starting a blog is not just setting it up and writing about whatever comes to mind. You really do have to have a strategy. I say that blogging is not advertising in the traditional sense. And yet, in the new sense, it is advertising. It's certainly marketing, right?

Patsi: Right.

Brian: And you have to have a marketing plan for your blog and the foundation of that should be, "What's my angle here? How am I going to stand apart in the crowd?" It doesn't have to be silly or sensational, it just has to be unique and provide some value to people in a way that other people don't.

Patsi: Right.

Denise: It's interesting. Last night Patsi and I were talking for a few minutes, and we were saying, you know, what's so interesting about Brian's blog is not that the information is new, necessarily, it's that he puts a unique perspective on it. That's what makes it so compelling.

Brian: And again, that goes back to what we said earlier. To me, it was completely apparent that you needed to apply these kind of tenets of copywriting into your blogging. It just so happened that no one else was looking at it that way.

Denise: Right.

Brian: So that was my little moment. What I love is that there's been a lot of different writing blogs out there that have a lot of good information, and they are a good compliment to what I'm trying to do. I've also noticed that writing is becoming more cool. I love that, and a lot of the really popular copywriters develop that rock star kind of mystique around something that a lot of other people would consider boring. Right?

Patsi: Yeah.

Brian: But that helps, and I think that's kind of caught on in blogging, where people are like, "Wow! This is fantastic!" And I'm like, yeah, I just was writing about bullet points. You tell the normal people that, and they're like, "You're crazy!"

But it's cool because communication is the foundation of everything. If you want to be

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rich, if you want to be powerful, being persuasive, you don't have to be underhanded or dirty. You just have to be persuasive and provide value, and you can have anything you want.

Denise: Right, right. So what's next for you, or Copyblogger? Any books in the wings?

Brian: I'm trying to decide. I do have a big project that is going to be very interesting, I think, about where things are going from here. Hopefully I can continue my run of spotting where things are heading, as far as what kind of content, what kind of monetization strategies are going to work for those who are trying to make money from the blog. What's the new lead generation strategy? What's the new strategy for getting links?

So, I'm working on a project that I hope to launch this fall related to that. I need to put together a book from some of my archives, which is a harder job than it sounds, because you have to edit. It becomes a big fiasco. Those are things I'm talking about to some other people doing other related projects, but not necessarily about blogging.

I think that a lot of people that have gotten into blogging are ready to learn some more advanced things. As you've said, I'm a recovering attorney. I've got a lot of information that I gleaned from my law practice even though I couldn't stand it, but I got to see and observe a lot of sophisticated business arrangements.

Denise: Right.

Brian: And I think you can boil some of those down to their essence. A lot of online marketers could learn a lot from that. I'm talking about pure play internet marketers as well as small business people who are trying to leverage other people's resources and make more money.

Patsi: Well, if you need help from a recovering psychologist, just let me know.

Brian: Hey, that was my undergraduate degree. I love psychology.

Denise: Well, there you go. OK, well, we're just about at the end of our time here. I want to personally recommend to everyone listening Brian's blog at www.copyblogger.com because it's great information, and Brian communicates very well. Do you see anything else?

Patsi: This had been been very informative, Brian, and we want to thank you for taking

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the time to share you views about blog writing with our listeners. Before we wrap up, though, I have a couple of important announcements. I'd like to let our listeners know that next week on "Blogging and Beyond" we are interviewing William Arruda about branding and your online identify. So tune in on June 28th at three p.m. Pacific time for the show.

Denise: And remember, you can find Brian Clark at www.copyblogger.com. Thank you, Brian, so much.

Brian: Thank you.

Denise: OK. You've been listening to "Blogging and Beyond" on BlogTalkRadio. You can always get the latest information about the show at www.bloggingandbeyond.com. So remember, the time is now.

Patsi: The time is now to attract, sell, and profit. Blog on!

About the The Blog Squad:

Blogging experts Patsi Krakoff and Denise Wakeman are known as The Blog Squad™. They have teamed up to help professionals Attract, Sell and Profit by harnessing the power of blogs, newsletters, and ecommerce systems. Between them, they have 17 years of Internet know-how, write on 10 blogs and publish 2 ezines.

Patsi and Denise have co-authored, "[Build a Better Blog: The Ultimate Guide to Boosting Your Business with a Professional Blog](#)" and many other blogging programs to address niche blogging.

They host a Blogging and Beyond, a weekly Internet radio show. You can get their free weekly ezine Savvy eBiz Tips at www.SavvyBizTips.com