

NINJA SECRETS of B2B BLOGGING

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Introduction

Did you know that **88 percent** of B2B companies are engaged in content marketing, including blogging ... but only **30 percent** feel their efforts are effective?¹

So we have a huge majority of B2B brands devoting countless hours — and untold thousands of dollars — to an effort that they feel is less than effective.

Which begs the question ...

Why put that kind of effort into something you don't think is working?

I have my theories. I believe many B2B marketers have listened to some self-appointed guru who told them “you need to be blogging” ... but never showed them how to do it well.

I believe they've heard a lot of high-level advice that stopped short of helping them meet the day-to-day challenges of publishing an effective blog.

And I believe they've gazed in adoration at brands who are doing B2B blogging extremely well ... but no one has pointed out the best practices that they can use in their own blogging program.

That's our mission in this e-book. In the pages that follow, you'll learn

- How to avoid the mistakes of those B2B bloggers who have gone before
- The secrets that every “B2B blogging ninja” knows
- How three real-world examples — Caterpillar, Kelly OCG, and IBM — can inspire your own blogging efforts
- How to stop spinning your wheels and start getting results from your own B2B blog

Are you ready?

1 B2B Content Marketing 2016: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends – North America, produced by Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs

Why B2B Blogging?

I find it amazing that we still come up against the myth that blogging is strictly a B2C (business-to-consumer) thing.

Many marketers see blogging as something that's fine for fashion designers, retailers, real estate agents, and veterinarians ... but B2B? What could a B2B business possibly have to blog about?

Guess what? **88 percent of B2B marketers** have incorporated content marketing into their strategies, compared to just 76 percent of B2C marketers. And of that large majority of B2B marketers, **81 percent are blogging.**²

I believe the reason is intertwined with the nature of B2B marketing. Think about the typical B2B sale:

- It involves more complex products and larger outlays of cash.
- It needs to go through multiple approval levels of the prospect's organization.
- It relies heavily on the marketer's expertise and reliability.

Each of these features points to a need for solid information, delivered on a consistent, reliable basis — and **what better place than a blog to do just that?**

The B2B blog also offers a versatile platform for publishing *different types of information* (research data, customer reviews, industry news) and *media* (text, audio, video), making it perfectly adaptable to your audience's learning style while still offering lots of flexibility.

Need more persuading? How about some hard data?

- B2B marketers who blog receive **67 percent** more leads than those who don't.³
- **67 percent** of B2B buyers rely more on content for B2B purchasing decisions than they did a year ago.⁴
- **56 percent** of B2B marketers report having used blog posts to research purchasing decisions in the last 12 months.⁵

So if you're looking to boost your B2B marketing, a simple blog can be the best place to start. Your customers will thank you ... and so will your CMO.

² B2B Content Marketing 2016: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends – North America, produced by Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs

³ 6 Stats You Should Know About Business Blogging in 2015, HubSpot

⁴ Content Marketing Statistics: The Ultimate List, Curata

⁵ Content Marketing Statistics: The Ultimate List, Curata

The B2B Blogging Wall of Shame

Before we head into the dojo and learn those secrets from our ninjas, let's make a pit stop at what I like to call "the wall of shame."

This is the "rogue's gallery" of mistakes that B2B bloggers make over and over again. And I'd be willing to bet that of those marketers who doubt their content's effectiveness — about 70 percent — at least some of them have allowed these missteps to creep into their practice.

Let's take a look:

“The Blog That Wasn’t There”

Of all the missteps that B2B marketers can make with blogging, I’d have to **rank “not having one” in the top spot.**

I’ve heard just about every excuse out there for not even starting a blog; here are just a few.

“We don’t have the time/the budget.”

Everybody has the same 24 hours in the day, and I’ve never heard a marketer complain about a surplus of money. Yet B2B businesses all over the world – from tiny startups to major corporations – have made the decision to commit to blogging on a consistent basis ... and are reaping the rewards. It’s not a question of time or money; it’s a question of priority.

“We’re doing fine with what we have.”

And that may be absolutely true ... for now. But remember, marketing is changing. Google is getting smarter in its mission to provide searchers with quality content – the kind of content you could be delivering on a blog – instead of directing them to sales pages. And consumers need more than a glossy ad with a catchy tagline to trust you: they need to get to know you first, and your blog could be helping them do that.

I’ll share with you a question I often present to my clients:

One year from now, you can either (a) be starting to reap real benefits from a strong, vibrant blog, or (b) be starting from scratch and wishing you had started today. What’ll it be?

“Our business is all about relationships.”

Funny, I remember hearing the same excuse 15 years ago when we were talking about websites.

There seems to be a popular misconception that relationship marketing and content marketing are mutually exclusive. They’re not.

Let’s say you have a sales rep named Donna who’s brilliant at relationships. When you have a solid blog in place, you provide Donna with a powerful sales tool. Instead of following up with prospects with the same old “just checking in” or “how’s it going?” (translation: “Any business for us?”), she can now offer her prospects a valuable resource: the link to a blog post that offers solutions to one of their most pressing issues.

Donna’s happy because she has another touchpoint with the prospect. Your prospect is happy because she’s been given a valuable source of information. Sounds like some solid relationship marketing to me!

..... “The Blog That’s All About MY Interests”

I have a brilliant client — let’s call him Frank — who has built a vibrant consultancy around helping teams communicate better. One of the smartest people I know, Frank has several advanced degrees and clearly loves what he does.

When I started working with Frank on his blog, he immediately rattled off a list of topics he wanted to cover around how the brain processes communications, the physiological aspects of interpreting the spoken versus written word, the anthropological reasons for developing a shared language, etc.

All these topics were quite fascinating ... to him. To his audience — mainly engineers and project managers — not so much.

I worked with Frank to come up with topics his clients *do* care about — things like tips on conducting more effective conference calls and best practices in email writing. Frank now has a thriving blog that delights his clients and prospects on a regular basis — with information that helps them do their jobs better.

..... “The Copy-Pasted Brochure”

Let’s say you’re out there doing research on a topic related to a project at work. You do the requisite Google search, and you come across a title that seems like the perfect match. You can barely contain your excitement as you click the link, and a few milliseconds later you find yourself on — a sales page thinly veiled as a blog post.

Instead of giving you actionable advice, the “author” presents you with a laundry list of reasons why his company’s products or services are the answers to all your problems.

We have a word for that on the World Wide Web: FAIL.

The purpose of your blog is not to sell. It’s to establish thought leadership, build trust and initiate conversations. So when you think about your blog, I want this image to pop up clearly in your mind:



Your blog is a place to inform, educate, entertain, and/or inspire — not to hawk your wares. If your audience visits your blog expecting to find engaging content, only to find a heap of sales copy, they'll hit the Back button faster than J.J. Watt can smack down a forward pass ... and they may never return.

By the way, the same goes for press releases. Are they important? Absolutely? Should they be on your website? Absolutely. Should they be copy-pasted in your blog? *Absolutely not!* Create a Media Center to house your press releases, and let your blog be a true blog.

..... “The Neglected Stepchild”

I see it way too often.

A marketing team gets all gung-ho about their shiny new blog, and they do a terrific job at publishing interesting, engaging posts ... for about six weeks.

Then, the excitement wears off and the blog becomes a chore. Or they get soaked on the latest product launch. Or a new CMO decides that they need to set this content foolishness aside and focus on “serious marketing.”

So what started as a weekly post becomes an every-two-weeks post, which becomes a once-a-month post, which becomes a “whenever we get around to it” post.

And then they stop getting around to it.

Folks, this blogging thing is a long-term commitment. The one thing I can promise is that it won't deliver results overnight. But deliver results it will — *if* you stick with it.

..... “The Crazy Aunt in the Attic”

If you're from the southern part of the United States like I am, you'll know what I mean when I talk about “the crazy relative thing.”

It seems every Southern family has that one relative who is absolutely bonkers. You never talk about them, never mention them — and God forbid anyone from outside the family knows about them.

Sadly, that's exactly how many B2B companies treat their blog. Regardless of how much effort they put into it, you'll find it mentioned nowhere in their main website navigation, nowhere in their emails, nowhere in their social media posts — it's almost as if their blog were in the witness protection program.

The sad thing is that many B2Bs have very good blogs with interesting, engaging content — it's just that no one can *find* it.

The *really* sad thing is that it's these companies who end up concluding that “blogging doesn't work” and abandoning the practice altogether ... without ever giving it a fighting chance.

..... “The Snoozefest”

Another pervasive myth about B2B blogs is that they have to be boring. For the average marketer, the phrase “B2B blog” conjures up visions of posts like

- “5 key items about recent legislation concerning XYZ”
- “On leveraging recent developments in X”

I would come up with a third example, but I’m already starting to nod off.

We’ve established that a blog is neither an online brochure nor a roster of press releases ... and neither is it a place for lifeless content that belongs in a musty lecture hall.

Think of your blog as the **online version of a water cooler**: a place for you to share your insights on what’s going on in your industry and for your audience to react and comment. So make it conversational. Make it personal. Drop the “capital-P professional” tone and write content that sounds like it came from a human being.

In other words, **put yourself in your audience’s shoes and create the kinds of posts you would want to read**. Tell stories. Use visuals. Make your content come alive with vivid descriptions and dialogue.

Clients often tell me things like “Whoa there, Parker. I’m a CPA — I can’t be Mr. Crazy-Happy-Fun-Guy when I start blogging!” True, but you can have a conversation. Imagine you’re at a dinner party and someone has asked you to share your insights on a particular topic in your industry. Get that reply down in writing, and voilà — you have a blog post.

What B2B Blogging Ninjas Know

Now that we've established what *not* to do as a B2B blogger, it's time to make our way to the dojo and see what secrets we can learn from the masters.

..... Secret #1: Know Your Audience ... on Both Levels

If you've been following my [blog](#) and [podcast](#), you've probably heard me expound more than once on the importance of knowing your audience. In my book (literally *and* figuratively), if you don't know your audience — I mean really *know* them — nothing else you do matters. You can have the world's most advanced content marketing program, but if you don't know that person on the other side of the screen, you're wasting your time and effort.

Your Target Audience, Part 1: The Company

As B2B marketers, our audience analysis goes a bit deeper than it does for our brethren on the B2C side. First, we need to know what kind of businesses we're targeting. Make sure you're absolutely solid on the answers to questions like

- In what **industry** is your target company?
- How many **employees** does your target company have?
- What is your target company's average annual **revenue**?
- Where is your target company **located** geographically?
- What is your target company's **structure**? Is it publicly traded or privately held?
- What is your target company's **culture** like? Is it buttoned-up and all-business like Delta Airlines, or is it more laid-back and quirky like Southwest? Is it more hierarchical or more of a flat-structure organization? What are some of its key values?

I often talk with B2B marketers who are rock-solid in knowing what companies they want to speak to — but that's where they stop. And that's a mistake. Which brings me to ...

Your Target Audience, Part 2: The Individual

Have you ever shaken hands with a company? Of course not. Companies are made up of *people*, and as B2B marketers, we need to make sure that we're speaking to the human beings on the other side of that screen. Once you've determined who your audience is on the company level, it's time to go deeper with questions like

- What is your target audience member's **job title**?
- What is his or her **level** in the organization? Entry level? Middle management? VP or executive level?
- What is his or her **age**? **Gender**?
- What **problems** does he or she deal with on a daily basis?
- What are his or her **hopes and dreams** for the future? Does he or she aspire to be a VP of Marketing? Perhaps even CMO?
- What are his or her key **values**?

Once you know your audience — on both levels — you have a solid foundation on which you can build a successful content marketing program. As they say in Monopoly, *do not pass Go* before taking this vital step.

..... Secret #2: Blog About Topics Your Audience Craves

All too often, B2B content marketers build their blogs around “nice to know” topics: topics that, when they pop up in your audience’s news feeds, elicit a passing nod and perhaps a half-hearted “oh, that’s interesting.”

If your blog is going to succeed, you need to **cover topics your audience craves**: topics they actually go out and search for, topics they’re hungry to know more about.

So how do you come up with crave-worthy topics? Believe it or not, you have abundant resources available to you:

1. Ask your audience directly.

Your audience knows what they want, and they’ll tell you if you ask them. Fortunately, you have several tools readily available to do that:

- Create surveys using free tools like SurveyMonkey.
- Send emails asking for their input.
- Post open questions on social media.
- Call a sampling of key clients and ask them.

2. Ask your customer service reps.

These folks interact with your current customers on a daily basis; they know the questions they’re asking and the problems they’re dealing with. Gather a few reps for a focus group, and get them talking about the issues customers are calling about.

3. Ask your sales team

Your business development peeps are the ones who are out there pounding the pavement, talking with prospective clients all day, every day. Ask them which questions come up most often in those sales calls. Ask them about the specific problems those prospects are dealing with. Ask them what makes prospects choose you over your biggest competitor (or vice versa!).

4. Review past content results

If you’ve been creating content for a while, you probably have a good bank of data to show you which topics get the most engagement. Look at your Google Analytics as well as data from LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and other sources. Analyze the top-performing content and see how you can leverage those ideas for new blog posts.

Once you start doing research, you’ll quickly start building a bank of irresistible topics that will attract people in your target audience to your blog — and keep them coming back for more.

Secret #3: Develop Your Own Unique Voice

People often ask me, “Rachel, what’s the best way to cut through all the noise out there and make an impact?” I believe the most effective way to do that is to develop your own unique voice.

“Voice? Really? Isn’t that once of those artsy-fartsy nice-to-haves?”

Actually, no. Your voice is serious business, and it’s the key to differentiating yourself, attracting new people to your tribe, and keeping visitors coming back to your blog.

So how do you go about finding your voice?

Do a bit of soul-searching

The content marketing world is chock full of gurus telling you to “be yourself.”

Unfortunately, that advice is about as useful as the advice your mom gave you when she booted you out of the car on your first day of junior high: “Just be yourself, honey!”

Developing your brand’s own unique voice is an ongoing process, a continuous evolution that will continue for as long as you’re in business. Fortunately, there are some simple steps you can take to get started:

1. Take some time to **consider who you are as a company**. What are your mission and vision statements? What are your core values? How would you describe your culture? Which characteristics separate you from your competitors? What do your biggest fans say about you?
2. **Look closely at the words you use** – not just in your marketing, but also in your conversations with customers and prospects. Refer back to the research you did with your sales and customer service team in the last chapter.
3. Think about this question that I often ask my clients: *If you could **pick any celebrity spokesperson in the world, whom would you choose?*** Once you’ve decided, think about that person’s communication style and how you might adapt it to your blog.
4. Come up with some **adjectives that describe your company’s voice**. Is it more casual or more formal? Edgy or traditional? Clipped and to-the-point or gentle and soothing?

Take it for a test run

Once you have an idea of how your unique voice might sound in your blog, do some market research. Work up a couple of sample blog posts and run them by some current customers. Ask them questions like

- What’s your gut reaction to the overall tone?
- Does this sound like us?
- Does this sound like something you’d want to read?

Put it in writing

As soon as you've firmed up what your voice sounds like, **get that description down in writing.** Remember, you may have team members rotating in and out to create blog posts, or you may need to outsource to a freelancer, and your writers need to know what's expected when it comes to voice and tone. Give them the information they need to ensure that your voice stays consistent, regardless of who's writing any given post.

..... Secret #4: Stay on the Leading Edge

Another key to a powerful B2B blog is staying on top of the current issues and events that are affecting your audience. Remember, one of your blog's key purposes is establishing you as a thought leader, and to do that you must be first in line (or as close to first as possible) in offering your insights on the topics that are foremost on your audience's minds.

- If you're in the legal industry, be one of the first to blog about new legislation that affects your clients' operations.
- If you're in IT, be one of the first to blog about a sneaky new virus and the precautions your audience needs to take.
- If you're in healthcare, be one of the first to blog about the latest treatment approved by the FDA.

Make it a daily practice to check in with key news sites, blogs, and other sources of information that's important to your audience. And when a hot topic arises, don't sit on it for a few days: get a blog post created and published as soon as possible to ride the wave of buzz and interest.

..... Secret #5: Be Consistent

I'll tell you a dirty little secret about this blogging thing: it takes time to start generating results. A *long time*. Two or three posts are not going to earn you a rabidly loyal audience.

And because it is a long-term investment, not everybody can stick it out. *And that's good news for those of us who can.*

In his seminal book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini states

It is important to recognize that in most circumstances, consistency is valued and adaptive. Inconsistency is commonly thought to be an undesirable personality trait ... On the other side, a high degree of consistency is normally associated with personal and intellectual strength.

Part of what we're doing as content marketers is **building a foundation of trust**, and one way to bolster that trust is to *be consistent*. When you publish blog posts on a regular schedule, without fail, you do more than share valuable information. You're saying to your audience, "We can be trusted to deliver quality content once a week (or whatever your schedule is) ... and that means you can trust us in other matters, too."

What goes through your mind when you click over to a blog and discover that it's one of those "neglected stepchildren" we talked about a few chapters ago? Do you think, "Wow, their marketing team must be really busy with new product launches?" Probably not. Your first thoughts are probably more along the lines of "Wow, they flaked on their blog after just a few posts. What does that say about their business?"

Don't make that mistake. Results will be slow at first, but if you are consistent — and *persistent* — you will build that foundation of trust, one post at a time.

3 Brands That Are Rocking the B2B Blog

One of my favorite expressions in business is “Success leaves clues.”

And that’s every bit as true in B2B blogging as it is in every other area. While every business has its own unique market and its own objectives, we can learn a lot from brands who have elevated the B2B blog to an art form.

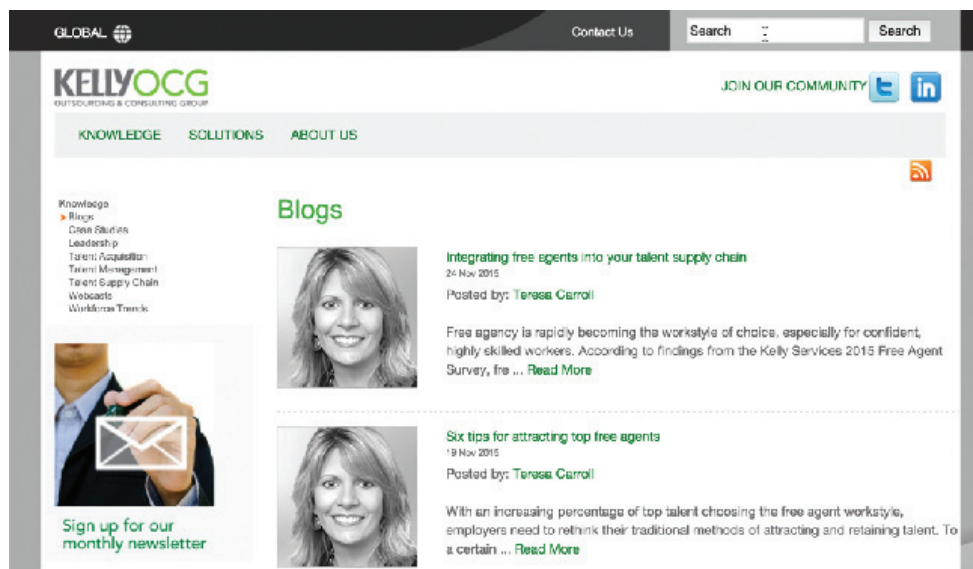
So let’s take a look at three of those rock stars — Caterpillar, Kelly OCG, and IBM — and what they can teach us about creating our own powerful B2B blogging practices.

Caterpillar

Yes, the same folks who make that huge equipment you see on farms and at construction sites are, believe it or not, quite the blogging rock stars. Caterpillar’s [On the Level](#) blog is a vibrant hub where the brand’s current and prospective customers can count on relevant, insightful information to help them do their jobs better.

What We Can Learn From Caterpillar

- Offer different perspectives by featuring multiple writers from different departments and different levels around your company.
- Don’t try to be cute. The Caterpillar blog is written in a friendly, conversational tone, but it stops short of cutesy tactics that would probably turn off its meat-and-potatoes target audience.
- Keep your finger on the pulse of your audience’s concerns and turn those topics into blog fodder (as Caterpillar did in its post [How to Avoid Machine Theft](#)).

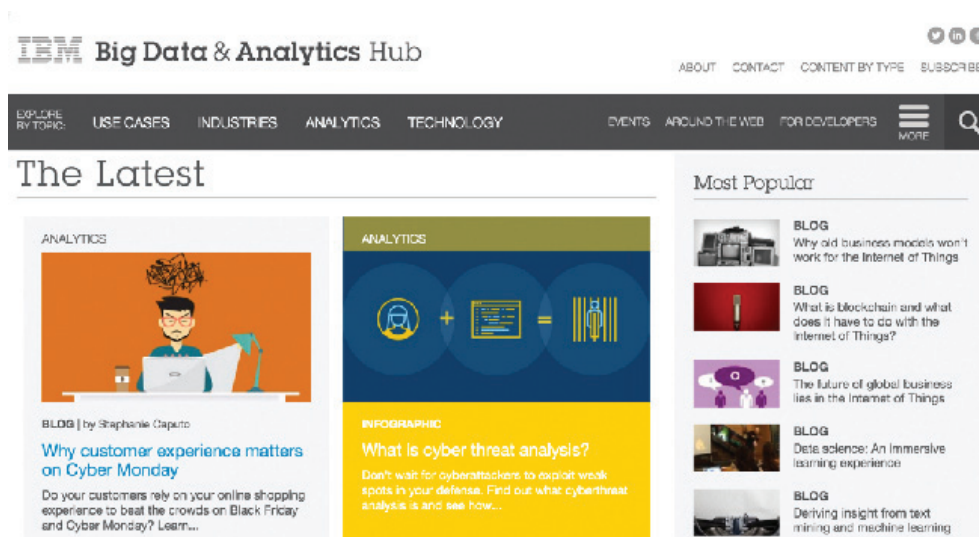


Kelly OCG

Kelly, the company that turned temporary staffing into an industry, has grown into a global powerhouse that now encompasses outsourcing and consulting — with a powerhouse blog to match. The Kelly Outsourcing & Consulting Group (OCG) blog offers the firm’s ideal clients a host of valuable information on topics such as leadership, talent supply chain, and workforce trends.

What We Can Learn From Kelly OCG

- Consider segmenting your blog by topic to help visitors navigate to the posts that most interest them.
- Highlight individual contributors. Notice how the blog’s home page features a photo of each post’s contributor and a link to his/her profile.
- Help your audience stay up to date by highlighting the latest research that affects their industries (as Kelly OCG did in its post highlighting results from a recent survey of free agents).



IBM

As the first name in business computing technology worldwide, IBM could have easily sat back on its laurels and given this blogging thing a pass. Instead, they've created a series of lively, engaging blogs — such as the [Big Data & Analytics blog](#) — around the topics that interest the brand's incredibly diverse global audience.

What We Can Learn From IBM

- If you serve a diverse audience, make sure targeted posts are clearly titled and tagged to attract the right people (as IBM did in its post [Public Sector News: Utilizing data and social media for public benefits](#)).
- Include “op-ed” type posts alongside your more informational content, as IBM did in the post [“Why old business models won't work for the Internet of Things”](#)
- Have fun with images: IBM uses colorful cartoons to add visual interest and vibrancy to posts covering even the most technical topics.

Next Steps

We've just laid out the groundwork for you. Now, are you ready to get started rocking a successful B2B blog?

We've given you the basic insights you need to get started ... but of course, every company is different. Which brings me to our special gift to you, just for downloading this e-book.

I'm offering you a complimentary **30-minute phone consultation** to discuss your specific challenges around blogging for your B2B audience.

To reserve your spot, go to **ConsultWithRachel.com**. I look forward to speaking with you!

About the Author



A self-described geek who can recite entire episodes of South Park by heart, Rachel Parker has had a passion for content ever since she was old enough to hold a crayon (purple, please).

As CEO and “Chief Geek” of Resonance, Rachel helps businesses publish content that connects with their audience ... and converts those followers into customers. She’s also the host of the [Content Marketing Podcast](#) and a sought-after speaker, having presented to numerous major business and marketing organizations.

Other E-books by Rachel Parker


[Top 10 Myths About Social Media Marketing](#)

[Top 10 Reasons Why Your Social Media Sucks](#)

Audiobooks by Rachel Parker

[5 Things You Must Know About Content Marketing](#)

[B2B Content Marketing: From the Blog to the Bottom Line](#)

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