

— Your Secret Weapon —

78 BLOG INTERVIEW QUESTIONS THAT KILL THE COMPETITION



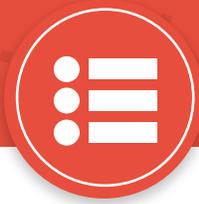


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YOUR SECRET WEAPON: 78 BLOG INTERVIEW QUESTIONS THAT KILL THE COMPETITION.

As a marketer, how can you use your blog to differentiate yourself from the competition? How can busy marketers and executives even find the time to regularly write blogs?

In this e-book, learn to save time and continually generate unique blog content through interviewing experts. This e-book will walk you through the practice of interviewing and share 78 real blog interview questions and interviewing tips to get you started.



BUSINESS BLOGGING TRENDS

Right now there are thousands of other business bloggers out there competing for keywords, visitors and leads.

According to Blogpulse.com, there are about:

150
MILLION
BLOGS ONLINE

UP TO
73,000
BLOGS CREATED
EVERY DAY

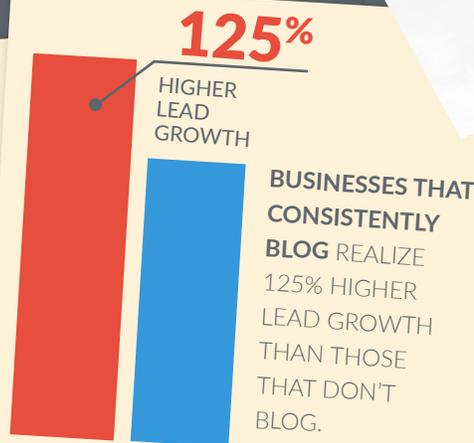
AND AS MANY AS
1.1
MILLION
NEW BLOG POSTS
INDEXED IN A GIVEN
24-HOUR PERIOD.

The number of business blogs in particular is increasing every year. Emarketer.com reports that today 34 percent of U.S. businesses are blogging, and that number is projected to reach 43 percent, or almost half of all U.S. businesses by the year 2012.

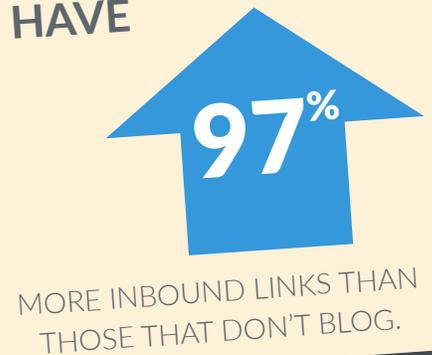
THE BENEFITS OF BLOGGING

The benefits of business blogging are pretty well-defined, but here are some of the most compelling data points:

COMPANIES
THAT BLOG
RECEIVE
55%
MORE VISITORS
THAN THOSE
THAT DON'T
BLOG.



COMPANIES
THAT BLOG
HAVE



BUSINESSES THAT BLOG
HAVE **434%** MORE INDEXED PAGES
THAN THOSE THAT DON'T BLOG.





THE CHALLENGES OF BLOGGING

TIME CONSTRAINTS, GENERATING UNIQUE CONTENT AND WRITING IN THE CORRECT VOICE ARE THE THREE BIGGEST CHALLENGES THAT BUSY MARKETERS AND EXECUTIVES FACE WHEN IT COMES TO UPDATING A BUSINESS BLOG CONSISTENTLY.

GENERATING UNIQUE

CONTENT: It's a common mistake for marketers to rely solely upon other industry blogs for content inspiration. As a result, business blogs often recycle many of the same ideas. For example, a recent Google blog search for "Top 10" AND "Facebook" returned 2,690,000 results. This illustrates just how common a post on "Top 10 Tips for Facebook" may be. Without original and compelling content, marketers will find it challenging to create content that grows their readership and gets distributed through social media channels.

TIME CONSTRAINTS: Many marketers and executives want to blog but don't always have the time to sit down and write. Even with time, many bloggers experience writer's block. This can be very frustrating and give the impression that blogging has a lower potential for return on investment.

WRITING IN THE MOST

APPROPRIATE VOICE: It is a common practice for businesses to use internal staff or outside agencies to ghostwrite their blogs. Unfortunately, the vast majority of agencies have challenges matching the authentic voice of the writer—something essential to truly capturing the essence of the writer. If the blog doesn't maintain a consistent and unique voice, it could reflect poorly on the company.





THE POWER OF INTERVIEWING

Interviewing is a powerful tool that has been used by content creators in news, radio, television and media for decades. Readers and viewers enjoy interview-based content because it helps them get inside the subject's head. For some reason, the art of interviewing has never made its way into blogging.

The truth is, behind every great story there is a powerful interview. *Washington Post* reporters Woodward and Bernstein changed the course of history when they interviewed sources like Deep Throat to crack the Watergate scandal. In a 1977 interview with Richard Nixon, David Frost prompted the former president to famously say, "I have impeached myself."

In 1993, Oprah Winfrey became a household name when she interviewed Michael Jackson after

his sexual abuse scandal, attracting over 90 million viewers. In 1999 Barbara Walters attracted 74 million viewers (a record audience in television journalism) when interviewing Monica Lewinsky.

Interviewing is also used by marketers to build successful brands. Michael Stelzner, marketing expert and author of more than 100 white papers, founded the blog *Social Media Examiner* in 2009. Stelzner uses interviews as the cornerstone of his blog content and has become an industry leader. Today, *Social Media Examiner* attracts millions of monthly page views and reaches more than 45,000 email subscribers. In his book, *Writing White Papers*, Stelzner advises content creators when talking about the power of interviews, "The best pearls [of information] reside inside someone else's head."

THE POWER OF INTERVIEWING

Interviewing can help businesses overcome the biggest challenges that prevent them from blogging effectively.

INTERVIEWING REDUCES TIME.

Interviewing quickly extracts content gems out of the expert's mind and frees them to concentrate on content rather than writing. A skilled interviewer can gather an executive's thoughts on several blog topics in minutes, while it could take hours for that executive to sit down, brainstorm and write the blogs herself.

INTERVIEWING DELIVERS UNIQUE

CONTENT. The collaboration between interviewer and expert generally produces richer content with deeper insights and arguments being exposed from each line of questioning. Interview conversations can also generate far more content than is appropriate for a single blog post, leaving companies with future blog ideas.

INTERVIEWING HELPS MAINTAIN THE RIGHT VOICE. An interview conversation captures the expert's tone, word choice and sentence structure. Strong interview questions can also help maintain the expert's voice when blogs are being ghostwritten.



78 BLOG INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The trick to interviewing is knowing which questions to ask and how successive questions can unlock the most compelling insights.

In the next section, you'll find 78 interview questions designed to help marketers get the most from their blog interviews.

The questions are grouped into 13 common types of business blogs. For each type of blog post, there is a description of what ingredients go into the post and a real world example of how a particular business might use the post. The real world examples make it easy to imagine asking the same questions in your own blog interviews.

Armed with these 78 questions and additional tips, marketers will have all the tools they need to put a blog interviewing strategy into action.





THE NUMBERED LIST

In a numbered list format, a blogger generates a series of related ideas or tips around one topic.

Example: A residential real estate agency creates a list of eight tips for renting a property.

- 1. *What are the three biggest potential risks renters face, and what can renters do to allay some of these risks?*** Blog readers like to know, “What’s in it for me?” or “What will I learn by reading this?” Identifying potential risks to readers shows why the blog content is important to them and the implications of not heeding the blog’s advice.
- 2. *Off the top of your head, what are three helpful tips for renters to choose the right property?***
The laid-back tone of “off the top of your head” can work on two levels to create more interesting content. On one level, the question pushes an expert beyond prepared statements or industry-speak. On another level, if an expert did not have time to prepare for the interview, this question can kick off a mini-brainstorming session.
- 3. *What are some common mistakes that renters make when they are looking at a home or apartment for rent? What do they tend to overlook?*** Even though you’re looking for tips, a common mistake can often be turned into tips. If the mistake is, “Forgetting to look in the basement,” the tip can be “Always look in the basement.”
- 4. *What factors indicate to a renter that a property is ineligible?*** When generating a list of tips, ask about negatives or things that signal the end of a process. It is easy to turn these negatives into positive tips for readers to help them be more efficient. For example, the expert might say to eliminate a property if there’s no guaranteed escrow account for the security deposit. Turn that into a tip such as, “Inquire about the whether the landlord will hold the deposit in escrow.”
- 5. *If you had to prioritize the list we’ve come up with, what items would be at the top? Why?*** Blog readers’ attention spans are short. Ask the expert which content is most unique or engaging so you can put the most compelling content toward the beginning of the post to capture more readers.





HOW-TO OR EXPERT GUIDE

A how-to or expert guide walks a reader through the steps of a particular process.

Example: A consumer credit indexing company gives readers advice on how to manage and improve a credit score.

- 1. *What are three actual problems that you've seen people face when they do not actively manage their credit scores?*** This question shows blog readers why the topic is important using everyday examples, such as “Unable to secure a car loan, or “Ineligible for financial aid from a University.”
- 2. *What are some hidden reasons why a consumer might have a good or bad credit score?*** As an interviewer, you want to build unique content. This question will help set the blog post apart from the competition by identifying lesser-known causes for poor credit scores. Lesser-known issues often create the most compelling discussions.
- 3. *Walk me through a checklist of information and materials consumers need when assessing their credit score.*** Readers love checklists and bullet points because they are concise and easy to read. Well-constructed interview questions make it easy to translate responses into valuable checklists.
- 4. *When a consumer wants to improve their credit score, what factors should they attack first? Why?*** For many readers, getting started with a process is the toughest part. Try to get the expert to identify a starting point and explain the advantages of the starting point.
- 5. *How much time does it take before a consumer sees an impact in a credit score? Why?*** A lot of how-to posts give tips for what to do, but then overlook the all-important factor of timing. An interviewer who asks about the timing and what can positively impact timing will extract the most valuable information.





RESPONSE TO ANOTHER BLOG OR NEWS STORY

In a response post, a blogger reacts to another piece of online content, such as a blog post, news story, published research, legal ruling or a change in industry regulations. Responses that are opinionated or controversial are often the most compelling. To generate the most excitement and intense debate, choose a topic that is trending.

Example: A consumer electronics retailer replies to a popular tech blogger's post that announces the death of the 35mm camera.

1. *When you read the blog post, what was your gut reaction?* This question feels “off the record” because it asks for a gut reaction. Sometimes gut reactions help the interviewer to extract the expert's true opinion.
2. *Tell me why you either agree or disagree with this blogger's argument.* Many response posts fall short because they rehash the original story or blog post without adding any value to it. Instead of asking for a summary, this question forces the expert to take a stance on the issue.
3. *If you had to rewrite the blog to match your opinions, what new arguments would you include?* Blog readers will be intrigued if an expert adds new insight or implications to a popular story. This question allows the expert to give their own spin on the arguments in the original post and build on these arguments.
4. *What are the key takeaways or tips from this blog?* Add even more value to a response blog by tying the issue back to the reader in the form of actionable advice. This is a good opportunity for the expert to rephrase any complicated or technical content in terms the reader understands.
5. *What future effects do you think the arguments made in the original story are going to have on the industry?* Here the interviewer gives the expert an opportunity to tie the original post to larger industry trends or developments. This is a good question for establishing the blogger as a forward-looking thinker.





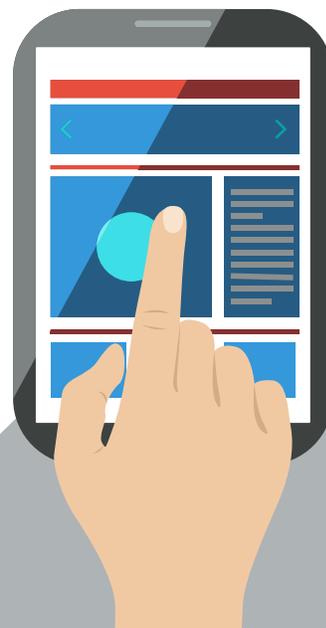
LINK OR RESOURCE ROUND-UP

A resource round-up post provides a number of links and resources for readers on a particular topic.

Example: A credit union creates a blog post offering links and resources to guide consumers interested in purchasing a home.

- 1. *What websites do you recommend that deal with issues surrounding a home purchase? Why would you recommend each of these websites?***

Get the expert to list as many web resources as possible for consumers thinking of buying a home. Skilled interviewers will prepare ahead of the call and have a few ideas ready in case the expert has trouble getting started. You may find yourself asking this kind of question about resources two or three times, but focusing on a different angle each time.
- 2. *What state or federal resources would you advise customers check before purchasing a home? Please explain the different ways each organization might help people thinking of purchasing a home.*** Remember, it's most important get the expert to answer the "why" for each resource.
- 3. *Please list publications, reports or other industry news resources that future homeowners should follow? Please explain the significance of each of these sources and how they might help consumers.*** Experts may be familiar with many of the trade publications, blogs, research or industry news sites that are difficult for consumers to find on their own. This question will unearth those hidden resources that consumers may not otherwise find.
- 4. *What are the three biggest benefits to readers in using these resources?*** The blogger needs to provide a reason for readers to care about the resources listed. An interviewer should try to extract the big pain points of the readers and how the resources listed will help alleviate some of these pains.
- 5. *What are some of the unique programs and services that credit unions offer to home buyers?*** The question allows the expert to talk about a type of resource they may offer in a general way, without sounding too self-promotional. A company can mention its own resource by name in a call-to-action at the end of the blog post, but the guts of the post should be educational.





4 INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

DURING YOUR FIRST INTERVIEW, CONSIDER ASKING THESE QUESTIONS UP FRONT:



What are the keywords or phrases that you'd like to build into your blog posts?

This question helps you include SEO friendly headlines, headings, anchor tags and URLs. This question can also help to generate topics for future posts.



Describe your ideal readers or personas? What are your readers' professional backgrounds and demographic profiles?

In order to write compelling blog content, an interviewer should clearly identify their audience. A blog post will be most appealing if it uses the same terminology and thought-process as its audience.



How do you want your name and title to appear on the blog?

This seems basic, but it is an important question to ask. Is Matthew really going to be known as Matt? Does the expert want their title listed on the blog? Do they have a Gravatar account with a headshot that will be linked to the blog? Do they want an "about the author" blurb to appear at the bottom of each entry? These make the post personal and consistent.



***What type of tone do you like to write in?
Do you prefer short or long sentences?
Are you wordy or do you cut right to the chase?***

These questions will help the interviewer recreate the expert's personal tone and style in a ghostwritten blog. This is very important for maintaining authenticity.





COMMON PITFALLS OR PROBLEMS

A pitfalls post captures common mistakes people make when using a product, service or strategy and suggests ways to avoid or overcome those issues.

Example: A mobile applications developer blogs about common problems clients experience when developing mobile marketing applications.



- 1. *What are three best practices marketers should keep in mind when developing mobile applications?*** Although you are looking for problems, experts may find it easier to start by discussing the best practices in their field. It's simple to reverse each of the best practices into a problem. For example, one best practice might be, "Always work six months in advance." The pitfall version of that best practice can be, "Poor scheduling."
- 2. *What are some of the biggest challenges your company has faced when developing mobile applications?*** People tend to remember their "war stories" in great detail. Have the expert share stories of tough times from the field to reveal real-world problems readers can relate to. Interviewers should take care to disguise any actual company names mentioned.
- 3. *Name three misconceptions that you think marketers have about mobile applications and how these misconceptions might impact their development strategy.*** There is a good chance that the blog reader shares some of these misconceptions about the process. The interviewer can rephrase misconceptions as problems. Identifying and dispelling any of these myths will create an affinity with the reader and position the blogger as a trusted authority.
- 4. *What are the implications if the problems cited in this blog don't get resolved?*** Asking about the potential negative outcome of each problem ensures the blog post has bottom-line issues that will resonate with readers.
- 5. *What are your recommendations for companies to protect themselves against these common pitfalls?*** Readers will not appreciate a blog post that just lists problems without actionable advice. Ending the post with recommendations to avoid pitfalls adds value for the reader. The expert can also position his own company as an industry leader by listing features or offerings unique to his company within the recommendations.

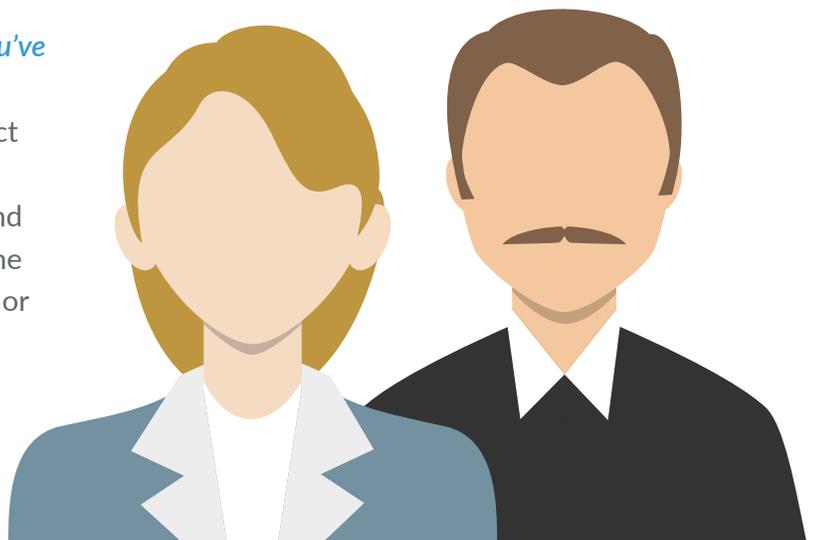


PERSONAL PROFILE OR BIOGRAPHICAL Q&A

A profile post shares an interview with a noteworthy individual. A profile post should bring out the human nature of the subject and reveal interesting gems from their life. The blog post can be written in either question-and-answer or regular-paragraph format.

Example: A non-profit organization involved with education reform posts an interview with an accomplished school principal.

- 1. *Walk me through a typical workday—from what you eat for breakfast in the morning to what you think about on your commute home?***
When you interview a person of interest, try to extract new information that doesn't show up in any other interviews. Asking about personal moments will paint a vivid picture for readers with unique details. Sometimes these mundane details can be the most interesting to audiences, because they make the audience think, "This is a real person just like me."
- 2. *What are some examples of the challenges and rewards that you experience daily as a principal?***
This question will flesh out specific anecdotes from the principal's work. Be sure to solicit an equal mix of positive and negative experiences.
- 3. *What were some of the biggest challenges you've had to overcome to get where you are today?***
This question sheds light on how the subject rose to the position they are in and what their background is. This can help inspire and provide guidance for readers who admire the subject or would like to become a principal or educator themselves.
- 4. *Pick one thing in your life you may go back and do differently. What would it be and why?***
During a biographical Q&A or profile post, include questions that reach outside of the person's present role and dive into the past. This question allows the subject to pull from a lifetime of experience—not just their present professional role.
- 5. *Looking forward to the next few years as principal, what projects or goals are you most excited about?*** This question allows the subject to talk about any upcoming milestones and future successes they hope to achieve. It also reveals their sources of motivation, which will leave the blog audience inspired.



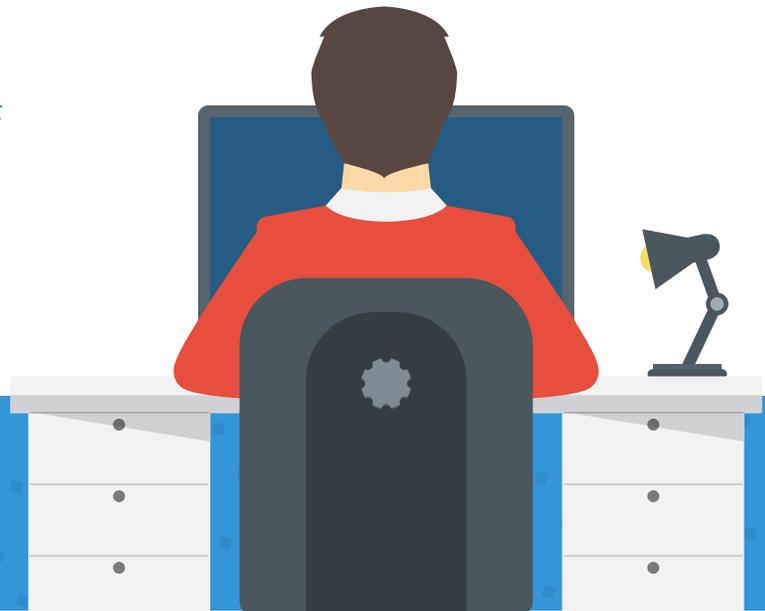


PRODUCT, SERVICE OR BOOK REVIEW

A review post provides an expert's opinion of a product, service or publication. To attract more readers and buzz, choose a recently released product.

Example: A VP of human resources reviews a new book about hiring in the Internet age.

- 1. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being extremely satisfactory, how would you rate your reading experience and why?** This question will gauge the expert's overall satisfaction with the product. At the start of the conversation, subjects may be more comfortable choosing a number on a scale than putting their opinion into words. This numbered scale question is a beneficial approach in many interview situations.
- 2. What were the three biggest questions that you had about hiring in the Internet age? How did the book address each of these questions?** This question positions the expert as someone who is thinking critically about advances in her field. The question also reveals how useful the expert found the book and gives a valuable content-summary to blog readers.
- 3. Which ideas or practices did the book reveal that you would consider applying in your company?** Here the expert provides value by sharing tips from the book. This saves the reader the time and money involved in purchasing and reading the book for themselves.
- 4. What topics or information did you find missing or lacking in the book?** This question will get the expert to either comment critically on any drawbacks or rave about how comprehensive the book was. A critical perspective on a product can position the expert as a thought-leader or authority in readers' minds.
- 5. Would you recommend this title to other colleagues in the HR field or to job candidates? Why or why not?** This question is specifically focused on the two types of blog readers—either HR colleagues or job seekers. To create affinity with the audience, the interviewer should urge the expert to say why she recommends the product for each type of reader profile or persona.





CONTRASTING OPTIONS

A contrasting options post compares two or more products, services or solutions. This type of post allows a company to speak generically about the types of products it offers and positions its own products ahead of the competition.

Example: A sales software provider contrasts the options of building custom software, using an out-of-the box solution or using a cloud solution.

- 1. *Can you give me an overview of the best available options for this type of software installation?*** By outlining all of the options, this question gives the interviewer an overall structure for the blog. A good follow-up question might be, “Are there any options that you would disqualify from the consideration right away? And why?” This follow-up question is useful if the expert wants to eliminate the competition.
- 2. *Starting with the first option, what are the pros and cons to users?*** For each option, the interviewer should repeat the pros and cons question. This question provides a SEO- and reader-friendly format for the blog—a heading for “Option 1” followed by a subheading each for pros and cons. Google checks for keywords in blog headings and audiences like blog headings because they make the content easier to read. If the expert does not provide enough initial detail, follow up by asking questions about pros and cons in terms of cost, time and other relevant factors for each option.
- 3. *What characteristics of the customer’s existing systems might push them toward a particular solution?*** This question will provide advice that makes the reader’s life easier. If a new purchase doesn’t fit with a reader’s existing systems, it can create headaches and added costs. This question also gives the expert an opportunity to eliminate competing solutions. For example, if the company provides custom solutions, the expert can explain how custom solutions integrate more easily than other solutions.
- 4. *What are users’ biggest needs for this software and which solution would you recommend?*** If someone is reading this blog, it’s likely they are facing a similar purchase decision. This question gives the expert a chance to create affinity with readers by moving past product specifications and directly addressing readers’ needs
- 5. *Which white papers, case studies or other information sources are there that readers can look to for further background on each of these options?*** Industry research often goes into great detail about products, features and benefits. Identifying independent analyses can be valuable for many readers. This is also a good place to transition to a call-to-action and link to the company’s own white paper or educational content.

4 INTERVIEWING TIPS

4 INTERVIEWING TIPS



Record the Conversation

Use a digital recorder or a VoIP software add-on for recording. This is the fastest and most efficient way to get all the information needed to write the blog post. In some states, you are legally obligated to ask permission to record at the beginning of the call.



Take Notes

Highly skilled interviewers can write or type thorough notes without affecting the quality of the conversation. It takes years to develop this level of interviewing skill, so in most cases it is best to record the interview as well.

While recording, take shorthand notes in case the audio file is lost or difficult to hear. Another time-saving tip is to note the approximate time when an expert said something really important. This enables you to skip directly to the remark when reviewing the recording.



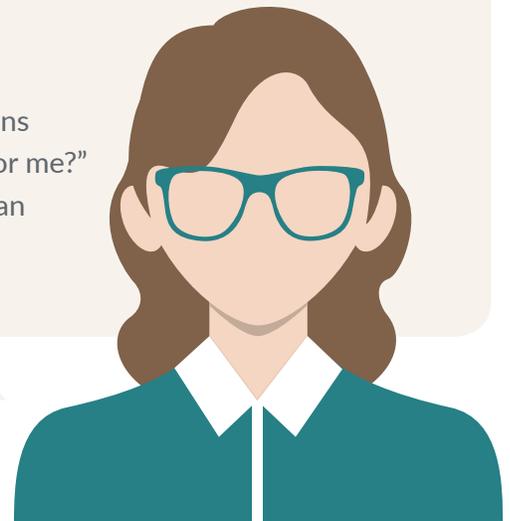
Control the Interview

Blogs need to be focused and it's up to the interviewer to identify comments that may be off topic or good for a separate blog post. If an expert veers off topic, rein them back in with a question like, "Do you want that included in the blog post?"



Extract Everything You Need

Skilled interviewers always drill down to the information they need using follow up questions such as, "Can you put that in laymen's terms for me?" and "What are the implications of that?" or "Can you give me an example?"





INSPIRATIONAL CLIENT STORY

The inspirational client story tells how a client or employee overcame a challenge or hardship. This type of post should leave the reader feeling motivated and optimistic.

Example: A career placement agent shares stories of working with clients laid off during the economic downturn.

- 1. *What are three words you would use to describe how clients laid off during the downturn feel about their situation? Why?*** The best blog content reveals how a person thinks. Describing how clients feel gives readers a glimpse inside their minds. This question also illustrates how well the placement agent listens to clients.
- 2. *Please walk me through the most inspiring client story you've recently experienced?*** In an inspirational post, get the expert to tell at least one story about overcoming a challenge or hardship. The rest of the blog can be filled in with details or tips about this particular story or the process in general. To uncover even more detail, ask this follow-up question, "What extraordinary factors make this story stand out?"
- 3. *What are some of the particular client attitudes or approaches that you find lead to success?*** In an inspirational post, readers are looking for encouraging advice for overcoming a challenge or hardship. This question reveals the traits behind the client's success, for example, flexibility, perseverance or an outgoing personality.
- 4. *What are three time-tested pieces of advice that you can share with readers about being prepared for job loss and job-hunting during a downturn?*** Even if they are currently employed, readers may have that nagging "What if?" question in the back of their minds. Here the expert can allay readers' anxiety about job loss with actionable advice tested in the field
- 5. *What is it about going to work every day that keeps you inspired?*** This question ends the conversation on a positive note and brings the focus back to the expert and the company.





An informational blog defines or gives background about an industry term, product, service or practice.

Example: A commercial printer explains the capabilities of its new custom printing service.

1. ***What are the three biggest benefits to marketers of this custom printing capability?*** The blog readers—who are also potential print customers—will care most about the benefits of this technology. Asking for three benefits is more targeted and effective than asking for the benefits in general. If you don't get the right answer here, try this follow-up question, "How do the marketing results for custom printed pieces vary from those of regularly printed pieces?" Inquiring about results is just another way of asking for benefits
2. ***What steps must a client take to produce a custom printed series of postcards?*** Again, focus on the reader's point of view by asking what's involved on the client side when using the custom printing technology. Mentioning a postcard makes it easy for the expert to focus on an actual print job instead of discussing custom printing in general.
3. ***When did custom printing become available and why did you decide to provide this technology in your shop?*** This is the kind of question that can position the blogger as a trusted authority to readers, because it establishes the subject's expertise on the topic. The question also provides the history of the technology which is relevant to an informational post.



4. ***Describe an actual example of how a client has leveraged custom printing in a campaign.*** Sharing a real client story will help readers to picture using custom printing in their own campaigns. If a reader pictures using the custom printing solution in their own business, they are taking the first step down the buying path
5. ***How do you see custom printing technology improving, and what kinds of new possibilities for custom printing do you see emerging in the next few years?*** This question allows the expert to demonstrate thought-leadership by mentioning custom printing developments. This question also segues nicely into a conversation about near-term trends, which can turn into a whole separate blog post (see the next blog type, Predictions or Future Trends).

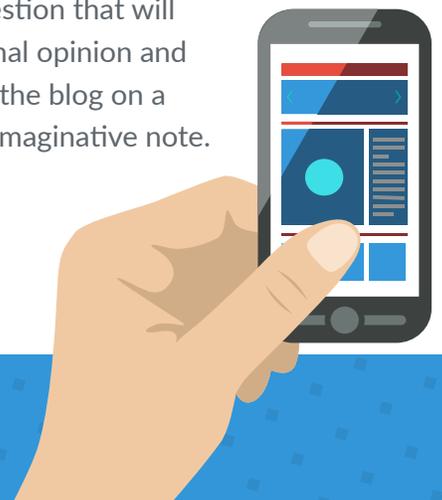


PREDICTIONS OR FUTURE TRENDS

This type of post discusses anything related to the future of an industry, including new regulations, new technologies, changes in consumer perceptions or a new business model. These posts are good to publish at the end of a quarter or year.

Example: Weeks before the new models come out, a national car dealership talks about the future of automotive technology.

1. *Looking back, what are your thoughts on how far the automotive industry has come in terms of rolling out new technologies? What does this say for the future of the industry?* This question gives the blogger a chance to establish his or herself as someone who knows where the industry has been and where it's headed.
2. *What are the hottest trends in car features and driving technology today?* This question shows the expert has their finger on the pulse of the market. Talking about today's leading trends sets the stage and provides contrast for future trends.
3. *What are some exciting new features or technologies automotive consumers can look forward to this year?* This question gives the expert the opportunity to talk about specific developments they may have seen at an auto show. It also enables them to talk about trends they read about in industry publications and how these changes will impact consumers. This is also a prime opportunity for an expert to discuss specific features and technologies that they plan to offer.
4. *Explain how the experience of walking into an auto showroom ten years from now will be different than it is today?* Creative content attracts the most readers. This question allows the interviewer to muse and paint a picture of what the car shopping experience will be like in ten years. The answer will likely be personal and opinionated, and generate truly unique content that can't be found on any other blog. The answer will also put readers into a purchasing mind-set.
5. *Which future concepts being discussed today, do you think are least likely to come to fruition? Why?* In almost every industry there are reports of revolutionary new developments or technologies. Whether the expert discusses flying cars or cars that drive themselves, this is a fun question that will extract a personal opinion and potentially end the blog on a humorous and imaginative note.





MINI CASE STUDY

The three elements of a traditional case study are the problem, solution and results. A blog-sized case study captures all three of these elements in a concise 600-800 word post.

Example: A marketing agency posts a mini-case study about setting up a social media strategy for a retail client.

1. *What kind of marketing was the retailer doing before they started using social media and what results were they getting?* Everyone loves a good before-and-after photo. This question establishes the starting point for readers before the retail company adopted a social media strategy. The “before” will serve as a good comparison for the “after” or results section of the blog.
2. *What do you think the three biggest factors or needs were that influenced the retailer to engage in social media marketing?* In the “problem” section of the case study, it’s important to say why a company sought a new solution. There are usually multiple reasons for making a change in a business process or strategy. Be sure to ask for three or more factors that led to the change.
3. *Walk me through some of the challenges you overcame while setting up this social media marketing solution for the client?* The best case studies discuss secondary challenges that surface during a solution’s implementation. Talking about hurdles that come up during implementation shows readers the company is capable of overcoming the daily challenges that tend to arise in business.



4. *What were the top three features on your client’s shopping list when they evaluated social media solutions?* This question will hit home with readers who are considering a social media strategy themselves. The answer will give readers an inside look at the features businesses typically shop for. The answer also shows that the company listens to and meets clients’ needs.
5. *What are some of the metrics used to track the strategy’s success and what are the results?* When you simply ask, “What are the results,” you risk getting a bland response, such as “We’re really happy with the strategy’s reach.” Asking about metrics gets the expert to think about how they measure and leads to a more detailed answer. Results are vital to a case study, so if you don’t get hard numbers, ask if there is someone at the expert’s or the client’s company you may get in touch with about results.



ENVIRONMENTAL OR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY STORY

An environmental or social responsibility story details company or employee initiatives to give back to the community or environment. The goal of this type of post is to show a company's human side and connection to the community.

Example: A blog post about how the CEO of a financial services company uses his vacation to volunteer with a non-profit organization.

1. ***Tell me why you were inspired to volunteer with this particular organization.*** This question humanizes the CEO by establishing his personal connection to the cause. If you don't get a very personal response, try following up with, "Is there anything about your personal life that made you want to work with this organization?"
2. ***Describe the most touching or inspirational moment you experienced while volunteering.*** This question should reveal a story about teamwork, or about a one-on-one interaction with other volunteers or people in need. Including the circumstances and names of the people involved will make the anecdote even more powerful.
3. ***What are some lessons or new skills that you learned from volunteering that you could apply at work?*** In an environmental or social responsibility post, it's important to show how an experience impacts the company. Relating the volunteer experience back to the work environment will also resonate with the blog's readers.
4. ***What is your future plan for staying involved with volunteer organizations?*** Readers may be skeptical of a blog post where a person congratulates himself for doing one good deed. This question will establish that the volunteer experience was not a one-time occurrence, but part of a company or employee's larger mission to give back. A good follow-up question to ask is, "How is the company at large involved in volunteering or environmental initiatives?"
5. ***What resources or advice would you share with professionals who may want to take time off to volunteer?*** Readers may feel inspired by the CEO's story but may not know how to take action themselves. This question can empower readers by giving them the tools they need to get started.





WRAPPING IT ALL UP

By strengthening your interviewing skills, you'll develop an art that will add value to your writing for a lifetime. Regardless of whether you're an expert in a particular topic or not, blog interviewing can help you capture deep insights and deliver them in a voice that will keep your readers coming back for you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RYAN MALONE is the founder and CEO of SmartBug Media and is a veteran of Deloitte & Touche, Seagate and several venture-backed technology companies. When he's not leading SmartBug and helping clients build high-octane marketing organizations, he's loving his wife and daughters and unsuccessfully learning the guitar. Go Terps!

ABOUT SMARTBUG MEDIA



SmartBug Media is one of only six HubSpot Diamond partners in the world and is the highest rated agency in the history of the HubSpot ecosystem. We also boast the highest ROI documented from any HubSpot partner – 3,558% and 14,500% ROI on a six-month and three-year campaign.

For more than seven years, SmartBug Media has been helping businesses increase sales leads, close more customers and enhance the reach of their brands. From building comprehensive online marketing programs to designing new websites, driving leads through social media or sales enablement, we're an extension of your marketing team that delivers.

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