

A GUIDE FOR BRANDS & BLOGGERS



**How to Find
and Work with
Bloggers**

GARY BEMBRIDGE

How To Find and Work With Bloggers

*The Essential Guide for Brands and Bloggers
looking to build successful campaigns.*

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About the Author



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Since 2012 he has been an independent marketing consultant, trainer and speaker. He helps brands apply new media to build brands – especially focused on the use of blogger-generated content.

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Table of Contents

Part 1: What is a blogger?	5
Definition of a blogger.....	5
Journalists versus Bloggers	6
Part 2: Why Work with Bloggers?	9
9 Reasons to Work with Bloggers.....	9
What are Consumers looking for from Bloggers?	11
Why do Consumers Read Blogs?	13
Key Dislikes when Using Blogs.....	13
Part 3: How to find and select bloggers to work with?	14
Importance of Strategy, Objectives and Measurement Criteria.....	14
8 Marketing Objectives that Bloggers are Best Suited at Delivering.....	15
9 Main Ways to Find Bloggers	17
Selecting which Bloggers to Work With.....	19
10 Factors to Consider when Assessing Bloggers.....	20
Part 4: How to Successfully Work with Bloggers?	22
Key Challenges Facing Bloggers - and the Opportunities it creates for Brands.....	22
The Key Stages and Tips on Approaching Bloggers	24
Ways of Working with Bloggers	26
Features of Successful Blogger Partnerships.....	28
Contracting with Bloggers.....	29
Measuring Blogger Activity and Campaigns.....	30
Building Lasting Relationships with Bloggers.....	31
Part 5: Final Thoughts	34
Summary of Key Watch-outs and Areas to Avoid	34
10 Things to Remember when Working with Bloggers	36
References	37
Travel Bloggers Podcast	38

Part 1: What is a blogger?

Definition of a blogger

Dictionaries usually describe a “blogger” as “*a person who keeps and updates a blog*”, where a blog is “*a personal website or web page on which an individual records opinions, links to other sites, etc. on a regular basis.*” (1)

However, this is a limited view of modern bloggers. Bloggers are unlikely to be focused only on written content and are more likely to be active in two areas:

- (1) **Producing long form multi-media content** which often includes written articles, photography, videos and audio. These are shared on their own websites and on other searchable online content sites like YouTube, Flickr, iTunes etc.
- (2) **Generating and sharing micro-blogging content on social media platforms** like Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr etc.

Modern bloggers should be thought of as long form multi-media content creators and micro-blogging social media campaign creators.

Journalists versus Bloggers

One is not “better” than the other. They do different things for different needs. Understanding and embracing the differences will help a brand to develop innovative and more successful partnerships. The key differences include:

Journalists are paid to generate content, while bloggers are likely to be doing it out of a passion for the topic.

Journalists earn a living writing and reporting. They are paid to cover a story by the media channel that will run it. Bloggers are unlikely to earn a living from blogging alone and are probably doing it out of passion for the topic. Most are likely to have another job or source of income to fund their passion.

Implication for brands: I believe that “free” coverage is going to become less likely if you want to partner with leading bloggers as they look to fund their activities, make it a full-time career or create a viable business. There is an opportunity for forward thinking brands to find new partnership models. I discuss this later in the book.

Journalists have one core content expertise, while bloggers have multi-content expertise.

Journalists write and rely on photographers to take the images, video makers to produce the video and publishers to publish the content. Each link in the publishing chain has a dedicated creator. Bloggers are multi-media content creators and publishers. They are also their own designers, marketers and social media managers. They will write, take their own images, make video or audio material and then publish them on a site they design and manage. They also market and promote their content on social media to build their own audience.

Implications for brands: Blogger programs can provide a good return on investment as they can deliver a range of content and social media campaigns in one partnership and promotional activity.

Journalists aim to be unbiased, while bloggers aim to be opinion based.

While many media channels have agendas and pursue a point of view about the world, journalists are trained and expected by their audiences to offer unbiased and balanced coverage of a topic. However, people who read blogs do so to hear the opinions of the writer. They expect them to be led by and offer a point of view and take a stand on topics. Bloggers can be open to supporting and promoting a brand’s objectives and messages if they believe in them.

Implications for brands: Encourage and allow balanced coverage by bloggers you partner with. To retain credibility bloggers need to maintain balance to be of value to their audience. Brands need to allow and encourage positives and negatives to be reported.

Journalists have limits on the amount of content they can generate, while bloggers are only restricted by how much they want to produce.

Journalists have to deliver content that is limited to a set word count or fits into a fixed time slot. They tend to produce one article or feature per commission for a publication. However, bloggers can produce as long or as much content as they want based on how interested they are in the topic. They have the ability to create a series around a trip or topic: before, during and after.

Implications for brands: Working with bloggers enables you to build on-going relationships where you can create a continuing series of content and coverage.

Journalists create “push” content while bloggers are able to create more responsive and interactive content.

Journalists are commissioned to produce stories by an editor, who is the key individual giving feedback on it. Once published journalists have limited opportunities to get feedback direct from the audience - unless it is posted online. Bloggers can be more led and influenced by their audience who can (and will) interact with them before, during and after the activity on what they want, are enjoying and want more of. The audience can have real-time influence on the direction of their coverage. Bloggers receive feedback from their audience indirectly too via tracking statistics, comments, “click-through”, “retweets”, and “likes” and so can respond to what the audience wants. They are able to actively engage in conversations with audience through out the content creation process.

Implications for brands: Have the confidence to create campaigns around broad themes where you let bloggers find own stories and allow their audiences influence the direction it takes. In my experience, bloggers create the best content when they are given more space and time to find the angle and story and do that by engaging with their audience throughout the experience. Unlike the more traditional and curated press trip approach, I recommend letting bloggers have more time and space to do this if you want to get the most compelling content from the partnership.

Journalists have to work to publishing schedules, while bloggers can be immediate and publish on demand.

Journalists have to work to deadlines and their content fits into a publishing schedule. Based on the publication or media channel that could be many months in the future. Bloggers do not face the same limitations. They can react fast to events and have content posted as it happens (e.g. if an issue arises, as it happens or is time sensitive).

Implications for brands: Consider using bloggers to build buzz and for promoting time sensitive activities and news as it arises. They can also help to get messages out in time of a crisis as they can publish as events unfold.

Journalists often work for publications reaching a mass audience, while bloggers often talk to niche and more specific audiences.

Even when writing for a segment, journalists are usually creating content for larger and broader audiences, e.g. cruising. Publications need to have an audience mass to make it a viable commercial enterprise. Bloggers often focus on niche and specialist interest groups. For example they may be talking to solo cruisers or cruisers with disabilities.

Implications for brands: Identify strategic niche audiences or interest groups versus broad targets. Then seek bloggers out with those followers to effectively reach them in a highly focused environment. The total audience may be smaller, but you may have much less wastage of effort.

Part 2: Why Work with Bloggers?

The purpose of this section is to outline the advantages and benefits bloggers can bring to supplement a brand's traditional marketing and communication programs.

9 Reasons to Work with Bloggers

1. **The growing importance of the content created by bloggers.** The awareness and use of content created by bloggers is growing. This is driven by bloggers building reputations in their various niches, search engine traffic and social media driving traffic to high quality blogger content and as content is recommended and shared. In parallel, third party content distribution sites like YouTube, Vimeo, iTunes, Stitcher Radio, and Flickr are also growing which means blogger content cross published there is reaching larger audiences beyond their own blogs.
2. **Content consumption trends are in favour of bloggers.** Traditional media is struggling to figure out how to address growing consumer demand to access content on digital platforms - and "on the go" and on-demand. However, bloggers are already established in the digital space and have a digital footprint with content across multiple online channels.
3. **Bloggers are social media active and led.** Social media is influential in all stages of the purchasing marketing funnel (inspiration, planning, buying and sharing). Bloggers were early adopters of social media and are very active in the space. Social media will play a growing role in all stages of the funnel as consumers rely on recommendations by their friends and people they follow and trust. Bloggers understand how to build and engage audiences - and approach content creation with a sharing mindset. Social media is growing as a driver of traffic and loyalty and so bloggers have a vested interest in being at the leading edge of its use. They are not constrained by any corporate processes and restrictions and so constantly experiment and

evolve their expertise. This enables brands to learn from bloggers on the latest trends and successes in the social arena.

4. **Generate more, and richer, multi-media content for travellers to watch, listen to and read.** Unlike traditional media, a single blogger will usually create video, audio reports, photographs and written content. They will create multiple posts and a spectrum of content on one trip.
5. **Blogger content can complement brand and official sites with the real life advice & tips potential customers are seeking.** In the work I have done looking at why and how consumers use blogger content, it suggests they are looking for “real life experience, advice & tips” from experts in a topic. They trust bloggers who can provide real life experiences with balanced opinions, advice and recommendations that supplement the marketing sell of official brand sites and providers.
6. **Proven to influence decisions.** In the studies I have done, over 80% of blog readers say blogs directly influence their purchase decisions - including which provider to use. (2)
7. **Deliver specific and niche audiences.** While the reach of an individual blog is likely to less than mass-market publications, successful blogs target specific audiences and aim to build a strong share of voice within their segment or niche. Bloggers are able to deliver targeted audiences against targeted topics and interest areas.
8. **Have engaged and responsive audiences that they can be interacting with before, during and after activities.** Bloggers have a community through their blogs and on social media. They thrive on interacting with followers before, during and after any activity or event. They actively encourage their content to be shared and are responsive to feedback and questions. They engage with their audience before, during and after events and campaigns and will respond to questions and requests at all stages.
9. **May already be your brand advocates.** Bloggers are often fans and passionate about certain destinations, attractions, designers, regions, restaurants, brands or products and may already be actively creating content, promoting and sharing it. Many bloggers may already be pre-disposed to promoting your brand and can be encouraged to maintain and extend their support.

What are Consumers looking for from Bloggers?

In this section I highlight what content consumers find blogs are most useful for, and how and where they influence their choices and decisions. It will help to define the role of bloggers when developing your brand strategy.

Consumers are looking to reduce risk at all stages of the purchase funnel, and bloggers can assist.

Consumers have limited time, resources and funds. So they are most likely to be looking for content at each stage of the purchase funnel that can help them make the most of these. Bloggers can assist at all stages of the purchase funnel by creating content to help guide choices and decisions. The type of content and mechanisms will differ by stage of the funnel as the following suggests:

Stage One: Awareness, Inspiration & Desire

Consumers used to rely on traditional marketing tools like advertising and PR activities for inspiration. Now they are relying more on blogs and micro-blogging posts with images of products and services being shared by friends and bloggers they follow on social media.

Implication for brands: Bloggers could be used to run on-going visual content (photos and videos) campaigns on their blogs and on social media around different aspects of your products and services. These should run year round to constantly inspire and create interest in the brand.

Stage Two: Planning

Travellers used to rely on formal advice channels such as in-store advisors and guidebooks, but now are more likely to use “user-based” advice including (1) review sites (like Trip Advisor in travel), (2) asking for advice on social media and (3) visiting blogs they trust.

Implication for brands: Bloggers could generate in-depth real life advice and tips in multi-media formats for different types of consumers (e.g. solo, family, “foodies”) based on their niche to assist with all aspects of the planning process. This content should be run on their blogs, your brand sites and even provided as eBooks or physical guides via brand sites or in-store. If appropriate, content could also be delivered location specific on-demand on mobile devices.

Stage Three: Purchase or Booking

Consumers used to use high street stores to buy goods and services, but now they increasingly purchase or book direct and via price comparison sites and aggregators. The choice of where to buy and how to buy is increasingly influenced by social media likes and recommendations of outlets and stores.

Implications for brands: Bloggers could provide advice and tips on how, where and when to purchase or book your brand goods and services - and have purchase options and widgets within their content.

Stage Four: Sharing and Recommending

Consumers used to have a small circle of people to share and recommend products and services they were satisfied with. It was mostly word of mouth. Now they share in real time on social media, often with images. These images are influential in informing and driving inspiration for others and reach far wider audiences than ever before. They also are more likely to share when they are unhappy or dissatisfied with products.

Implications for brands: Bloggers can be used to engage with consumers sharing their experiences on social media and offer a more independent and less corporate response.

Why do Consumers Read Blogs?

I believe, based on the work and studies that I have done, that consumers look to bloggers to provide them with real life advice & tips to help them reduce risk at all stages of the purchase funnel.

They are looking to reduce risk with blogger content that will help them to:

1. Validate or confirm a decision they are making.
2. Select a brand or provider. They are looking for bloggers to provide recommendations on which is the right product and brand for them to use or purchase.
3. Inspiration. They are also looking for inspiration on finding the right product.

Key Dislikes when Using Blogs

There are a few key things that consumers do not like about blogs and these are easy for brands to ensure bloggers they chose to work with do not overdo. These are:

1. Most blog readers say they dislike pop-ups (such as newsletter sign-ups)
2. The next largest dislike is articles with poor spelling and grammar.
3. Too much advertising.
4. Posts asking them to vote for the blogger in competitions, awards or to win trips.
5. Overly positive articles about products or services where the blogger has received something in return (e.g. a free trip or product).

Part 3: How to find and select bloggers to work with?

The purpose of this section is to provide practical advice around finding, identifying and selecting bloggers to work with.

Importance of Strategy, Objectives and Measurement Criteria

Working with bloggers should not be a strategy or objective in its own right. It should be seen as one of many possible routes to deliver your strategy. Brands should only work with bloggers when you are sure they will deliver against the agreed marketing strategy. Some companies start to work with bloggers because they want to ensure they are not left behind the trend.

It is essential to first set a clear strategy, objectives and measurement criteria for the total marketing and digital program - and then assess if bloggers are the most effective and cost effective way to achieve them.

8 Marketing Objectives that Bloggers are Best Suited at Delivering

You should work with bloggers when your strategy has some or all of the following objectives. These should be used to guide your blogger programs:

1. **To create or increase awareness of the brand and your strategic focus areas.** Bloggers will be able to create social media campaigns to engage and be shared, and they also can create evergreen content that will build awareness of the brand by posting it on their own sites and other content sites.
2. **To reach new or specific audiences.** By identifying specific and new audiences to attract to the brand you can then seek bloggers most able to reach these individual audiences and promote what your brand has to offer to them.
3. **To recruit and build your social media community.** Bloggers will be able to help you to recruit new users to your various social platforms through content and links. They already have engaged audiences and should be able to promote your sites to get people to “like” or “follow” you. This can also be achieved through running competitions, advertising and sponsored posts or content on their sites and social media pages.
4. **To drive website referrals (to convert to sales).** Bloggers will also be able to generate leads by building in calls-to-action into their content to drive traffic to specific landing pages or content on your site. You should design and optimize these landing pages to ensure conversion to a sale or action other desired action.
5. **To generate quality and evergreen multi-media content.** Bloggers can create high quality written, photographic, video and audio content about the brand, your strategic focus areas and promotional activities. Encourage them to distribute the content to a wider audience beyond their blog and social followers by posting it on your sites, other blogs and third party channels (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, iTunes etc.).
6. **To support crisis management and time sensitive activities.** As bloggers can publish content whenever they want they should be used to create buzz in the build-up to an activity and to

promote time sensitive activities like events, promotions and news. They can also help share and get messages out to deal with crisis management.

7. **To amplify, extend and supplement your PR activities and social media campaigns.** While traditional media can usually create more reach during a specific marketing campaign, it will usually be via once off and time specific features. Bloggers can be very effective at amplifying traditional marketing campaigns and social media posts through (1) sharing them, (2) building a content series around the campaign to run after the main burst of activity to help extend the life and (3) creating in-depth and long form content to supplement the time and space limited restrictions of traditional media channels.

8. **To support your SEO activities.** Many brands engage with bloggers to build links back to specific pages or content to assist with search engine rankings. This often takes the form of placing links and articles with bloggers. However, a more strategic approach is to work with bloggers to create high quality strategic content that also does well in search. This will ensure more evergreen content that will have a long tail in search results to drive traffic to your sites and destination over time.

9 Main Ways to Find Bloggers

The question most asked about partnering with bloggers is: how do I find the right bloggers to work with? The first step is to have a clear objective about what you want the bloggers to deliver and the audience you are looking to influence. Then use some or all of the following routes to find them.

- 1. Ask bloggers you trust for recommendations.** Bloggers are well networked and can recommend bloggers that meet your exact brief and needs. It is an underused way of finding good bloggers. Reach out to bloggers you trust or the blogger groups on social media like Facebook and Google+. As individuals are putting their name to the recommendation you can usually ensure this approach means quality referrals.
- 2. Invite bloggers to pitch.** Place your brief into the blogger community and ask interested bloggers to pitch their campaign proposals. You will get to choose from bloggers genuinely passionate and interested in your activities. You are also likely to find unusual and groundbreaking concepts.
- 3. Use blogger alliances.** There are a number of alliances of established bloggers who have grouped together and can provide a one-stop shop for blogger campaigns. For example, in travel there is [Travelator Media](#) targeting 40+ UK travellers, [iAmbassador](#) for luxury European traveller audiences and [Reise Blogger Collective](#) for German speaking travellers. They will develop the campaign, select and propose the best bloggers for approval, manage and run the trip, content quality, sharing and report on the campaign.
- 4. Bloggers associations & resources.** There are associations of bloggers in most niches that can provide recommendations. Some may require a fee or membership for providing this service. For example, travel groups include PTBA (Professional Travel Bloggers Association), TBU Book of Bloggers and Travel Massive. They also exist for other niches like fashion (Beauty Bloggers Network & iFabbo) and parent bloggers (Tots100). They will know the most professional, experienced and reliable bloggers and can advise on which will best meet your needs.
- 5. Blogger Conferences & meet-ups.** Attending blogger conferences and local meet-ups in key cities in countries you are targeting is a good way to build contacts, informally assess and build a database of bloggers. There are also online resources to find conferences relevant to your

niche like blogconferenceguide.com, blogconferencenewbie.com & meetup.com. You get to meet and assess a wide range of bloggers across many niches at one time. You can usually host “speed dating” and “open marketplace” tables to meet bloggers interested in working with you.

- 6. Major industry conferences and events.** Set up meet-ups and events for bloggers during major industry fairs or conferences. This is very advanced in travel, especially ITB Berlin and WTM London, where bloggers are encouraged to attend these events by the organizers and do so in large numbers. There are training sessions, informal events in the evening and meet-ups on the stands for bloggers. They attract leading bloggers as well as up and coming ones. You can meet many bloggers and build connections in a short period of time. I recommend posting a project before the event and request interested bloggers to arrange to meet with you at the event to make the time more productive.
- 7. Online tools.** There are online tools that draw on various data sources that rank bloggers by reach and influence. They include Wefollow.com, Followerwonk.com, and Quantcast.com. Use the data to build lists of the most influential bloggers in your industry, although do use with some caution as they are not always comprehensive and often bloggers have had to opt in before the data is collected.
- 8. Top blogger lists for your area.** For most topic areas there will be a number of curated lists of the top bloggers in that field. They will use different data sources and weightings established by the curator based on what they feel are important. While a useful resource, I recommend that you use them with some caution as they can often be out of date and inconsistent and they are only able to use data in the public domain. They are very useful though for identifying possible influential bloggers in your niche.
- 9. Social media and PR agencies.** Most PR agencies are building lists of bloggers and have the capability to develop blogger programs. There are also specialist social media agencies that will develop, select and manage blogger programs (such as Think! Social Media). They provide a one-stop shop service that will develop, find bloggers and manage the campaign. The one downside of this approach is that you are not building a direct relationship with bloggers.

Selecting which Bloggers to Work With

When selecting bloggers, there are four key stages to go through:

1. **Have your objectives clearly in mind when assessing bloggers.** Do not be distracted or diverted from your strategy by appealing blogs and bloggers that are off strategy.
2. **Look for and review blogger's "about" pages.** Bloggers that understand and appreciate what brands are hoping to achieve should have an "about" page on their site. It should provide insights on their niche, target and what they can provide. Having a good "about" page is an early indicator that the blogger is likely to be one that understands how to work with a commercial organization like yours.
3. **Download or request their Media Pack.** Bloggers who understand partnering will also have a media pack with more substance and data. Not all bloggers will have their media pack to download on their website as they do not want to share their statistics openly. Absence of a media pack should be a warning sign – proceed with caution to next stage.
4. **Review and assess the blogger, blog and media pack based on the ten key criteria I recommend in the next section.**

10 Factors to Consider when Assessing Bloggers

- 1. Traffic: You should not always reject bloggers with lower traffic than others as it depends on the niche.** Review other aspects like:
 - Is their traffic building over time?
 - In addition to traffic to the blog look at traffic on YouTube, podcast downloads, Flickr views, social media followers and newsletter subscribers.
 - Ask to see the sources of traffic to understand how much is once off traffic from search versus loyal readers. Bounce rates can provide some insights on this area.
 - Look at time spent on the site and pages viewed to understand interest in their content.
- 2. Audience: Check the audience is coming from the target countries you are looking to attract.**
 - Where a blogger is based does not necessarily mean their traffic is local (e.g. UK based bloggers may only have a small amount of traffic in the UK with most coming from North America). Compare traffic across blogs you are considering based on the traveller location you are targeting.
 - Ask for survey data and insights about the audience. Statistics like Google Analytics do not give detailed insights of the audience. Bloggers who are close to their audience and committed will often have surveys and insights on their audience habits and attitudes. If they do not have this ask for their most read, viewed or listened to content for the last 12 months to see what their readers are consuming and if it fits with your objectives.
- 3. Longevity: How long has the blogger been active? This is an indication of commitment and potential for building a longer-term relationship.** The dropout rate and blog fade can be high and you need to ensure the blogger is committed and worth investing in.
- 4. Strategy & plan: Ask bloggers what their 3 or 5 year plan and vision is.** Does the blogger have a plan for their blog? Understanding their vision will be an indicator if it is worth investing and building a relationship with them.
- 5. Activity level: Another indicator of blogger commitment is how active they are on the blog and social media.** Activity is important in building traffic and engagement.

6. **Look and speed:** Consumers of digital content are very unforgiving of content that does not download fast or look good on all types of devices. The site needs to download fast (some reports suggest it needs to be under six seconds), look attractive, work and look good on tablets and smartphones and be easy to read (e.g. well written, good grammar etc.)
7. **Social amplification:** How active are they in sharing and promoting content? How much of their traffic is driven from social media sharing? Ask to see data like Facebook and Pinterest insights data, and check engagement on Twitter using tools like TweetReach.com.
8. **Engagement:** How active are their readers in engaging with their content on the blog and in social media, and how active are they in entering into discussions and interaction with their audience.
9. **Balanced coverage:** Review examples of their content to understand how balanced their coverage is. Do they provide honest but fair coverage on sponsored trips, events and products as well as when covering topics themselves? To build trust and credibility with an audience bloggers should be providing balanced coverage. Is the content and style meeting your objectives?
10. **Case studies (with effects):** Ask for case studies which include data not only on views, reads and listens but also actions such as click-through to sites or confirmations from past clients that they were able to drive responses and sales.

Part 4: How to Successfully

Work with Bloggers?

The purpose of this section is to provide tips on the various way of working with bloggers and how to ensure you achieve your desired outcomes in the short and long term.

Key Challenges Facing Bloggers - and the Opportunities it creates for Brands

Bloggers face many challenges. By understanding these and considering how your brand can help bloggers tackle and address them will help attract the best in the field. You will show you understand them and their needs.

Bloggers face a challenge in building traffic

Blogging is a cluttered space and it is hard to compete and stand out. Search has traditionally been the main source of traffic for blogs. However, the constant Google algorithm changes have affected many bloggers negatively and made it harder to attract search traffic. The art of search engine optimization is becoming more sophisticated, constantly changing and resource intensive making it harder for bloggers to keep up and compete effectively.

Implications for brands: You should show how you can help bloggers you partner with to stand out in the crowd and how you can drive traffic to their blogs, social media channels and other content. For example, this could take the form of using online and off-line clout to drive traffic.

Bloggers face a challenge in generating revenues and income

It is difficult to earn significant income from a blog. Even many pro-bloggers make their income from other activities like consulting, specialist services, and fees for talking or acting as brand ambassadors. The blog is the mechanism for building credentials, reputation and leads. Traditional

revenue streams from advertising (e.g. direct or Google Adwords) and sponsored links is declining with changes in the systems and greater penalties for sponsored posts and links.

Increasingly leading bloggers will not generate coverage for brands in return for free goods and trips. They are looking for remuneration for their time and the content they create.

Implications for brands: The brands that will attract the best and most innovative bloggers and content creators are those that move beyond the free products and press trip approach of working with bloggers. Brands that find ways to create revenue streams for bloggers will attract the most influential and creative bloggers. (This is covered in the section on [models for partnering with bloggers](#))

The Key Stages and Tips on Approaching Bloggers

1. **Build a list of influencers you think meet your objectives.** Build a database of target bloggers split by each of your target audience niches and focus areas using the [initial screening criteria identified](#). Many brands keep a list of 100 bloggers they believe are key influencers so that when they need to develop programs they have pre-screened bloggers to draw on. Set up a process to update and review the list regularly where you add and remove bloggers as you learn more about them and find new ones.
2. **Read and follow their blog and content.** Understand their skills and niche. Ideally sign up for their email newsletters or RSS feeds and keep an eye on the content they produce. This means that when you are looking for a set of skills or topics you know which ones to approach. You will also be able to communicate in a more personal way with knowledge and credibility when contacting them.
3. **Follow them on social media.** You can start to understand their skill and engagement levels.
4. **Engage with them on their blogs and social media.** Start to interact by re-tweeting, liking and sharing content created by your target influencers with company and even personal accounts. It gets you noticed, indicates your interest in them, starts to build a relationship and you are flagging the type of content you like and value.
5. **Wait for the right opportunity before reaching out to bloggers.** Be clear about what your objectives are and what projects you are looking for before reaching out to bloggers. You should be up-front and clear with bloggers about what your marketing and communication objectives are (as outlined in the section on [8 key objectives bloggers are best suited to delivering](#))
6. **Email them in as personal way as possible to introduce yourself - asking them to opt-in or opt-out of further contact.** Email is the bloggers preferred way of communication over all others, including phone calls. Once you are clear on the projects and the objectives, email them to introduce yourselves and indicate your interest in their work and ask if they want to find out more about what you are looking to achieve. When emailing I recommend the following:
 - Do not make your first contact one asking or proposing something specific.

- Indicate what you can offer in return and the benefits to them of working with you. Be as specific as you can, avoid vague promises of exposure or traffic.
- If you do not intend to remunerate bloggers make that clear.
- Initial contact should be designed to let them know who you are, what you are hoping to achieve and give them the option to start a relationship by offering them a chance to opt out or opt in for further contact.
- Be as personal as possible, including addressing them by name (making sure you get it right) and making reference to an article or content you admire or have followed.
- Ask them to suggest other bloggers they think you should be aware of and provide a link for them to forward on.
- Allow up to two weeks for a response to allow for blogger travel. However, as most bloggers are constantly connected you should hear back within this time if you do not get a response by then only follow-up if you are especially interested in the blogger. Otherwise assume the blogger is not interested.

7. **Stay in contact with bloggers that have opted in for contact.** Consider sending regular scheduled updates with links and information to those that have opted in. Generally speaking bloggers are not interested in receiving traditional press releases and I recommend that you develop blogger information packs and emails that contain links, and content they could use including articles, images or video. I strongly advise you include work by other bloggers that you like in these content mailings.

8. **Send a detailed proposal to selected bloggers for projects.** Send detailed and targeted proposals to selected bloggers that reflect their blog, their niche and clearly lay out what you are looking for from them - and what you can offer in return. Be very explicit about what you are looking for (e.g. what sort of content, social media activity) from the program and make it clear that you will want to contract with the blogger on the deliverables

Ways of Working with Bloggers

Think beyond the press trip and event! The world of blogging is evolving. Until recently, the “press trip” or “press event” approach used with journalists has been used when partnering with bloggers. Brands hope that by sponsoring trips, inviting bloggers to events or giving free products they will get articles and other content created.

This model is starting to change and established bloggers with significant influence and proven content creation capability are looking to be remunerated for creating content marketing campaigns as they come to understand the value of their content. They are not being paid by anyone else to generate content, unlike journalists, and so are looking at brands for that.

In my view it is unlikely that brands will be able to retain the press trip and event model if they want to attract the best bloggers, and should explore other options of working with bloggers where there is some form of value transaction. This will often, but not always, be money.

It is still possible to find bloggers, especially those who blog as a hobby, who will be open to partnering on a press trip or event approach. However, within the blogging community the pressure and expectation is that this will change. Many of the more successful and leading bloggers will not participate on this basis or provide limited content if working on this basis (much as traditional press would also provide such as one article or video piece only).

Future and emerging models for partnering with bloggers to add value include:

1. **Content creation fees.** Payment for a campaign of content generated in the form of articles, videos, photographs or audio. Examples include:
 - Daily rate for attending a trip with an agreed output of social media and content.
 - Payment for specific features, videos or photographs for brochures and websites.
 - Fees for creating videos for brand websites.
2. **Books, publications & merchandise.** Creation of additional and added value products like eBooks, brochures or guides that the brand can sell or provide to consumers. For example, eight leading bloggers have written “The Traveler’s Handbook” series of guidebooks written published in paperback and eBooks (kindle / Kobo etc.).

3. **Brand advocates, ambassadors & advisors.** Retainer fee for a blogger to act as a brand advocate or ambassador which involves creating content, talking and representing the brand to the media, promoting the brand online and taking part in exhibitions and events for the brand. These can range from limited assignments to on-going retainers. For example:
 - G-Adventures hires 4 bloggers on annual retainers to promote and represent the brand.
 - HouseTrip hire 4 – 5 bloggers for extended periods of time to visit a number of their properties and produce reviews and content for the site.
4. **Create campaigns through blogger co-operatives.** Hiring one of the blogger co-operatives formed by proven and established bloggers to run specific campaigns. For example, iAmbassador has run campaigns targeting European luxury travellers for destinations like Jordan, Cape Town and Australia.
5. **Sponsorships.** Sponsoring existing content by leading bloggers around areas of interest, or help to fund creation of new content. For example, DK Eyewitness Guides sponsors my Tips for Travellers Global Destinations Podcast and Easy Jet and Hostel Booking agents sponsored a blogger created luxury hostel guide.
6. **Related Services (e.g. tours and workshops for consumers).** Bloggers with specialist niches and audiences are partnering with brands to arrange and run escorted tours and workshops. For example:
 - WDW (Disney fan) Podcast runs daily tours of Disneyworld Florida and arranges community cruises on Disney Cruise Ships
 - Travel with Earl arranges adventure tours in emerging markets.
 - Try Ratcliff runs photo tours and workshops in New Zealand.
7. **Social media management.** Destinations and brands contract their social media activities to bloggers with expertise in their target niches or audiences. For example, Danielle Fear (Cruise Miss) has run the social media activity and blog for “The Cruise Line”.
8. **Consulting, training & talks.** Destinations and brands engage bloggers with expertise to help train their teams or represent them at conferences and events. For example, I run training workshops and talks at various conferences, PR agencies and travel brands on partnering with

bloggers. Jayne Gorman (30before40) helps brands and destinations set up and run blogger outreach programs and select bloggers for campaigns.

Features of Successful Blogger Partnerships

1. **Set key objectives and broad themes for your campaign with bloggers and then spent time with them discussing the types of angles and stories** that they and their audience are interested in pursuing and how you can enable that. Do not be prescriptive.
2. **Bloggers create the best content when given space and time to find their own stories.** Trips, events or partnerships should build in time for bloggers to explore and be less structured than traditional press trips and events. As they are likely to be creating multi media they need more time to digest and take in the story as well as take photographs, video and record audio content. Consider providing suggested itineraries or areas to cover and allow bloggers to opt-in and have the ability to self-tour, explore and investigate your brand and product.
3. **Constant access to Wi-Fi is essential as bloggers thrive on being constantly connected and able to post to social media.** Engaging and interacting with their audience will enable them to fine tune content, and may also lead to unexpected things and experiences resonating and being worth exploring. Constant access to Wi-Fi is key at any event, trip or visit to investigate your company and products. If you have over scheduled activities then unexpected stories and opportunities will be missed. On every trip or interaction, bloggers will find something unexpected resonating and interesting to their audience and if they are allowed to head off and develop the thread it often ends up being the most successful aspect of their coverage. If the blogger activity is over scheduled then this opportunity gets lost.
4. **If you want content to be produced during the trip or event you need to build in content creation time into the schedule.**
5. **Many brands are surprised to find that bloggers are usually less social and outgoing than journalists and will respond to less structured social time.**

Contracting with Bloggers

Whether there is a fee for content creation or a sponsored trip or event, it is important to agree and contract with bloggers on what content and social media activity will be created in return. It does not have to be a formal signed contract but should be agreed in writing, even by email. This will help identify any issues before the activity and minimize the chance of disagreements and disappointments. Avoid working with bloggers who are unwilling to commit to these agreements.

The main factors to agree should include:

1. What content is to be created?
2. What social media activity delivered?
3. Where it is to be delivered (e.g. on the blog, YouTube etc.).
4. How the activity will be measured and evaluated, including what campaign hash tags and unique tracker codes for links should be used.
5. What declarations must be made?
6. What links back to your properties must appear in all content?
7. Post report requirements?
8. What you will provide and cover (e.g. what costs, Wi-Fi, etc.)?

Measuring Blogger Activity and Campaigns

It is possible to measure blogger activities if you set clear objectives for the campaign before starting the program and partnership.

1. Set your campaign objectives

- a. Number of articles, videos or podcasts?
- b. Number of tweets, Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook posts?
- c. Number of click-through to site, follows or page likes?
- d. Reach of the campaign?

2. Some traditional media efficacy measures like frequency are not always possible, but you can measure:

- a. Total reach over time (long tail) based on views, listens and reads. Get the blogger to report statistics for up to six months after the event to see total reach.
- b. Social media amplification measures. Reach, likes, shares, retweets using Facebook Insights, Tweet Reach, and Pinterest Stats are all available. To measure the specific impact of a campaign or blogger you should set up dedicated campaign hash tags and require them to use them in all content.
- c. Call-to-action effect. You can measure the click-through, follows and page likes of your branded properties by setting up and track them with specific links or landing pages.

3. What coverage in “traditional media” did the campaign and activity create or were you able to leverage, and what reach and impact did that have. Many innovative blogger programs have PR potential in their own right and can generate content for traditional media outlets. Create blogger programs with this aspiration in mind.

Building Lasting Relationships with Bloggers

To get the greatest return from your blogger outreach programs and efforts, you should try and build an on-going relationship with every blogger you work with. You should aim to build them into brand champions and ambassadors. Many brands and destinations stop contact after a project - forgetting that if the blogger loved your brand and the experience they can and will act as a champion and ambassador for you forever.

If they are a good fit you should work on encouraging them to provide on-going coverage, promote your events and news, and use them as a sounding board for new campaigns and to give input into future activities you are considering.

They can provide valuable insights and input based on the knowledge they build up of your brand, what audiences responds to and the latest trends and thinking in the blogger community.

They may also be prepared to represent you at events, travel shows local to them and comment and promote you online when they see positive or negative comments or questions about your brand.

You can build long-term relationship with key bloggers by:

1. **Creating and running on-going campaigns and activities.** Running on-going programs using a pool of bloggers is the easiest way to build relationships. Examples could include:
 - Official Blogger Programs (use of a set of bloggers to cover a niche or focus area several times a year or cover every major activity by your brand in that niche)
 - Brand Ambassador Programs. Hire bloggers to represent the brand in their local region or city, attending events, running talks and engaging with media.
 - Official Brand Tours or Workshops. Engage bloggers to run tours and workshops on their niche about your brand and products for consumers on a regular basis or during major events.
 - Run Regular and On-going blogger campaign events. For example:
 - a. Richmond Canada hired a blogger to eat at different restaurants every day for a year <http://www.365daysofeating.com>
 - b. The destination Emilia Romagna set up a house where they had bloggers staying in rotation year round <http://www.blogville-emiliaromagna.com>)

c. Flanders has started to invite large numbers bloggers to cover the music festivals in the region thinkdigital.travel/spotlights/Flanders/

2. **Build one-to-one relationships.** Identify a point person for each blogger that they get to know and communicate with directly.
3. **Stay in contact online and off-line too.** Keep in regular contact with an online and digital program of emails and Google+ hangouts for your core bloggers. Use these as opportunity to showcase and promote content created by your bloggers to increase quality and identify what you value. Arrange physical meet-ups in major city hubs, at major blogger conferences and big industry events and conferences.
4. **On-going promotion of the blogger's content to help build their followers and traffic.** Keep promoting good content beyond the activity on social media, on your sites and email marketing activities. Have links to the bloggers sites and content on your sites and showcase and promote bloggers on your site and social media.
5. **Acknowledging good work and content.** On an on-going basis let bloggers know when you see some work they have done that you admire – even if not about your brand. Create recognition awards that you run annually to reward excellence in content and campaigns created by bloggers about your brand. Make it a major event, possibly run during one of the major blogger conferences or travel industry shows.
6. **Help them to build and reinforce their unique proposition and niche.** Bloggers are looking for ways to reinforce their expertise and coverage in their niche. Work with them to identify stories and angles relevant to them, including connecting them with other bloggers in your influencer list.
7. **Identify revenue opportunities for bloggers on an on-going basis.** Constantly be aware of finding revenue opportunities. This could include:
 - Contracting them to produce images, articles and video for your marketing materials.
 - Development of brochures and other materials.
 - Content for your websites.
 - Paying to use images for social media programs.

- Sponsorships of eBooks, or podcasts to promote various events and features.
- Running events and workshops for consumers or other bloggers.
- Running advertising campaigns to support major events across all your influencer blogs.

Part 5: Final Thoughts

Summary of Key Watch-outs and Areas to Avoid

1. Blogger programs should be part of a clear strategy and the best route to deliver your objectives before you proceed.
2. Do not treat bloggers like “journalists” and think of how to move beyond the “press trip” model with trips and partnerships reflecting the challenges bloggers face and what they respond to best.
3. Increasingly free trips, events and products will not guarantee coverage, and you need to identify what value you can provide to bloggers to attract the best.
4. When developing new ways to partner – think of what content and social media campaigns you can create that will have more longevity and the potential to leverage beyond just the digital space (e.g. that can be repurposed into physical products and services).
5. Think of the role and content differences that you want from bloggers for the entire marketing funnel (awareness/ inspiration – planning – buying – sharing).
6. Spend time finding the right bloggers and build longer term relationships with a bank of key ones using the approach outlined in the guide.
7. Set clear measures up front so you can track the outcomes.
8. Ensure you have a clear contract before you start working together on what will be delivered and by when.

10 Things to Remember when Working with Bloggers

1. Bloggers probably do not make living from blog alone – they need help on finding revenue.
2. Bloggers provide multi-media & social media content.
3. Consumers use the content from bloggers to reduce risk in all stages of their purchasing cycle.
4. Blogs are influential in driving and affecting choices.
5. Bloggers well positioned as media habits change.
6. Bloggers can and should complement traditional media campaigns – especially in buzz, amplifying and extending – not replacing them.
7. Partnering needs to be part of strategy and there are a number of activities bloggers are better suited to deliver than others.
8. Some of the best ways to find the right blogger is asking bloggers and blogging associations and by attending blogger conferences and major travel industry events.
9. Assessing and establishing a relationship with bloggers takes time and requires quite a bit of effort.
10. Always contract with bloggers before any activity to ensure both sides understand what is expected and how it will be measured.

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1. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blog>
2. Think Digital Tourism White Paper “Creating Content for Travellers” by Gary Bembridge.
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Travel Bloggers Podcast



For on-going advice and tips on partnering with bloggers, subscribe to Gary Bembridge's Travel Bloggers Podcast. The podcast shares the latest best practices on how to make blogs an invaluable resource for your audience and so making them more attractive to brands looking to work with them. Although focused on travel blogging the learning is applicable across all topic areas.

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