# Editors who blog: exploring editorial practice through blogging

# Katy McDevitt

# Introduction

When I talk to publishing friends about my life as an editorial blogger, I get mixed responses—from 'That's great! I'd love to have time to blog' to 'You must be crazy! I can't think of anything worse than sticking my head above the parapet like that'. Both



# About the author

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responses are totally valid and understandable. I have been blogging about editing since 2011 and have experienced both extremes—of enthusiasm and downheartedness—and today, I'd like to talk about how to find the middle ground and approach blogging in a balanced way.

What will this paper cover? Well, I want to start by giving an idea of the size of the industry, since editorial blogs are just one niche within a burgeoning generation of blogs. We'll look briefly at some of the distracting facts and figures that can really put a new blogger off; and explore the more constructive reasons why an editor might want to blog.

Of course, the path to a successful editorial blog isn't always smooth, and there are significant challenges to overcome if you want to write—some practical, others more personal. I'll explain why planning ahead to anticipate these downsides can help to handle difficulties when the time comes. Then, we'll take a quick look at practical ways to get started with your own editorial blog. As we travel, I'll be drawing on the perspectives of several experienced editor-bloggers from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, all of whom kindly took the time to share their thoughts with me for today's talk. I encourage you to visit their blogs and business websites, and learn more about their work.

I hope we will have time for any questions you may have about getting started with an editorial blog. For me, blogging is an important part of the social media profile of my business but also, business aside, it offers a great opportunity to share with my readers why editing and editors are great and worthwhile, and that's important to me. It's time to get blogging!

# What's the scale of the blogging industry?

A huge number of people are now blogging, which means that a more pertinent question might be 'Who *isn't* blogging?' The numbers involved are certainly pretty staggering. There are almost 58 million WordPress sites in the world (WordPress.com 2012). WordPress.com users produce about 29.2 million new posts and 40.5 million new comments each month. Over 396 million people view more than 3.7 billion pages each month. And that's only one of the blog platforms, with many others to choose from.



With so many people blogging, it's possible to view the situation in two contrasting ways. First, your little blog would be in competition with so many other bloggers that it's pointless even trying: what could you possibly add? Second, it seems that everybody else is doing it, so why not join in? I'm going to talk today about the second of these paths.

# What editor-bloggers don't need to worry about

Having spoken about the mind-boggling numbers of people who are already blogging and reading blogs, I'd like to steer you in a more realistic direction. There is definitely a significant folklore springing up around how to blog successfully, with many authors offering the ultimate 'how to blog' guide. That said, there is also a lot of information that is not really geared towards editors or indeed many people in publishing who wish to blog.

The following statements may be true for many bloggers, but are not necessarily useful ways of thinking for editor-bloggers:

## The main goal of blogging is generating income

For many bloggers, the amount of income generated by their online activity is quite small: one 2012 American survey of 1000 bloggers found that more than 80% of bloggers made as little as US\$100 in total (www.blogging.org 2012). Although there is no lack of high-profile full-time bloggers, who have made their blogging the hub of online moneymaking, they are clearly not typical of an individual blogger. I'll come back to the money issue shortly.

# Your blog should be read by everybody

There is an approach that says 'If you blog it, readers will come', but I'm not sure how useful it is to assume that a big blogging market will translate into a big readership for a new blog. As Mary Cross has written, with 'an estimated 156 million and counting bloggers out there, someone is bound to be reading and listening' (Cross 2011). Most likely, though, when you start off, very few people are going to be reading: although it may sound harsh, it's true that you'll be starting from zero. Acknowledging this at the beginning, and expecting to work hard to build a readership, will help avoid a creeping sense of disappointment while you're becoming established. And, as editors and publishers, we know that if you aim to be read by everybody, your most likely audience is nobody: it's much better to target your niche readership than to aim for a mass market. More on this in a moment.

## Your blog will be competing with a huge number of other blogs

The huge numbers that I mentioned at the beginning can easily lead to a sense that you're in competition with an unmanageably huge number of other blogs. This sense is made explicit in some blogging guides, for example *Bloggers boot camp*, which states that 'there are billions of blogs competing for the attention of your prospective readers' (Biggs & White 2011). While I'd go so far as to say that there is an element of competition in blogging, I'd also say that, in the main, what you're competing for is your readers' time. Editors who blog are not generally interested in blowing all other editorial blogs out of the water: their writing is about learning, sharing knowledge, and expressing viewpoints.

# You need to blog all the time or your blog will die

This is more of a half-myth than a full one, since it is critical to update a blog regularly and, if you do not, it certainly will lose any readers it has built up. However, it's important to find a rhythm that works for you and for your readers—you do not have to follow a daily blogging schedule, or even a weekly one. We'll return to the scheduling challenges of blogging in a few minutes.

# Why blog about editing?

Editors choose to blog because of many motivations and purposes, ranging from creative impulses to business reasons. Editorial blogs:

- drive clients to (or influence them to use) a freelance editorial business
- provide a forum for discussion of editing, publishing, and writing issues and trends
- allow editors to express their ideas about editing
- inform clients about the work of editors
- publish information and resources which may be useful to others, in one place
- foster a sense of community among editors—moral support, practical guidance, mentoring.

In the words of experienced editor and blogger Desolie Page, blogging:

- spreads the word about editing
- gives editors a personality (we're not all cardigan-wearing, tea-sipping, introverted pedants!)
- demonstrates the value an editor brings to writing
- describes what an editor does
- shows that we care more about the author's voice than enforcing 'the rules'
- shows that we do want to help people write more effectively, no matter what their genre or interest. (Page 2012)

Blogging is ideal for communicating about our work, creating an attractive professional profile, and giving a realistic view of what editors are like. The critical words, though, are 'caring' and 'helping': caring about our work and helping other people. This is far from the competitive, cutthroat world we started with: an editor whose purpose is primarily focused around the goals I've just described is hardly worried about competing with billions of other blogs, as long as he or she is reaching the people who matter.

## Making money from blogging

You'll have noticed that I did not list moneymaking as a major purpose for editors who blog. But let's address it. It's certainly possible to 'monetise' an editing blog, for example by setting up WordAds or WordSense, joining an affiliate marketing program like Amazon's wellestablished one, or writing and accepting sponsored posts that promote compatible products and services. However, a word of caution: many readers dislike in-your-face advertising such as banner ads, pop-ups, promotional buttons, and animated gifs. And the easiest templatebased blogging platform, WordPress.com, does not allow this kind of commercialisation (outside of its selective WordAds program) in any case.

For editors, I'd suggest that it's probably less worthwhile spending time on 'monetising' a blog than on using it to promote the substantive, worthwhile services we have to offer. After all, editing is something we promote and sell in and of itself—unlike many who blog as a hobby, we do not need paid ads for our blogs to pay their way. Every visitor to your blog is a potential professional contact or future client. It's possible to blog for clients or for other editors, and either can benefit your business.



# Benefits of editorial blogs

So, let's move away from general blogging and look at some of the benefits of blogging for editors. The editor-bloggers who spoke to me when I was preparing to talk to you today reported benefits that ranged from invitations to take part in training activities to approaches from new clients. Liz Broomfield of *Libroediting*, based in the UK, says:

I have been invited, on the strength of my web presence, including my blog, to take part in training seminars, which fulfils an interest I have in training people and supporting other people to learn how to run a business ... (Broomfield 2012)

Blogging about editing can help to build a public profile that is based on your in-depth knowledge of the field you work in. The experienced editor-blogger Abigail Nathan told me:

If you write well and/or engagingly, and if your blog is seen by the right people, you can also build up a good reputation in your field. There is potential to build recognition as an expert in your chosen niche, if you do things right. (Nathan 2012)

The American blogger Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, who writes as *EditorMom*, agrees with Abigail:

Blogging gives me a chance to demonstrate my expertise in publishing, editing, social media, and self-employment. (O'Moore-Klopf 2012)

You can, of course, create a very strong online profile through a standard business website, especially if you're directing attention to it through an active life on other social media. So what does blogging do for your profile that's different to these other promotional channels? In fact, blogging is a critical tool in enhancing your search engine visibility, whether or not it's part of your business website. Louise Harnby reports from the UK:

... from a marketing perspective, the SEO opportunities can be exceptional. A good blog, when attached to your business website, generates lots of 'juice' and increases your search rankings. Potential clients are then more likely to find you. (Harnby 2012)

A blog, effectively linked to or hosted within your business website, will improve your online discoverability. That's because you're able to tag your content (alongside other forms of metadata), and those tags are indexed by the search-engine crawlers: the more relevant tags you use, the better (within reason!). You can also add categories and create a permalink, which is effectively a permanent label attached to every post. Creating a small stable of regular terms to use in tags, categories, and permalinks will give you a good start on the SEO front.

The content you write is naturally just as important as your metadata, since it is also indexed. (Although you can opt out of indexing, search engines do not have to honour your request.) To achieve good search engine results, there's no need to mention editing ad nauseam, especially as this inevitably creates awkward and stilted prose. Just write relevant content and make sure that you stick to your topic each time, and search engines will find you, pushing your blog up to the early pages of a Google search. For me, for example, searches that find me easily include 'editor Adelaide' and 'publishing in Adelaide', but the search terms will be different for everybody. Bear in mind that indexing is not instantly updated, so it does take time for changes to your metadata and content to create improved search results, but be patient and it should work for you.



# A few drawbacks of editorial blogging

The downsides of editorial blogging are few, but important.

## Time limitations

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The editor-bloggers who spoke to me in preparing for today's talk have consistently reported that pressure of time is the biggest single issue that faces them in managing their blogging activities. Katharine O'Moore-Klopf (2012) reports that 'the only drawback is finding enough time to write blog posts often enough'. We're all busy with other work, so this is not surprising. The knock-on effect is that you may not have time to do what you really want to with your blog. Louise Harnby (2012) adds:

The downside is the time it takes to maintain it, and to organise the content in a way that remains user-friendly to your readers. You won't get the benefits if you don't put in the time to ensure the content is strong enough to attract readers in the first place, so the upsides and the downsides are intimately connected!

#### **Opportunity cost**

Of course, time spent blogging is potentially time that is not spent on paid editorial work. This may not be a significant problem if you're planning to blog mainly in your own time, but if you're writing meaty posts on a personal blog every week or every fortnight, be prepared to lose some evenings and weekends—or to trade some paid hours for writing time. It's hard to defend time for blogging, even if we see it as a business-related activity, against other editorial work. Prioritising time to write when you're not busy, or when you're off duty, is important.

#### Some reputational risk

Getting it wrong can be embarrassing at best and damaging at worst. As Abigail Nathan (2012) puts it, 'There is ... potential to get people off-side or to be seen as presumptuous, arrogant or just plain wrong if you don't get it right, so you have to tread carefully.'

Your head is definitely above the parapet, but there is no need to worry: there's always a helpful reader to set you in the right direction through comments or off-site feedback. Give your opinion confidently, and be prepared to respond constructively to comments that challenge your viewpoint: there's room for a range of opinions and you should never flame a visitor even if they're critical of what you've written.

#### Getting started: choosing a platform

There is not time today to talk about the detail of how each platform works, but rest assured there is one out there for you. The two most popular and searched blogging platforms are WordPress (www.wordpress.com and www.wordpress.org), and Blogger (www.blogger. com). There are, though, many other platforms available, and your choice will be informed by factors such as:

- how much control you want over your visual presentation and layout
- how easy or difficult you find each platform's administrative environment
- whether you're working mainly with words, images, or video (sites like Instagram and Pinterest cater well for visual materials).



I use WordPress.com, which I chose because I did not want the hard work of setting up a site from scratch, and have stayed with because it is so easy to use. It has:

- a simple user interface
- reliable content management
- pre-installed widgets for all sorts of site features
- a good choice of nicely designed templates.

I have figured out tweaks here and there to make the blog fit my preferences more closely, and it helps to know a little bit of HTML if you want to make a design truly your own—but you do not need to know it to do some personalisation.

## An approach to writing your blog

When you're getting started, it's critical to:

- choose your niche wisely
- decide who you're writing for (clients or editors or someone else)
- define and use a voice and style that you're comfortable with.

You can refine these as your blog develops, but it can be helpful to do some preparatory work around these issues. We'll come back to each of these critical issues in turn in a moment.

And it's also important to:

- decide your sharing terms (Creative Commons License or traditional copyright notice?)
- be friendly and constructive, even if you're discussing tough topics
- be true to yourself and your values
- be consistent with your purpose/do not overreach
- post regularly (but do not set an impossible schedule).

#### Choose your niche

Editing and publishing are enormous fields and there's potential to write about any aspect that appeals to you, from new technologies through style and grammar to business issues. Before getting started with your first post, it's a good idea to define an area that has long-term potential for different angles and topics, and about which you feel you can offer informed, in-depth opinion. That said, it's important not to feel you have to write from the point of view of a world expert: I think it's more than OK to admit that you do not know everything about everything, and many readers will respond more positively to a friendly explorer than a rule-making instructor. Blogging is a great way to find out more about your niche and to ask questions. Liz Broomfield (2012) puts it very nicely: 'Do it! Pick a niche and do what you do well. Share your own experiences and be open.'

#### Choose your target audience

We've talked about the impossible target of aiming to write for 'everybody', so who could you write for when you are blogging? There are two main focus points for editors who blog:

- 1. The client blog. Build a readership among authors, publishers, and other people who hire editors. Your blog is a 'shop front' showing your sensible thinking, rigorous standards, and friendliness.
- 2. The editor blog. Build a readership among editorial peers. Create professional networks; be seen as a 'go-to' editor in your field. Your blog shows that you are taken seriously in your profession.

Whoever you decide to write for, bear in mind that other people will pick up on your blog and follow along: for example, although PublishEd Adelaide is primarily intended for editors and publishing professionals, I quite regularly hear from authors, book reviewers, aspiring/future editors, and students. They're all welcome and I try to write broadly enough that my posts are accessible to non-experts, while still offering thought-provoking perspectives for practising editors. It's a balancing act.

Voice characteristics	Tone characteristics
Upbeat	Friendly
Informative	Ironic
Approachable	Enthusiastic
Conversational	Humorous
Trustworthy	Balanced
Passionate	
Quirky	
Practical	
Caring	
Inclusive	
Professional	

A sample voice and tone activity chart

#### Define your voice and develop its tone

As editors, we're used to working within the voice and tone of another author, but what about our own writing style? If you're anything like me, when you start blogging it may take some time to find your natural style, but you can explore this before you start, if you wish. Will you be super-friendly, humorous and light-hearted, or strict and teacher-ish? (I do not recommend the last one!)

Your voice and tone are up to you, but it's good to be consistent. Check out chapter 3 of *Yahoo! style guide* for helpful exercises (Barr & senior editors of Yahoo! 2010).

#### Generate ideas and keep going!

Blogging is a long-term activity and this brings creative challenges. How do you generate new ideas on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis? Some quick tips to keep the topics coming:

- Embrace your creativity: this is *your* writing on *your* terms.
- Develop your blogging repertoire over time (posts plus videos, interviews, guest posts?).
- Encourage others to contribute comments and guest posts to your blog.
- Do the same on other people's blogs, and watch comments on posts that have sparked your interest.
- Draft your posts while work is quiet—ready to use when you're busy with paid work.
- Carry a pen/notebook/iPad/laptop at all times (low-tech is good).

Katharine O'Moore-Klopf (2012) has some helpful words of advice on this, too:

Read lots of other blogs in your field to see what bloggers are talking about. Follow the blogs you admire, and comment on posts there frequently. And then spend time thinking about what you want to talk about on your own blog. You won't make the time to blog if you aren't writing about topics you love.



For me, this has translated into posts about curly questions that get you thinking about your own editorial practice, plus lots of mulling over the rewards and challenges of working with authors and publishers. For you, it will be different. What do you love about your editorial practice? What can you do to make others share your enthusiasm for an area of editing?

## Create an editorial calendar

As Darren Rowse of ProBlogger has said, creating an editorial calendar is a way to 'map a rhythm for your blog' (Rowse 2006). An editorial calendar helps plan posts weeks or months in advance, so that you know exactly what's coming. It's also a great way to plan to avoid writer's block, since you will not be faced with a blank slate each time you come to write. Your calendar also does not have to be complicated: there is a plug-in available in WordPress. org if that's your platform of choice, or you can set up your own (Excel is super-easy). Some quick pointers on using a calendar:

- Update it regularly.
- Schedule regular features even if you do not yet have content for them.
- Keep a record of even your wildest ideas—they may develop over several months.
- Check back on how you're managing your time—are scheduled dates and actual publication dates lining up? What do you need to change to make this happen?

Here is the WordPress plug-in (as of December 2012).

« April, 201	2 - May, 2012	» Show Toda	у			Show Dra
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29	30	May 1	2	3	4	5
01:00 pm	10:00 am	10:00 am We	10:00 am	10:00 am Better	10:00 am The 20 second	10:00 am Jus
Joyland	10:00 am FTS	come in peace for cats and	Popular spelling	blogging	20 second work week	remind you to
	Testing today	mice everywhere	mismakes	through 10:00 am chemistry Sean's test 10:00 am test9		do this. 10:00 am
					Session	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
10:00 am	10:00 am	10:00 am Post		10:00 am	10:10 am How	10:00 am Te:
testing	Scheduling the unscheduled	1		runmp 10:00 am	I met your mother	Draft
				Hello		

The WordPress editorial calendar plug-in (WordPress.org 2012)

And here is a sample editorial calendar using Excel: note that there are still gaps to be filled in this fictional schedule, leaving room for inspiration and returning to topics that you think need more development. There's also room at the bottom for ideas, which may start out hazy and take several months to become firm.



Editorial schedule -	Updated:	15/02/2012		
Post title	Description	Regular	Schedule	Published
		post?	pub date	date
Why I love editing	First post: what the blog is about.		2/01/2012	2/01/2012
Beyond the comma splice and other adventures	Regular themed post on quick grammar fixes.	Grammar	15/01/2012	15/01/2012
When deadlines attack	Regular themed post on managing your time.	Time	28/01/2012	3/02/2012
Warning: steep learning curve ahead	Focus on professional development issues.		15/02/2012	15/02/2012
Quick grammar fixes post TBC.	Regular themed post on quick grammar fixes.	Grammar	28/02/2012	
"Don't take the proverbial!": managing unreasonable editing requests	What to do when you're asked to edit for free, by someone who should know better.		15/03/2012	
Managing time post TBC.	Regular themed post on managing your time.	Time	31/03/2012	
Interview with Bert Cheerman, Owner, Cheerful Editing.	Regular Q&A/ interview slot with working editors.	Interview	15/04/2012	
Quick grammar fixes post TBC.	Regular themed post on quick grammar fixes.	Grammar	30/04/2012	
			15/05/2012	
Managing time post TBC.	Regular themed post on managing your time.	Time	28/05/2012	
			15/06/2012	
Quick grammar fixes post TBC.	Regular themed post on quick grammar fixes.	Grammar	28/06/2012	
Ideas				
Something on building your client base.				
Develop Q&A feature.				
Invite Sally to write guest post (free choice				
of topic).				

A simple editorial calendar in Excel



# Using social media to promote your blog

Once your blog is live, how do you tell people about it and get them talking about your posts? Canny use of social media is the key. A few years ago, people were predicting the demise of blogging, but in fact social media has given blogging new life. Using social media allows you to generate discussion, attention, and followers—all key to building your editorial profile. Do not rely on email or subscriptions via your blog feed—get talking about your blog on Twitter, Facebook, or any other social network. Says online commentator Jeff Bullas (2012):

Social media has in fact saved blogging from stagnation and extinction as it has accelerated the online sharing and discovery of bloggers on tens of thousands of topics.

# Social media tips for editorial blogging

Social media can be really useful in promoting your blog—and so, your editorial business but it's important to use it in a way that makes sense for you. Some quick tips:

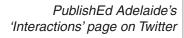
- Choose only the social networks that are right for you—think about keeping one network solely for personal use.
- Make sure your profile is consistent across all the social media you use: biography/CV points, and voice/tone.
- Spread your updates across your social media, so that your blog does not have to do all the work.
- Be generous in your interactions with other editors—retweet, repost, and comment, comment, comment!
- Draw the line somewhere—do not let social media swamp you. Force yourself to switch off.

# The 'Interactions' page at Twitter: your blogging activity hub

If you're on Twitter, your 'Interactions' page is where you'll see most of your blog-related activity happening. Replies, retweets (RT), and mentions (MT) are all good.

In this screenshot from PublishEd Adelaide's Twitter account, you can see other editors picking up on a post of mine, and adding their own spin on the story.

Of course, once you've tweeted about your post, you cannot easily control where the conversation goes next. Be ready to chip in with comments, thankyous, or clarifications as the chatter twists and turns. And watch your follower list grow!





Your blog is a great place to promote your editorial services, and your business website is a great place to promote your blog: cross-promotion and seamless communication between the two sites are key. It's a good idea to close the loop between your two sites if they're separate entities: you may well hear from prospective clients through your blog contact page, even if you do not think you're writing especially for them!

Here are some ideas for how to join up your blog with your business:

- Inside your blog admin, direct the contact form to your work email address.
- Write a lead-in to prompt a response: why should readers contact you?
- Offer something—that is, something manageable and realistic—for free, for example, editorial advice or a Q&A service. If you do make this kind of offer, be sure to do what you've said you'll do.

Contact Katy	
	to figure out a publishing issue? Chances are I can help. Contact me for expert answers at to your email inbox. This service is free and completely confidential.
You can also use this form to contac you!' for your interest in the blog!	ct me about the blog (for book review requests, guest blog pitches, and so on). A big 'than
Name (required)	
Email (required)	
Website	
Comment (required)	

Part of the contact page at PublishEd Adelaide: questions to prompt actions, and a free Q&A.



# Wrap-up

I hope that you've enjoyed this quick tour of editorial blogging, and that you may be inspired to develop your own blog, if you are not already doing it. As Louise Harnby says, 'Blogging, whatever the nature of the content, is all about communicating' (Harnby 2012), and writing about editing is certainly enjoyable and stimulating too. I can honestly say that I feel more engaged in editing since I've been blogging, because I write about it all the time and see it as part of my creative life. And by writing and reading blogs, we can also learn a lot about editors and editing, and maybe even create and influence public perceptions about our profession. It's time to get blogging!

Please feel free to contact me afterwards if you'd like to discuss your own editorial blogging ideas in more detail. You're also welcome to visit my blog, PublishEd Adelaide <www. publishedadelaide.com.au>—stop by and say hello! Thanks for listening and thanks again to the organisers for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

# Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to the conference organisers for giving me this opportunity to speak about editorial blogging. Several editors from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States kindly contributed their time to talk or write to me about their editorial blogs. Excerpts from their comments feature throughout today's talk and I only wish I could have used more of their material in the time available. I thank all of the editors for their contribution, and encourage you to visit their websites and blogs. So, my special thanks to:

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- Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, *EditorMom* (editor-mom.blogspot.com)
- Desolie Page, *Perfect pages* (www.perfectpages.net.au)
- Barbara Sjoholm, *The editor's POV* (theeditorspov.blogspot.com).

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