8

Steps to Blog Greatness:

Giving Your Blog Maximum
Impact and Visibility

compete

Introduction

Compete first started to dip its toes into the blogosphere back in 2007. With a team of talented writers, industry experts, and an abundance of data, blogging seemed like a logical step to communicating the relevance of data in people's everyday lives. While web analytics may not seem exciting to everyone, data is everywhere and measuring digital insights doesn't have to be as dry as a spreadsheet. We wanted to engage a community of readers interested in a wide array of topics with one thing in common: Compete's world-class data.

From its humble beginnings, Compete Pulse (http://blog.compete.com) has grown in popularity and regularly places in the top 10 in the Ad Age Power 150 ranking of the best media and marketing blogs in the world. We succeeded through a blend of strategic foresight and trial and error, by leveraging our unique value drivers and the power of our collective – and highly opinionated minds, and by combining internal resources with the input and insight of smart people in our network.

"@compete
I love you I just
can't admit it..."
Jennifer

Now, we want to share our secrets of success with you – marketers, bloggers, and communications professionals in organizations of all sizes – so that you can build readership, awareness, and, ultimately, revenue through better blogging. Whether you're new to blogging or want to polish your blogging skills, the steps in this book will help you achieve the results you seek.

When Compete Pulse was first launched in 2007, we had three bloggers sharing nuggets of data. In time, we started including case studies, then opinion pieces.

The number of internal bloggers grew to our current stable of about 140. Using the eight steps in this book, we were able to gradually raise our profile, attract external guest bloggers, get quoted in the media, and eventually earn our Power 150 badge.

Blogs can be an effective tool in and of themselves, but as with any marketing effort, they are more powerful when used as part of a concerted, strategic initiative involving the full range of resources at your disposal. Today, those resources include other forms of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We'll show you how to make your blog an integrated part of your social media and corporate marketing efforts.

But for now, let's start with Step One on the next page.

Newly designed: http://blog.compete.com/

The blogosphere is made up of
all blogs and their interconnections
in which everyday authors can
publish their opinion*....

1:

...the better your content, the better your blog.

Content is what makes a blog a blog. But what differentiates a good blog that is noticed, referenced, and bookmarked from a bad blog that is just another dead end in the Internet universe? Simply, the quality of that content. Great content cuts through clutter, engages readers, and provides value; unremarkable content recedes into the din of the blogosphere. Readers have seen enough bad content that they can identify it right away, so if your content isn't uniformly interesting, no reader will give you a second chance to make a good first impression.

What constitutes "good content"? You can probably answer that yourself. Just put yourself in the shoes of the readers you want to attract and think about what kind of content you and they would find compelling. Chances are, you'd name many of these characteristics:

Topicality. Part of being a thought leader and an innovator means keeping abreast of current events. If you want to comment on something that just happened, do it right away. The sooner you convey your viewpoint on a topic, the more valuable it will be. Conversely, the longer you wait, the greater the chance that your commentary is viewed as redundant.

A phrase that might resonate to a reader in your blog posts is "just announced" as in "Eventbrite just announced a new round of venture financing for the company and it is easy to see why VCs are excited by the company." If it just happened and you just commented on it, that's as topical as you can get.

Of course, if you're quoting statistics a certain time lag is allowable. For example, we commented on Howard Stern's October 2010 Sirius XM ratings in mid-November. At that time it was still pertinent but it would have been irrelevant had we waited until January 2011. On the other hand, if you're announcing something that's coming up you need to be in advance of it. We wrote about Movember – in which men are challenged to grow a mustache during the month of November to promote men's health – on October 20th. It would have been too late on November 20th, and a non-story on December 20th.

Relevance. Write about things your audience cares about. Whether you're targeting clients, prospects, or both, keep your opinions on point and of interest to your readers. That doesn't mean you have to keep all your blog posts within a narrow range of topics, but always try to tie what you're saying to what your audience is interested in learning about.

Key to this is knowing your audience. Company leaders are always looking for analysis on the issues they're facing so if you can comment on industry issues relevant to your audience; you will be seen as a valuable resource to your customers and prospects.

Diversity. There's a difference between presenting a consistent voice and presenting a predictable voice. If only one person blogs, only one perspective is being shared and the end result is that your blog will not only be less diverse but also less informative. At Compete, we started with three bloggers and to date we've had more than 140. Everyone is invited to write for the blog – and because we provide training to new employees to educate them on blogging, including standards, tips, and expectations, everyone has the skills to blog. For our seasoned bloggers, we have a quarterly meeting to celebrate successes and brainstorm.

*They leveraged their personal networks and experience in conceiving valuable and interesting topics backed up with illuminating data.

*Kristen - Marketing Manager, **Drew** - UI Design

Movember Grows More Than Just Mustaches

by Karen Costa - published October 20, 2010

Movember challenges men to change their appearance and the face of men's health by growing a mustache. The rules are simple, start November 1st clean-shaven and then grow a mustache for the entire month.

Read more at http://blog.compete.com/2010/10/20/movember-grows-more-than-just-mustaches/
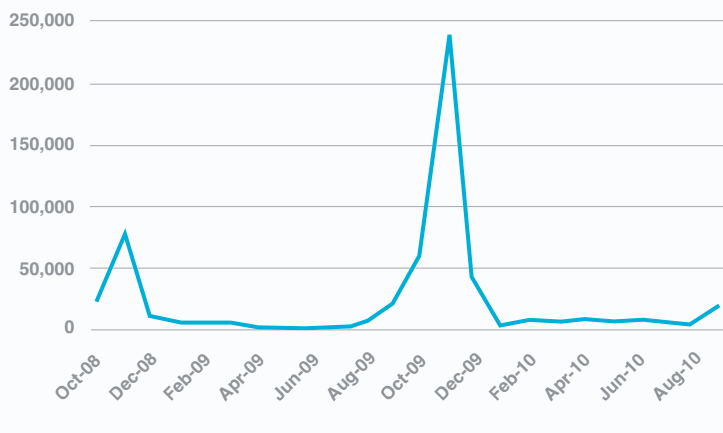
Unique Vistors to Movember.com October 2008 to September 2010

Damian - Marketing. **Kate** - Interactive Designer. **Chris** - Product Manager.

Here are two examples of good blog posts written by people who by virtue of their position might not have had the opportunity to blog if they worked in a different company. Yet because we took the time to onboard them, they were able to produce effective pieces for us. "What're you doing at work all day, bro?" was written by a former intern at Compete, and "Uhaul.com – Traffic gets moving" is the work of a co-op student. They leveraged their personal networks and experience in conceiving valuable and interesting topics backed up with illuminating data.

Conviction. Take a stand on an issue, even a controversial issue. Readers may not always agree but they'll respect that you have a viewpoint. And when you can engage readers in a discussion you can learn more about them, which will help you target your content to their needs and interests.

In a post we titled, "Compete.com Crack Down: Sadly this appears to be working," we took aim at what we saw as a deceptive marketing practice in which a promotional lure is made to look like actual news content. On one level, there's a certain strategic and technical ingenuity behind the technique, but we took a stand on the issue, and that helped our readers understand us better.

Compete.com Crack Down: Sadly this appears to be working.

by Damian Roskill - published October 20, 2010

Marketing disguised as content is nothing new, but with the internet you can take it from a sideshow to an art form. Consumers everywhere, beware! Read more at http://blog.compete.com/2010/10/26/compete-com-crack-down-sadly-this-appears-to-be-working/
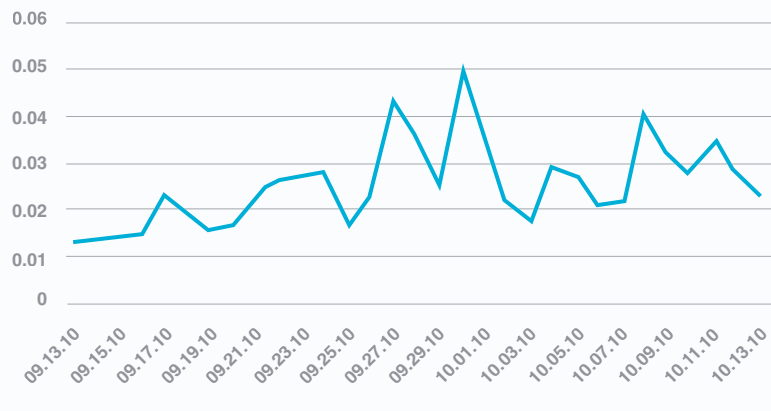
Daily Reach at News1Report.com August 2010

"Thought leader" was used to designate interview subjects for that magazine who had business ideas that merited attention*...

2.
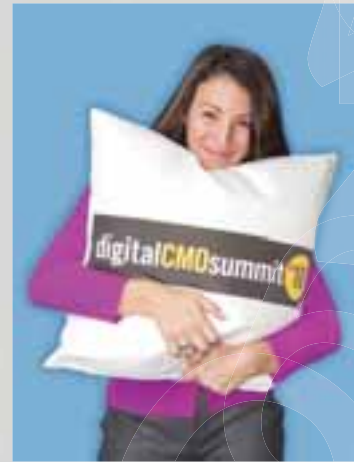
...if you want to be seen as a thought leader, put some thought into it

One of the reasons why companies blog is to be seen as a thought leader. But just pushing content is not enough to truly qualify you as one. Thought leaders are like any other kind of leader, and the pillars of leadership are the ability to exude credibility, earn trust, engage with others, and establish community.

Therefore, to be regarded and relied upon as a thought leader, you need to be a consistently credible source of accurate and useful information. Compete's Chief Marketing Officer, Stephen DiMarco, is the driving force behind the company's branding and a recognized thought leader on digital intelligence. When he speaks (and blogs), people listen. And for good reason: he offers important information. In "How Much Is Our Behavior Worth?" Stephen recommends a new report from the Harvard Business School, but then goes further to add his own, often divergent, opinions on the topic. And after our successful Digital CMO Summit in 2010, Stephen offered his own valuable takeaways from the event for people who were unable to attend. Here are some other ways you can use your blog to establish your thought leadership:

Educate your readers. About your company, your products, your market. Don't assume they know about you. If you have a new product release, don't just talk about its features. Make it a brief tutorial with visuals to help people understand what it does, why it has been introduced/enhanced/extended, what they can achieve with it, and how it works – and, if you can, prove that it works, as we did in "Referral Analytics We Don't Just Make Up." Again, don't be a virtual salesperson; the more purely factual and practical the post is, the more credible and effective it will be.

Promote educational events. When you promote an educational event to your audience (as Compete did when we posted information about a Webcast called "Buzz is not sales!"), you are not only providing a valuable service by informing readers about an educational opportunity for them, you are also helping to build your prospect base by attracting individuals to the event who might not currently be under your spell. Assuming the event itself is informative and relevant to the audience, it could help you turn attendees into customers. Even if it's not an event that you are sponsoring or hosting, position yourself as a good source of useful information.

Invite special guests to blog. Don't be afraid to collaborate with other thought leaders. When you share your soapbox with other visionaries you open your blog

up to a new set of readers. Guest bloggers attract additional communities of readers and appreciate the opportunity to share their content with your readers.

Compete frequently invites guest bloggers like Marshall Sponder from webmetricsguru.com to write posts for our blog that are relevant both to what our blog is about and what our audience knows.

Start a content-generating program. This takes collaboration to another level. Here, you undertake barters, trades, and partnerships with other thought leaders in which you give away their content on your blog in exchange for capturing the names of your readers. Your partners get additional eyeballs and you get high-quality content, such as the Q&A with SEM expert Alex Cohen (@digitalex) that would only have been available to attendees of his webinar.

*Share your soapbox with other visionaries

How much is our behavior worth?

by Stephen DiMarco - published August 21, 2009

In an attempt to solve this seemingly Sisyphean task, the report asserts that the Internet is simply worth what we pay for it, which is roughly equivalent to 2.1% of the U.S. gross domestic product. Due to the commercial diversity of the Internet and its far-reaching socioeconomic impact on American consumers, the authors rely on three different approaches to triangulate their answer:

1. From an Employment perspective (jobs created), the Internet is worth $300 billion;

2. From a Sector GDP perspective (money paid to the Internet sector), it's worth $444 billion;

3. From an Attention perspective (consumer time online), it's worth $680 billion.

Read more at http://blog.compete.com/2009/08/21/mediapost-online-behavior-value/

Designing often necessitates considering the aesthetic, functional, economic and sociopolitical dimensions of both the design object and design process*...

*

3.

Matt - UI Design · **Kate** - Interactive Designer · **Drew** - UI Design · **Aaron** - Marketing.

...build it (well) and they will come

While it's true that content is king and substance is essential, a successful blog is visually appealing as well. That doesn't mean it's overly colorful or ornate; the key is that it is designed well for quality of experience. It should be clean, clear, and easy to navigate. How the content is presented is almost as important as the content itself because no reader will attempt to wade through a confusing and complex-looking blog for whatever nuggets may exist in the content.

To ensure that your blog is well-designed, keep these important tips in mind:

Create design standards. Your blog can look distinctive from the rest of your website but it must support your corporate design standards in terms of color and font choices. Make sure that the newest content is highlighted and past blog posts are easy to find and click to. Compete uses a standard template for all data and charts to make sure there is a consistent look and feel to all our posts.

Structure your posts. While our blog authors have free reign over their content, we try to make sure each post adheres to a few simple structural guidelines, such as having a catchy title, useful content, relevant image, and supporting data. As far as length goes, we don't have a minimum or maximum word count but they should only be as long as they need to be. Our most popular blog postings have been about 250 words.

Incorporate media. Video, animations, images (either photographs or illustrations), tweets, and links to other sources of content and media add texture, information, and visual appeal.

Assign roles. Who writes, who posts, who proofreads, who collects comments and manages responses are important decisions you have to make. Note that the person writing a post doesn't necessarily have to be the same person who actually posts it to the blog. If it doesn't cause unnecessary bottlenecks, you might want to have an official poster who collects people's contributions, checks them for accuracy and adherence to standards, and then posts them to the blog.

It's the process of improving the visibility of a website or a web page in search engines via the "natural" or un-paid ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results*...

4:

...maintain and master the SEO checklist

Adhering to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) principles won't make the content of your blog better, but it will make it more visible in search listings. You don't need to spend too much time focusing on obtaining technical SEO skills. Just master the basics and spend the rest of your time generating great content.

Copy this checklist to get started. Search engines notice these things and apply them to their complex algorithms in assigning rankings to web pages.

- **Make unique URLs** – make sure your blog and individual posts have their own URLs, add www.yourcompany.com/blog/coolest-blog-ever

- **Add sharing functionality** – add sharing buttons that link to Twitter, Facebook, Digg, Reddit, etc.

- **Comment moderation and user-generated content** – like a shark, search engines sense activity

- **Keep fresh content/multiple authors/guest bloggers** – other names on your blog open up search possibilities

- **Focus on keywords** – meta descriptions and keywords that are rich and relevant

- **Include alt text for images** – because images are "read" by the search engines, too

More SEO?

Because SEO is such a large topic, easily its own book, here are a few places you can go for more detailed information:

- 21 Essential SEO Tips & Techniques (SearchEngineLand.com)
  http://searchengineland.com/21-essential-seo-tips-techniques-11580

- SEO Starter Guide (Google)
  http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2008/11/googles-seo-starter-guide.html

- The Beginner's Guide to SEO (SEOmoz)
  http://guides.seomoz.org/beginners-guide-to-search-engine-optimization

Keywords. A good definition of keywords is provided by godaddy.com, a leading domain name registrar: "Keywords are the words or phrases in the content of your website that someone is most likely to use when searching for your online business or website." Keywords, then, are the clues on the map to the treasure; in other words, they're extremely important. Think about what words and phrases your customers or prospects might be searching for; ask a few trusted customers what keywords they think would be most appropriate; do some Internet searching on your own to see how many results certain words and phrases get.

Tags. Tags are used in Wordpress to help people find content they're interested in. You should tag your blog posts but try to limit the number of tags to a manageable sum; you don't necessarily want a million different tags but if a few tags reappear many times throughout your blog, they're more likely to get noticed.

Inbound linking/sharing. When someone links to your blog, it serves as a kind of third-party validation that your content is good. For that reason, you should have an inbound linking strategy that encourages your readers to link to your blog or to specific blog posts. One easy way to do this is to put a "Share" button on your posts so that readers can easily put the URL of your blog out on social media and share it.

Aaron Wall: How Long is your Keyword Trail?

by Aaron Wall - published January 22, 2008

Due to lowered incremental distribution and delivery costs, the emergence of social filters, and better recommendation algorithms, the future of business is less about selling one key product and more about selling a wide array of products.
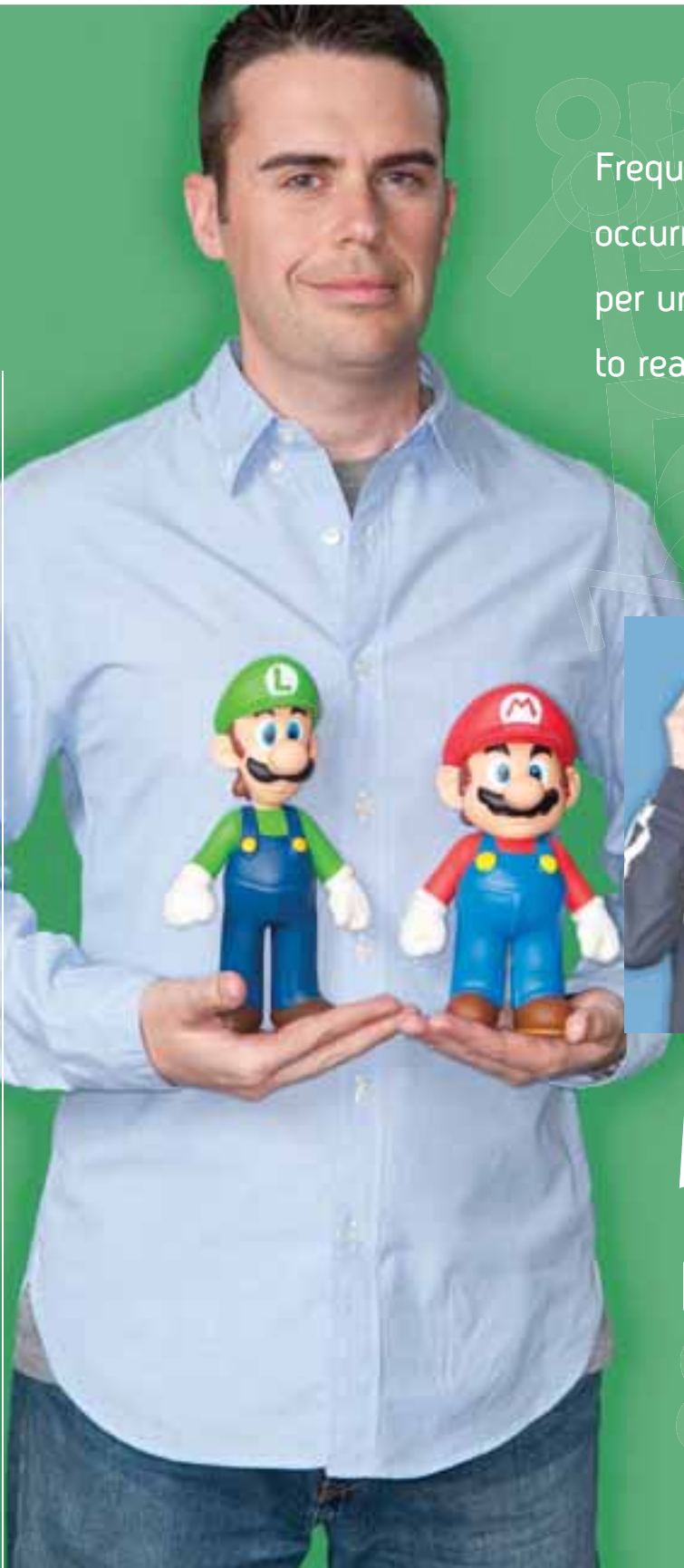Read more at: http://blog.compete.com/2008/01/22/aaron-wall-how-long-is-your-keyword-tail/
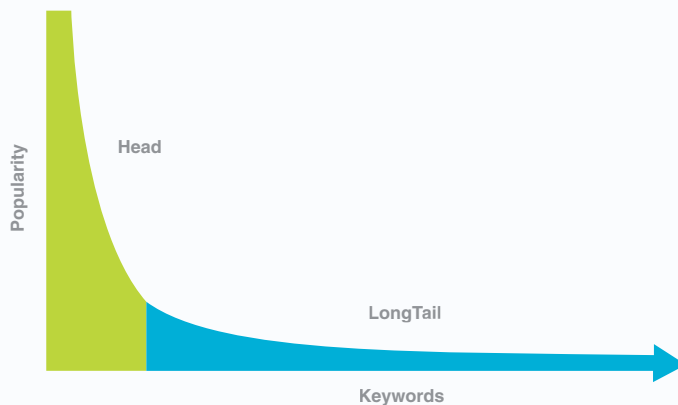
Frequency is the number of occurrences of a repeating event per unit time. Bring fresh content to readers on a daily basis…

Chris - Product Manager **Lindsey** - Client Relations **Nathan** - Technology + Entertainment **Holly** - Online Media & Search.

5:

...and always be blogging

At Compete, we have an equation that we swear by:

FREQUENCY + QUALITY CONTENT = BLOG DOMINATION

How frequent is frequent? At Compete, we shoot for one new post a day during the week, plus one new post on the weekend called "The Weekly Compete Pulse," which is a compendium of interesting things we read over the previous week – with links, of course.

How do you maintain such a grueling pace? First, create a plan and a schedule and stick to it. At Compete, with multiple bloggers in the company, everyone knows what's expected of them – and when. Which leads to the second strategy: create a pipeline and keep it filled. A week's worth of posts is sufficient. You just need to have some back-up, which can and should be pre-empted if something major and unexpected happens. Of course, an RSS feed can bring fresh content to readers' inboxes on a daily basis.

What're you doing at work all day, bro?

by Abigail Holden - published August 2, 2010

Barstoolsports.com caters to men 18-45 years of age, bored at work, looking for some entertainment, and maybe in need of more than a brief moment to simply space out in "man-land." As indicated by the the graph below, they are definitely reaching their target audience, with 82% of visitors falling into their intended age range. Read more at: http://blog.compete. com/2010/08/02/what%E2%80%99re-you-doing-at-work-all-day-bro/

Age	Percentage
18-24	27%
25-34	37%
35-44	18%
45-54	13%
55-64	4%
65+	1%
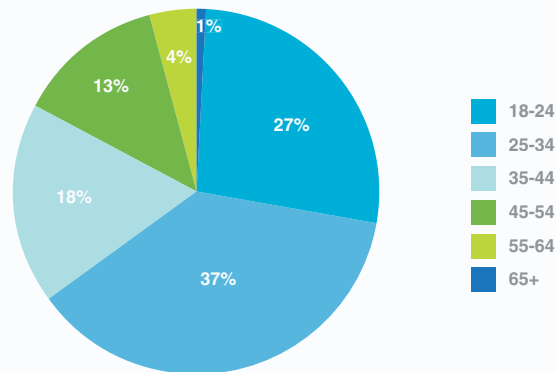
Age Demographic barstoolsports.com June 2010

Give it away, make it
available without charge
and watch it get around.
And then blog about it.

6:

✱ **Nathan** · Technology + Entertainment **Karen** · Marketing **Holly** · Online Media & Search **Drew** · Marketing

the best things in blogs are free

Great blog content is meant to be shared. Your business no doubt already has and pursues partnerships and relationships with other companies, industry publications, and thought leaders. Give them something to write about. Show them your reports, your data, your product announcements – anything, so long as it's relevant to them. Give it away and watch it get around. And then blog about it.

Another important thing to remember: a blog is part of the realm of social media, and all forms of social media should be well-integrated with each other. Whatever you say on your blog, tweet about it, too. Link to it on your Facebook page. On your LinkedIn page. Whatever social media you use, make it all work together.

I'm the mayor! So what?

by Karen Costa - published December 27, 2010

Gowalla boasts that you'll "find inspiration to explore the world around you while picking up rewards from local eateries, venues, and retail stores." Similarly, Foursquare says that it's "a mobile application that makes cities easier to use and more interesting to explore. Read more at:

http://blog.compete.com/2010/12/27/im-the-mayor-so-what/
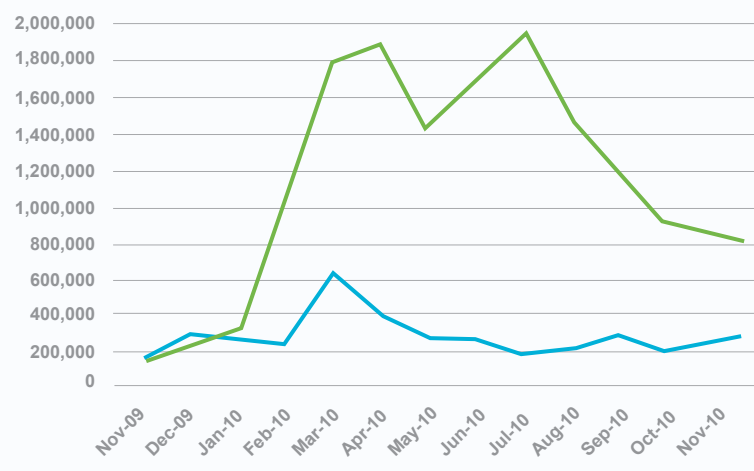
— **Foursquare.com** — **Gowalla.com** Unique Vistors November 2009 to Novemeber 2010

Blog, measure, blog again.
Repeat as necessary until
your blog rocks!

7:

Karen · Online Marketing **Alo** · Product Strategy **Chris** · Product Manager **Aaron** · Marketing

measure, optimize, measure again

You know that to run your business effectively you need to analyze a range of metrics and measure key performance indicators (KPIs). The only way to know if your blog is achieving its goals is to measure its performance and impact, understand what gaps exist and what fixes are required, make the necessary changes to optimize its performance, and measure again to see if what you did made a difference.

There are good, easy-to-use tools available to help you do that. Google Analytics, for example, allows you to measure your blog's KPIs at a glance. Things to look for include:

- Total number of visits
- Unique visitors
- Bounce rate
- Average time spent on site
- Pages viewed per visit
- Traffic sources
- Most popular posts
- Most effective keywords

You can also measure the number of subscriptions/followers, the number of times your content is shared, and the number of comments your posts receive. More qualitatively, you should analyze those comments to make sure you are moderating spam, answering questions in a timely manner, and engaging in and extending conversation on the topic. The amount and substance of conversation on a given topic is a good way to know when you've landed on a pressing concern for readers, one that invites a follow-up post.

* Any lunch with @Matt_Siltala is a good lunch. He dropped a great #SEO bomb about a site called compete.com...Ever heard of it? - Thomas

* **Damian** · Marketing **Lindsey** · Client Relations **Aaron** · Marketing **Chris** · Product Manager

Identify your blog as a source not only of opinion but of breaking news

8.

news is good content

PR is a great way not only to spread the word about your blog, it also can be a great source of content. For example, a press release about a new product you're releasing or a new study you've conducted or a new partnership you're announcing is wonderful fodder for a blog post. Don't worry that it's self-promoting – all blogs are self-promoting, it's just that typically it's a perspective that is being promoted. But talking about a product gives you an opportunity to address current needs in the marketplace, use it as

an example of new product trends, and demonstrate your commitment to your customers.

At Compete, our data is segmented by vertical and we consistently blog about announcements we make to the various sectors we follow, such as automotive, financial services, online media and search, retail and consumer products, technology and entertainment, and travel. Because it's a regular part of our blog, readers come to expect and look for it.
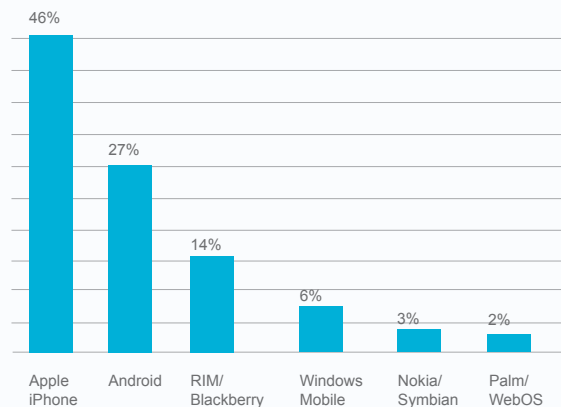
At the same time, your blog itself is well worth promoting. Make sure the market knows where to find you. If something you wrote in your blog gets picked up somewhere else, send out a press release trumpeting the third-party validation. At Compete, we've had blog posts based on our own press releases that get picked up by industry publications as news stories. Identify your blog as a source not only of opinion but of breaking news and – if you deliver on that promise effectively and promote it properly – you'll begin to

get referenced and build credibility.

iPad 2 – On the Crest of the Tablet Tidal Wave

by Kevin Muoio - published March 2, 2011

Which one operating system would you associate with the following statement: "Has the coolest phones"? Read more at: http://blog.compete.com/2011/03/02/ipad-2-%E2%80%93-on-the-crest-of-the-tablet-tidal-wave/

Apple iPhone	Android	RIM/Blackberry	Windows Mobile	Nokia/Symbian	Palm/WebOS
46%	27%	14%	6%	3%	2%

We live by these steps and that has enabled our blog to be highly ranked and highly regarded.

Those are the eight steps. Not that many, if you think about it – yet every one is important and effective. We're living proof of that. At Compete, we live by these steps and that has enabled our blog to be highly ranked and highly regarded. We take great pride in being a trusted resource for our readers and followers, yet with that comes great responsibility. That's why we continue to do everything we can to make our blog as useful and relevant as it can be.

We know that your goals for your blog are the same as ours, so now that you know the eight steps to achieving blog greatness, start applying them. Don't try to do everything all at once. Give yourself time to get acclimated to a new way of doing things and gradually integrate these steps into your workflow. We're sure that in time you'll begin to see the results you seek. Until then, remember: **ALWAYS BE BLOGGING!**

○ compete

Compete, a Kantar Media company, helps the world's top brands improve their marketing based on the online behavior of millions of consumers. Leading advertisers, agencies and publishers rely on Compete's products and services to create engaging online experiences and highly profitable advertising campaigns. Compete's online panel – the largest in the industry – makes the web as ingrained in marketing as it is in people's lives.

Visit blog.compete.com or call 617.933.5600.