



BJA
BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

GETTING STARTED...



Determine your blog strategy. As with any new program or initiative it is important to determine a strategy before getting started. Why do you want to blog? Establish goals for your blog. Remember that your new blog, like any other form of social media, is simply a tool to enhance what you already have, the services you provide, and your agency's mission. Determining your strategy will help with the other steps of getting started. At this stage you will also want to create a management plan outlining how often you will post, how often you will monitor comments, and other questions you may have about your new blog.

Assign responsibility. Decide who will manage the blog. Will this be the chief's area to speak on issues affecting the community? Or will the public information officer or other member of the department be the blog administrator? Someone will need to have responsibility not only for content creation but also for any comment moderation. Also determine what will happen if that person leaves the department. Establish who will fill in as the responsible party as well as what the protocol will be for changing passwords.

What will be posted? Will you be posting content on crime prevention, recruitment, or a mix of topics? A blog allows you to share your story, unfiltered by anyone else. Decide what kind of content you want to post to help guide your efforts and to inform people so they know what they will find when they come to your site. You may choose to use this as the chief's platform and therefore a mix of content will be presented. Think of all the places within your department where content can come from. Many of your officers have stories to tell and a blog may be the perfect platform. You can also recycle content from other areas. This doesn't mean simply copying and pasting from a press release, but different types of content you already create can give you ideas for blog posts.

Promote your blog. If people don't know where to find it, they won't read it. Therefore, tell people about your blog. Put the URL on your agency website and other social media sites. You may also put it on e-mail signatures, flyers, and press releases. Create partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and organizations within your community and have them assist you in the promotion. Depending on the focus of your blog you may have a targeted audience that you want to promote it to. For example, if you have a blog about recruitment, you may give the URL to any person who applies to your department. If it is a crime prevention blog, you may pass the URL out at Neighborhood Watch meetings.

BLOG WRITING TIPS & ANALYTICS

Less is more. People have short attention spans, and they want their information as succinct as possible. Keep your information clear and concise. People may be less likely to read a lengthy, text-heavy post. If you have a lot you want to say on a particular topic, you can break it into several parts and post each one separately, making it easier for people to consume the content. Also, be sure to use common language and try to stay away from legalese or police jargon which the general public may find confusing.

Images and video. The use of multimedia in your blog can go a long way to add visual interest and enhance your message. If you use photo- and video-sharing sites you can repurpose your content by embedding your photos and videos into your blog. Images and videos can help tell your story and are a great way to catch readers' attention.

Catchy titles. Many times, people will choose whether or not to read a post based on the title. The title of your post may be all that someone sees on first glance through a search engine, RSS feed reader, or other social media sites. Therefore, a title can make or break a blog post. Think of titles that you would want to read. Use strong and exciting words, ask a question, or pose a benefit to your readers in a title. These strategies, along with many others, will build people's curiosity and entice them to read the rest of your blog post.

Weekly themes. Having daily or weekly themes may assist you in developing your content strategy and lets your audience know what to expect. For example, you may post information about crime tips every Tuesday, or feature an officer's story each Friday. Having weekly themes will also help you stay consistent as you progress with your blog. These themes will allow your readers to know what to expect when they come to you blog as well.

Guest bloggers. Featuring guest bloggers allows you to provide multiple perspectives and bring fresh ideas to your blog. You may even decide to have a team of bloggers who regularly contribute to the blog. Being able to provide multiple perspectives will help expand your blog content and will ease the creative burden on a single person. You may choose to have a guest blogger once a month, featuring a new person from each of your units or precincts. There are many ways to incorporate guest bloggers effectively.

Most blogging platforms have a built-in dashboard that tracks analytical measures. Another option is to create a free Google Analytics account. Various types of no-cost analytical tools allow users to view trends and track usage through charts and graphs. Analytics allow you to see what type of content is most popular, when your blog is receiving the most traffic, and where your blog traffic is coming from.

It is helpful to set up a schedule for assessing your analytics as well as determining what analytics and measures you will be tracking. Analytics will help you determine the success of your blog and also guide your future efforts.

COMMENTING

Blogging allows the user to determine their level of engagement. Many blogs allow moderated commenting, meaning the blog administrator will receive notification when someone comments on a post. The administrator then has the ability to accept the comment, meaning it will then appear on the blog, or they may deny the comment, meaning it will be deleted.

It is helpful to have a commenting policy in place when you launch your blog. This may be posted on your blog, so readers will know your regulations and expectations. Below is an example of a commenting policy from the Roanoke, Virginia, Police Department. While this policy is posted on their Facebook page, the same policy could be applied to a blog.

We welcome you and your comments to Roanoke Police Department's Facebook Page. We encourage you to submit your questions, comments, and concerns, but please note this is a moderated online discussion site and not a public forum.

Once posted, the Roanoke Police Department reserves the right to delete submissions that contain:

- (i) vulgar language;*
- (ii) personal attacks of any kind;*
- (iii) offensive comments that target or disparage any ethnic, racial, or religious group.*

Further, the Department also reserves the right to delete comments that are:

- (i) spam or include links to other sites;*
- (ii) clearly off topic;*
- (iii) advocate illegal activity;*
- (iv) promote particular services, products, or political organizations;*
- (v) infringe on copyrights or trademarks.*

Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of the Roanoke Police Department or its officers and employees.

It is important to monitor blog comments and provide feedback when necessary. Replying to questions or complaints lets your community know that you care and that you are attentive. It also gives them the correct information. Commenting allows your agency to have a two-way conversation with the community.

PLATFORM EXAMPLES:

WORDPRESS →

WordPress gives users two options. The first option, through wordpress.org, requires users to have an acceptable Web host and then to download and install the free WordPress software. This option allows users to create completely customizable blogs. The second option, available at wordpress.com, is a much simpler and less customizable option. Through this option, no downloading or installation is necessary.

BLOGGER →

Blogger is a free blogging service provided by Google, that links to a user's Google account. Blogger has a simple interface and allows users to publish text, photos, and videos to their blog. There are a number of design templates, and users can customize a template to make their own design. They can also use Blogger to create a team blog, which allows multiple users to contribute to a single blog.

LIVEJOURNAL →

LiveJournal is an online journal service that offers both basic free accounts and paid accounts that offer premium features. LiveJournal allows users to create blogs and then set their security levels so that their content may be shared or kept private. Users can also create networks of friends through the LiveJournal service.

TUMBLR →

Tumblr is a blogging platform that allows for shorter posts that may consist of images, video, text, music, or links. Users can access their blog in a variety of ways, including an Internet browser, e-mail, or mobile device. Tumblr is designed for quick and easy blogging updates. There is no cost to set up an account.

DEFINITIONS TO KNOW:

Blog: a self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for "Web log."

Blogosphere: refers to blogs and blog interactions on the Internet.

Blogroll: a list of blogs that a blogger might recommend by providing a list of links on their site.

Post: content, in any format, placed on a website or the act of publishing content on a website.

Widget: a small block of content, including graphics or text, which may be static or dynamic, that a site can provide to users for implementing on a blog or website. Widgets have a specific purpose such as showing weather forecasts, stock quotes, or news updates.