

BLOG COMMENTING FOR SMART PEOPLE

Commenting on blog posts that are relevant to the interests of your own stakeholders or market niche is one of the most effective ways of developing your brand, spreading your message, and sharing your ideas via the Internet. It can also be engaging and fun. Before setting out on this new adventure, however, the “blogosphere” abides by some conventions and rules of the road you should be aware of, and as you will discover below, there are some simple ways to get the greatest benefit out of your responses.

The benefits of commenting

Responding to posts on other blogs in your area of interest can prove as important as posting in your own blog. Here’s why:

- Engaging in dialogue with other bloggers helps keep you current and in touch with the thoughts and activities of individuals and organizations in your niche in a very timely way.
- Content that develops on other blogs can inspire and inform the content of your own.
- Commenting can help develop fruitful, ongoing relationships between you and other bloggers.
- Every comment you make contributes to your online profile, helping readers to gain confidence in your knowledge and understanding in your area of expertise. This, in turn, reflects on your organization.
- Perhaps most importantly, every comment you write also serves as a doorway back to your own Web site or blog. In fact, commenting is one of the most effective ways available to drive traffic to your own blog.

How to reply

The technical aspects of commenting are simple. Here is what to do:

- Look for a screen button on the blog site that says, “Comment.” This may appear on the posting page or you may have to go to the list of comments to find it. Left click on the button. If there is no button, scroll down to the bottom of the comments list. In either case, you should find yourself at a blank form with fields for your name, email address, Web site, and comment. If you can’t find these blank fields anywhere, you may be reading a blog that does not allow commenting. Others may require that you register as a member before posting a comment.
- Fill in the ‘name’ field. Although you may be tempted to use a screen name, readers will take you more seriously if you use your real name. In particular, don’t use the name of your organization as your screen name (e.g., HartfordFoundationPerson). Readers will quickly categorize you as a “spammer,” that is, someone whose primary purpose is to get them to link back to your blog or Web site.
- Fill in the “email” address field. This will NOT become available to the public. The blogger will use your address only to send you updates and notifications.
- Fill in the Web site field. This is important, as the address will appear with your name and will provide readers with a route back to your blog.
- Type in your comment. Generally, try to keep it brief—no more than a couple hundred words, if possible. However, it never hurts to stand out from the crowd. If you want your comment to get more notice, make it a little longer if the other responses to the entry are short, or keep it brief if the other comments are long. Be aware that many blogs are “moderated,” meaning that the blogger will review your comment before posting it. This step simply helps eliminate inappropriate or offensive material, or submissions that are entirely off topic.

Effective commenting

As beneficial as good commenting can be, bad commenting can be a waste of time both for you and the blog’s readership. To help make your comments as effective as possible, here are some points to keep in mind:

- **Comment early.** This is the golden rule, especially if you're trying to get the attention of other commentators. Readers will rarely look beyond the first 50 comments on a blog post, and to make it into that group, especially on high-traffic blog, means you'll probably need to comment within a few hours of a blog post's publication. However, if your interest is to capture the attention of the blogger, timing is less critical, as he or she will most likely read all comments, even on un-moderated blogs.
- **Read the post.** Never, ever comment on a blog post you haven't read from beginning to end. This seems self-evident, but many people will read only to the point where they're inspired to reply and ignore the rest of the post. This can become embarrassingly evident in the comment.
- **Add value.** It is VERY important to comment only when you really have something to say. Submitting replies like "great post" will mark you as a spammer (i.e., using a valueless comment as an opportunity to present your Web site's link to readers).

Adding value

This point is important enough to explore in some further detail. There are many ways for your comment to add value to a comments thread on a blog post. Here are some to consider:

- **Give an example.** If you have an example from your own experience that can illustrate the blogger's point, you may be able to help clarify the post or make it more concrete and personal for readers.
- **Add a point.** If an idea occurs to you that would help expand the idea of the post even further, your comment may make a great addition to the thread.
- **Disagree respectfully.** You won't agree with everything you read, and it is perfectly acceptable to voice your disagreement in a comment. Doing so in a courteous, respectful, and well-thought-out way, of course, will win you more points than simply expressing disapproval.
- **Describe your reaction.** If something in a blog post excites you, saddens you, angers you, or disappoints you, talk about that in your comment. Describe, and if possible, explain the emotions you felt.

- **Ask questions that other readers may be able to answer.** This technique is great for getting people to engage with you and go to your blog. Generally speaking, readers will enthusiastically share information with you.
- **Add useful links to your own site and others.** While you DON'T want to pepper your comments with repeated links back to your Web site's homepage, including links to germane posts on your own blog is a very important tool to increase traffic. Also, be generous about linking to related blogs or material on other sites.

Trackbacks and permalinks

Leaving a comment isn't the only way to respond to a blog entry. You can also use a "trackback." This is a little technological wonder that allows you to post a comment on your own blog to a post on someone else's and give the other blogger a signal (called a "ping") that you've done so. Why would you want to reply in this way? Because your trackback acts like an invitation for the other poster to come and visit your blog. If he or she decides to publish your trackback in the post's comments list (it will appear as a brief line of text, in brackets, from your blog), other readers can link back to the comment on your blog as well. In other words, trackbacks can increase your site traffic.

Although the concept of trackbacks may seem a little confusing at first, in practice, they're simple to use. Here is what to do:

- **Compose your entry.** Write your comment or related post in your own blog.
- **Copy the permalink URL.** Go the blog entry you're responding to and look for the word "permalink." This will usually appear as a hyperlink somewhere near the bottom of the page. A permalink is the Web address you should use to create a link back to the post you're commenting on. It will take readers directly to the particular entry rather than the blog's home page. Click on the hyperlink, then highlight and copy the address to your clipboard. Alternatively, you can right click the hyperlink with your mouse and select "Copy Shortcut" (or "Copy Link Location" in FireFox).
- **Create a link.** Paste the URL into your own post to create a link when you first reference the other blog entry. This is considered good form among bloggers.

- **Copy the trackback URL.** Return to the blog entry you're referencing and look for the word "trackback." Follow the same procedure you used to copy the permalink. If the trackback URL appears on the page and is not a hyperlink, then simply highlight and copy it.
- **Enter the trackback.** Go back to the entry you're writing for your own blog and look for a field (box) labeled "Send Trackback to." Paste the trackback URL into the field.

Now, when you publish your entry, your blogging software will send a signal to the blog you have referenced to alert the poster. He or she will then decide whether to publish the trackback, but in any case, will most likely visit your blog to read your post.

A special case

As you establish your brand and increase traffic to your blog, posts about you, your organization, or your Web site may begin to appear on other blogs, possibly as trackbacks. If this happens, there are some issues you may want to consider before responding.

If the post is positive, as mentioned above, don't comment unless you can add value. Even writing a simple "thank you" will be cynically interpreted by many readers as an effort to get them to link back to your Web site.

Your response to a negative post will depend upon its content. If the poster is simply someone who rants, rages, or insults, it's generally not a good idea to respond at all. The argument will go nowhere, and neither party will come away feeling satisfied. If the poster is making a judgment based on misguided information, however, it's perfectly acceptable to offer well-cited corrections to try to resolve his or her difficulties in a calm, well-thought-out way. If the poster has offered a thoughtful, considered comment, even if it's negative, responding in kind can lead to a constructive dialogue.

FURTHER READING:

11 Tips for Getting Your Comments Noticed on a Popular Blog

(www.probblogger.net/archives/2007/11/07/11-tips-for-getting-your-comments-noticed-on-a-popular-blog/)

10 Ways to Hurt Your Blog's Brand by Commenting on Other Blogs

(www.probblogger.net/archives/2007/08/29/10-ways-to-hurt-your-blogs-brand-by-commenting-on-other-blogs/)

How Not to Promote Your Blog: Top 10 Broken Blog Promotion Strategies

(www.probblogger.net/archives/2009/05/13/how-not-to-promote-your-blog-top-10-broken-blog-promotion-strategies/)

Leave Comments on Other Blogs

(www.probblogger.net/archives/2009/04/25/leave-comments-on-other-blogs/)

How Not to Comment on Comments

(<http://lorelle.wordpress.com/2006/08/07/how-not-to-comment-on-comments/>)

The Air Force's Rules of Engagement for Blogging

(www.globalnerdy.com/2008/12/30/the-air-forces-rules-of-engagement-for-blogging/)

How to use Trackbacks to Promote Your Blog

(www.5minutesformom.com/47/using-trackback/)

How to Use Trackback Comments on Your Blog

(http://onlinepublishing.suite101.com/article.cfm/how_to_use_trackback_comments_on_your_blog)