Design Themes

PREPARE OUR STUDENTS FOR LIFE

PREPARING OUR STUDENTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY SOCIETY AND CAREERS

LEARNING DESIGN FOR THE 21 FIRST CENTURY	SKILLS
LEARNING ABOUT SELF LEARNING SKILLS, TEAM-WORK, PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS PROBLEM SOLVING, PRESENTATION SKILLS	Soft skills such as adaptability, creative thinking, persuasion, relationship mastery, the ability to deal with complexity, and time management are increasingly valuable to companies as they become more dynamic, interconnected, and flexible by necessity
21ST CENTURY INDUSTRIES	ROBOTICS, AI, COMPLEX INDUSTRY INTERACTION, SELF-MANAGEMENT, REMOTE COMMUNICATIONS, VIRTUAL REALITY, PRINTING MACHINES

Trust, Respect, Empathy, Listening, Independence, Collaboration, Kindness, Taking Risks, Boldness, Creativity, Learning attitude, Work ethics, Communications skills, Decision process

PREPARE OUR STUDENTS FOR LIFE

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Common Sense sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts *So far, I've had the common sense not to tweet anything ghastly.*

Learning that is engaging and exciting:
- Self-learning/Team /Ownership
- Activity based
- Mentoring others

Portfolio of Learning-05052021(Power-Point)
http://projectacademy.org/trainer/schedule-young-adults.html

Marketing contacts: (Modules, Unique)
Marketing-module-01282022

Drug rehab programs
Prison training programs
Adoptee programs
Existing training programs
Mentoring. Training organizations, Coaches karenderusha@gmail.com
Seniors(people) re-entering the work-force http://www.projectacademy.org/seniors/
Skillful career coach **what to high-light to make the student acceptable to be hired**   • LinkedIn   • On-line presence   • Groups

Learning about self • Branding • Ownership	

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- Common-Sense
- Ice-Breaker
- SEL learning
- Overview of program

Team-work
- Charter
- Culture/Values
- Sports team
- Dealing with differences

Tools & Skills for life
- Business operations
- Questioning
- Business skills
- Life-skills

Problem Selection
- Root cause
- Requirements
- Decision making

Possible solutions
- Many designs
- Pick a few
- Shaping

Testing & Reporting
- Test and check ideas with other
- Elevator pitch

Start

Learning about yourself
Icebreaker

Creating the Team
(Foming Community)

Business Tools
Life-Skills

Problem Selection

Possible Solutions

Testing & Reporting

Follow-up Sessions

END

Contacts

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# Mia Dubosarsky **STEM Education Center** **DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** **EMAIL** mdubosarsky@wpi.edu **CONTACT** **Phone:** +1 (508) 8315617	**karenderusha@gmail.com** - **Looking to get her advice** - **URL of Mentoring organization**
What is Novel Engineering? Inspired by kids and grounded in research, Novel Engineering is an innovative approach to integrate engineering and literacy in elementary and middle school. Students use existing classroom literature – stories, novels, and expository texts – as the basis for engineering design challenges that help them identify problems, design realistic solutions, and engage in the Engineering Design Process while reinforcing their literacy skills.	CEEO Director, Merredith Portsmore, **Address:** 200 Boston Ave g810, Medford, MA 02155 **Hours:** Open · Closes 5PM **Phone:** (617) 627-5888
Nancy Gustafson Greater Boston Contact info Contact Info ## Nancy's Profile linkedin.com/in/nancygustafson **Website millisps.org (Company)** **Email gustafson.n@gmail.com** **Connected June 17, 2015**	

Five Steps to Creating an Effective Social Media Content Plan

Project Academy

By Mary Gormandy White M.A., Communication

Creating a presence for your company on appropriate social media websites is the first step in utilizing social media marketing, but it's only the beginning. In order to benefit from this marketing strategy, it is critical to create - and use - an effective content plan that involves sharing engaging posts on a consistent, ongoing basis.

Five Tips for Creating a Content Plan That Works

1. Select Content Likely to Engage Users

The first thing that you need to realize is that you can't use your company's social media profiles like a catalog of available products and services. This means that you can't limit your content plan to sales-oriented messages. When choosing content, switch your focus away from deciding what to share based on what you think can get someone to buy to what you can do to inspire someone to want to invite your business into his or her hand-picked online community, allow you to stay, and encourage others to do the same.

While it's okay to mention new products occasionally, special offers, seasonal promotions and other sales-oriented messages, the majority of your content plan should focus on information that is likely to engage users so that they (a)

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want to hear more from you and (b) so that they will share it with their own contacts, further expanding your social presence.

2. Create a Stockpile of Posts

Rather than let yourself get in the position of trying to come up with a new post every day, periodically sit down and map out a plan for specific items you'd like to post in the near term. If you can keep a selection of approximately 30 topics, links and blurbs, you'll always have something interesting to choose from, but you won't have to worry about the content that you've compiled becoming stale.

Use the following list of appropriate content types as a starting point to begin putting together a collection of posts, being sure that you comply with all guidelines for any site you are posting on:

- Upcoming company and community events
- Tips/expert advice that may interest your audience
- Relevant current events
- Developments in your industry
- Photographs of company leaders, trade show booths, products, etc.
- New product or service announcements (occasional)
- Links to relevant videos of interest to your followers
- Links to news stories about the company or related topics of interest
- Links to articles and/or websites of interest paired with engaging blurbs
- Links to informative blog posts paired with interesting text
- Results of employee recognition awards and programs

Remain flexible in your plan, making adjustments as needed based on what is going on in the world, with your target consumers and with your organization

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3. Centralize Posting Responsibility

Provide administrative-level access to company social media profiles with care, limiting posting capabilities to a small group of individuals. Clearly define social networking responsibility for the company, being sure to specify exactly who is responsible for making the final decision regarding what to share, who will actually make posts on behalf of the business, and who will respond to comments and private messages as well as monitor for SPAM.

4. Encourage Idea Contributions

The fact that posting responsibility needs to be centralized does not mean that individuals throughout the organization can't contribute ideas for your content plan. It's actually advisable to establish a system that makes it easy for personnel to submit ideas for the content plan, as well as a way for those assigned to post to gather information from co-workers that they might need.

You can implement a procedure as simple as providing a contact person for employees to send social media posting ideas to as they have them. If you're looking for a more formal system, set up a shared document on your network, intranet or GoogleDrive that people can contribute to any time they want.

5. Tweak Content Based on Results

Pay close attention to the types of content that seem to generate the most chatter, realizing that content that generates user interaction represents information that appeals to your audience.

- Keep track of how many likes each Facebook post gets, as well as the number of comments.
- On Twitter, look to see which of your tweets are being re-tweeted the most.
- If you have a presence on Pinterest, pay attention to pins that attract a significant number of re-pins.

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- Use Google Analytics to determine how much website traffic is coming from social media posts, and which ones perform the best.

Use this information to identify new content to share, adding items similar to those that seem to perform the best.

Build Social Media Success

While these tips to not represent everything you need to know to implement social media marketing effectively, they do provide the information necessary for you to begin creating and implementing an effective content plan. Once you are comfortable selecting content for social sharing and are in the habit of doing so regularly, with positive results, you'll be ready to begin exploring new ways to expand the potential of social media marketing for your company.

Interview: Social Networking for Business

By Mary Gormandy White M.A., Communication

Catherine Brown, Dotster, Director of Enterprise Social Networking

In today's marketplace, social networking for business is an important part of any successful marketing plan. Catherine Brown, director of Enterprise Social Networking for Dotster, Inc. shares her insight about the role social networking plays in the 21st century business world.

The Role of Social Networking in Business

LoveToKnow (LTK): Why is it important for businesses to participate in social networking?

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Catherine Brown (CB): A social network is a powerful new tool for small businesses. It provides a way for customers, vendors, employees, developers and partners to meet, share ideas and learn from one another.To be clear, a [business social network](#) is not like Facebook. It is the company's own community Web site (or a new tab on their current Web site) branded with their logo and material and devoted to their customers' needs and interests.

LTK: What benefits can business expect from social networking?

CB: There are many benefits including:

- Reduced costs with more efficient customer service, market research and customer communications.
- Increased visibility with customers who come to your site more often and stay longer.
- Revenue growth through display ads, paid search, search engine optimization (SEO), shopping, downloads, referrals and lead exchanges.

LTK: Is social networking just as important for small businesses with a local focus as it is for larger organizations with a more global focus?

CB: As with a large corporation, a small business can utilize a social network to increase its customer base as well as improve customer retention. For example, a local winery could have a very active network of customers discussing all aspects of wine and wine-making.In addition to food and wine, other industries that are leading the way in social networking include entertainment, healthcare and consulting.

Guidelines for Utilizing Social Networking for Business

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LTK: Are there guidelines for how much time and resources businesses should devote to social networking?

CB: A social network will be more successful if the company can devote some resources to it, especially at the beginning. Here are 4 tips for making the site successful:

1. Provide articles, posts, information and other content that is interesting to the customer.
2. Keep the information new and exciting-posting once a day or every few days will keep customers returning to your site frequently.
3. Promote the site to your customers so they know that the community is available to them.
4. Moderate the forums and keep track of posts to ensure they are appropriate and relevant.

LTK: Does the demographic makeup of a company's customer base impact how social networking should be used?

CB: Any business with customers who use the Internet can benefit from a social network. Moreover, for companies with younger clients, a Web community is becoming imperative. Students and young adults expect to be able to communicate freely and frequently with their vendors, clients, peers and partners.

LTK: What forms of social networking are most important for small businesses?

CB: Small businesses should choose social networking features that support the needs of their customers. They may not need complicated additions such as avatars or streaming video. Examples of important business components include:

- **Blogs:** A regularly updated blog enables you to be a subject matter expert and draw search traffic.
- **Forums:** Users ask and answer each others questions. Moderation tools on these forums allow you to control the tone and subjects of discussion.

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- **Polling:** Surveying customers allows you to get great feedback and innovate faster.
- **Media sharing:** Gets the buzz going by showing your announcements and new products and services.
- **Calendars:** keep customers up to date on any events or specials.
- **Ratings:** Allowing users to rate posts let the customers choose what content they like the best.

LTK: How do the costs of social networking compare to other online and offline forms of advertising?

CB: For a small business, the cost of a social network is very reasonable, especially compared to some of the more expensive forms of advertising. Dotster Connect SMB, for example, starts at $199 a month.

In addition, tangible benefits such as lower customer service costs as well as intangible ones such as improved reputation and increased satisfaction more than pay for any associated costs.

LTK: What is unique about your company, Dotster Connect, and how can it help businesses move forward in the social networking arena?

CB: Dotster offers two different [social networking](#) packages. Dotster Connect Enterprise has over 400 features and complete customization capabilities. Dotster Connect SMB is an easy to implement solution that fits a small business budget. Other reasons to choose Dotster Connect include:

- **Experience:** Dotster has over ten years of experience bringing internet innovations to SMB's, including customer Web site building, Search Engine Optimization and virtual private servers.
- **Security:** Dotster's experience in hosted solutions provides data integrity; trusted provider of 100 percent reliable domain name services for U.S. federal and state governments 99.9 percent network uptime.

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- **Integration:** The community can fit into your existing Web site and internal IT applications/systems.
- **One stop shopping:** in addition to social networking, Dotster provides Domain Registration, Web site Hosting, Hosted services, E-mail, Web site design and construction, and marketing tools (e-mail, SEO, SEM).

Love to Know Social Networking would like to thank Catherine Brown for taking the time to shed light of the role and importance of social networking for business and wishes her continued success in her future endeavors.

Blogging Used for Public Relations
By Yvonne Gando

Taking its roots from the online diary, blogs have grown to become a critical component of the social media landscape. In recent years, blogging is increasingly being used a public relations tool for news and media outlets. A 2008 survey conducted by Brodeur found that over three-quarters of reporters say that they consult blogs for story ideas, while 51 percent also admit to bloggers' opinions influencing the editorial direction of journalists' own news articles.

How the Media Uses Blogs

The Brodeur survey also revealed that about 70 percent of reporters said they read blogs on a regular basis, and, almost 21 percent said they spend more than an hour a day reading blogs. More than 61 percent of journalists surveyed said they believed blogs to have a significant impact on the tone of news reporting.

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Collectively, this data reinforces the fact that blogging is a powerful communications vehicle, that, if viewed by the right people, can help one cast a much wider net, reaching the international audience of the blogosphere. In other words, if you blog, your ideas or products have a greater chance of being 'heard' and seen.

Discover MoreREAD MOREDaily Health Rituals Proven to Boost Mood,Sleep, and Overall Health | LoveToKnow Health & Wellness

How to Start Blogging for Public Relations

One should recognize the difference between blogging for public relations and blogging for friends and family, the latter of which might include sharing special events in your life or your personal opinions about the news. The key to using blogging as an effective PR tool is to focus on providing content that is of value to your audience. Building a strong readership lies in providing specific information that your readers need and might not be able to find anywhere else. This also includes cultivating active conversations with your audience, weighing their ideas, and leading a discussion that will ultimately unearth a wealth of insights that an entire community can benefit from.

Further, using blogging as part of your public relations strategy is really all about establishing yourself as an expert in your field. The more you write about whatever topic your business is related to, the higher your site will rank on search engines, which lends itself to building more credibility. These factors increase the likelihood that a member of the media looking to write a story about your topic will rely on you as a source.

Tips for PR Blogging

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When you are blogging for public relations, you need to build a good and steady source of traffic to your [blog](). The way to do this is to post information that is keyword rich, valuable, unique and frequent.

Let's look at each of those aspects individually so we can see how they fit together.

- **Keyword rich:** Think about the words that people would type into a search engine if they were looking for a Web site like yours. For instance, if your blog is about gardening in the shade, people might type in shade gardening, shade garden, low-light gardening and so on. You want to use these search terms liberally (but not too excessively) on your site.

- **Valuable:** Your content must be valuable to the reader in order for him or her to keep coming back. Don't just tell part of the story; give them everything they need to know.

- **Unique:** This of course ties into being valuable-you need to provide content that's not like everything else that's out there on the web. If we go back to shade gardening, for instance, most people who are interested in this topic know ferns and hostas are popular shady choices. Add to the discussion by taking your site in a different direction, such as writing about shade gardens in a certain region of the country or shade gardening in low-water areas.

- **Frequent:** Post something every day if you can. If not, try for every other day. You definitely don't want to go longer than a week between postings. People won't remember to check your site for updates if they get used to not seeing anything new, and you'll rank higher on the search engines if you post frequently.

This powerful combination will help you maximize the visibility, reach, and exposure of your blog, while also establishing your expertise in your field.

We Analyzed the 10 Most Popular Blogs in the World and Here's What We Found

BY **VISHVESHWAR JATAIN** [JULY 20, 2015]()

We at AdPushup try to learn from the best and apply it to our work. One day, some of us got talking about our favorite blogs on the internet and what we thought made them so great.

That's where the idea for this post came from… we wanted to deconstruct the most popular blogs in the world and figure out how they worked.

Everything from the big things to the small details. What CMS did the blog run on? What fonts did they use? What was their ad strategy? We learnt a lot in the process and we hope that you will too.

These are the blogs we chose to analyze based on the average of each blog's Alexa Global Traffic Rank, and U.S. Traffic Rank from both Compete and Quantcast:

1. Huffington Post

2. Boing Boing

3. TMZ

4. Business Insider

5. Mashable

6. Gawker

7. The Daily Beast

8. TechCrunch

9. Perez Hilton

10. Engadget

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Let's get started.

Table of Contents:

☐

Homepage

Did you know that typically 50% of all web traffic lands on the homepage of a website and it takes a visitor only 1/10th of a second to form an impression about your website?

Failure to impress at this stage is almost a certain way to alienate potential readers for good. Big publications know this more than anyone — after all, it's their business.

So are there any tips or best practices we can draw from studying what they do? Let's find out.

[easy-tweet tweet="It takes a visitor only 1/10th of a second to form an impression about your website." user="adpushup" usehashtags="no"]

Advertising

Well, no surprises here — 100% of blogs we analyzed use advertising to monetize their homepage — so much for all the never-ending talk about the inevitable and impending death of display ads.

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Given, gradually declining CTR has decreased the overall revenue potential of display ads, but that doesn't mean publishers are giving up on it just yet.

Seven out of 10 publishers also use alternate monetization strategies such as native advertising and content recommendation systems such as Outbrain and Taboola to supplement display revenue.

Social accounts

With the exception of Gawker, all other blogs had their social media accounts displayed somewhere on the homepage — some more prominently than the others.

Gawker, along with many of its sister blogs such as io9, Jezebel, Lifehacker, Gizmodo, Deadspin, and Kotaku run on Gawker media's proprietary Kinja platform, which hinges on a minimalist design philosophy and has as few elements on the homepage as possible and no more.

Out of the nine blogs that did feature social accounts, only Facebook and Twitter were common to all, the third most common being Google+.

Other social accounts displayed included Tumblr, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, YouTube, and Stumble Upon.

A balanced approach here is probably the best way to go — not over clutter the homepage with 10 accounts, but definitely display the most important ones such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+.

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"AdPushup helped increase our revenue through automatic ad layout testing. Our UX has gotten better due to dynamic placement — a feature you don't find in ad insertion plugins on WordPress."

Chaitanya Patel
Founder, Tech Apple

User account management

70% of the blogs we analyzed feature a user account management system where users can register, create profiles, and manage their subscriptions among many other things.

The decision of whether or not your blog needs a user management system largely depends on your specific aims and objectives:

- Do you want to want to crowd-source your content?

- Do you plan to run a forum for user interactions?

- Do you want users to be able to privately message each other?

If yes, then you need a user management system. While in some cases, user management systems are custom made for the purpose, there are plugins available for WordPress that you can just install and use right out of the box.

These plugins allow functionality such as registration, reset password and edit profile, content restriction, user badges, guest post support, subscription management, and more.

UserPro is an example of one such plugin. If you're looking for a free alternative, try WP User Frontend.

Subscription

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Email and RSS subscriptions are a great way to build a captive audience for your blog – some blogs display the subscription boxes in the sidebar or a similar prominent place, while others use a popup to the same end.

Surprisingly, none of the blogs that we analyzed as part of our study list utilized a popup, maybe because the general perception is that popups are annoying. **7 out of the ten offered users a subscription box, out of which 4 offered both email and RSS subscriptions, 2 offered only email, and one offered only RSS**.

Practically speaking, there's no real reason why you shouldn't be offering your readers subscription options, whether you do that by popup or by a box is something that depends on the trade off between potentially higher subscription rate and the chance of annoying a part of your readership.

[Icegram](), [OptinMonster](), and [Privy]() are good options if you want to set up a popup based email subscription box on your blog.

If you want to use a subscription box instead, the first thing you'll need to ensure is that your theme supports sidebars – if not, you'll probably either need to change the theme or modify it to support them. Once that's done, you can either use the default subscription box that WordPress provides or use a plugin such as [Simply Subscribe]() if you need more features.

Top navigation

Eight out of 10 blogs we analyzed (exceptions being Boing Boing and Gawker) feature a prominent top navigation menu using which the readers can easily browse content.

Having a top navigation menu does lend a sense of familiarity to any blog since we're used to seeing information online in a particular way — so sometimes a navigation menu becomes conspicuous by its absence. But that doesn't mean you have to have one.

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For instance, if you focus more on quality than quantity and your design is minimalist — you can get away without using a top navigation menu — many blogs do. It's good to have but not necessary.

Sidebar

Once a default feature of almost all blogs, sidebars are becoming less and less common with more modern designs taking its place. Although sidebars can be quite useful functionally: You can use them to display subscription boxes, display ads, popular posts, and social accounts among other things. In the blogs that we analyzed, **six out of 10 used sidebars**.

Design

As someone famous once said, "Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works." (Psst: It was Steve Jobs.) This couldn't be more apt for blogs — a design that's pleasing to the eye, though a necessary part of good design — does not wholly constitute it.

How user-friendly is the interface? Is the blog easy to navigate? How is the overall user experience? These are the questions that design concerns itself with. Let's look at how these blogs fared at some of the most common design indicators.

Responsive

Response design is definitely amongst the biggest web design trends of the last decade. And if you thought that it's just another one of those buzzwords, think again — implementing a responsive design on your blog or website will significantly increase its usability.

So what is responsive design? Quite simply, makes content more uniformly accessible across different devices and screen resolutions. For instance, if you try to view a non-responsive blog on a small screen, you will probably need to do a lot of panning and scrolling to get anything done — responsive design eliminates this problem by keeping the design elements fluid, i.e. depending on the window size of the browser or the screen resolution of the display device, the content will automatically resize itself for a seamless viewing experience.

Coming to the blogs we analyzed, five out of 10 featured a responsive design. It's interesting to note that the blogs that did have a responsive design (Mashable, TechCrunch, Engadget…) are the same ones that also cover technology as one of their beats, as opposed to business or celebrity blogs (Business Insider, TMZ, Perez Hilton…). Although it's worth noting that those who don't have responsive designs have mobile versions instead — it's not ideal but it's definitely better than nothing.

[easy-tweet tweet="Five out of 10 websites in our sample featured a responsive design." user="adpushup" usehashtags="no"]

Seems like the common theme uniting the latter group is that they simply don't know better. Ideally, you don't want to be in that group in 2015, when more people access the internet using mobile devices than PCs.

As a blogger, the quickest way to go responsive is to purchase an out-of-the-box responsive theme and just customize it to your specific purpose. You can also hire a designer to create a theme for you, but it's a trade off because all that custom development comes at a higher price.

Content Management System

Content management systems serve multiple purposes: They allow users with little or no knowledge of programming and markup languages to manage a website; they act as a repository for all media assets such as page content, metadata, images and videos; and incorporate the

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functionality to collaborate, manage documents, and enable multiple author editing and participation.

Among the blogs that we analyzed for this post, three (Boing Boing, TechCrunch, TMZ) were found to be running on [WordPress](#), six were running on a custom design, and Gawker of course, ran on its own platform Kinja. Custom designs are tailor fit according to your specific requirements, but this comes at cost that's significantly higher than most out-of-the-box content management systems (most of which are actually free).

There are many out-of-the-box content management systems in the market, but possibly the most widely used by bloggers is WordPress — which is used by over 60 million websites including CNN, Bloomberg, The Rolling Stones, MIT, Vogue among many others.

Setup is really simple, all you need to do is download the package and install it on your server. WordPress has a large developer community constantly creating new plugins and themes for it, making it extremely customizable.

As mentioned before, there are many other options to explore when choosing a content management system for your blog; [Drupal](#) and [Joomla](#), two of the other largest content management systems and WordPress's direct competitors, are also worth looking into.
Other than the established players, there's a slew of new entrants such as [Ghost](#), [Wardrobe](#), and [Dropplets](#) who are making their presence felt — although they tend to sacrifice features in favor of simplicity, which can be a good or a bad thing depending on what you need from your blog.

Page load speed

Although more an indicator of good design rather than a feature of it, page load speeds have a significant impact on a website's user experience. In an age where information is ubiquitous, users generally

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have little patience for a page that takes too long to load — so every passing second counts.

A study by [Akamai](#) found that 47% of people expect a page to load in two seconds or less while 40% abandon a website that takes more than three seconds to load. Therefore, slow page load speed is like digital suicide for content producers.

We measure page load speeds with Pingdom Tools using New York as the location for all tests to ensure consistency, you there are many other tools such as YSlow and GTMetrix that you can use for the same effect too.

In our tests, two blogs loaded under two seconds, five loaded under five seconds, and the remaining three took over five seconds. **Recorded minimum and maximum were 1.06 seconds and 13.8 seconds respectively. The average page load speed of all the 10 blogs came out to be 5.63 seconds**, which isn't bad considering that [Google estimates the world average to be around 7 seconds](#), but it isn't ideal either.

In a best case scenario, your page should load under two seconds, any more than that and you start losing readers. Here's a [guide from Crazy Egg on how to reduce page load speeds](#) and [here's another from Sparring Minds that was specifically written for WordPress](#).

Comment system

Most content management systems come with their own commenting systems, but they're not particularly feature rich, which led to the development of many third party specialized commenting systems with social logins, nested comments, and more features.

Two of the blogs we analyzed were using [Disqus](#) as their commenting system, two were using [Livefyre](#), two were using [Facebook comments](#), two were using a custom design commenting system, and two used no comment system at all, which works if you don't need discussion around your content or if you don't yet have significant traffic.

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In terms of functionality, both Disqus and Livefyre are quite similar; although, the latter has a slightly slicker interface. Facebook comments have a unique advantage in that they can make the commenting process quite friction-less as anyone who is logged into their Facebook account (hint: almost everyone is, all the time) can just leave a comment without requiring to login again. Another strong contender, though not seen in this list, is IntenseDebate — created by Automattic — the same people who built WordPress.

Content recommendation systems

Shrinking ad revenues caused by declining CTRs across the board have forced publishers to try out more innovative ad practices such as ad testing, ad optimization, and native advertising.
Content recommendation is one such forms of native advertising that has become really popular with online publishers in recent years. Although it works on the same principle as display advertising, where the advertiser pays a certain amount to the publisher on a per click basis, it's the nature of ads that differs — basically, the sponsored content is created to look less like an ad and more like something of genuinely to value to a reader, thus increasing overall engagement and revenue.

70% of publishers in our sample use some or the other content recommendation system, proving that this is no passing trend. Among the ones that did use a content recommendation system, three used Gravity, two used Outbrain, and two used Taboola. Here are some other ad networks that you can consider too.

Typography

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Some would argue that typography is really just a part of design and should therefore fall under it. And while we agree wholeheartedly with that, the goal of keeping it as a separate section in this post is only to emphasize its relative importance in the larger scheme of things. You could have the best design and yet it will all fall flat if you have bad typography.

Font type

During our analysis, we only looked at fonts in the body copy because that's where the reader spend their most time on any website — this is not to be taken as a sign that body copy fonts are more important than headline fonts, the latter are just as important.

We only did this because understanding the dynamic of the two is beyond the scope of this article, although Smashing Magazine has this excellent guide on anyone looking to gain a better understanding of it. Four out of 10 blogs in our analysis featured a Serif typeface, while the majority went with Sans Serif. Interestingly, in all four cases of the Serif typeface, the font used was Georgia, whereas the Sans Serif family saw much more diversity with the use of Verdana, Ariel, Helvetia, Open Sans, Verdana, and Segoe UI.

Font size

The second most important aspect of typography after the typeface and font itself, font size can play an important part in the overall readability of content. The smallest font size observed was 14px on Perez Hilton and the maximum was 19px on Business Insider, with the average font size being 15.8 px. As a subjective opinion, it was the largest font size as seen

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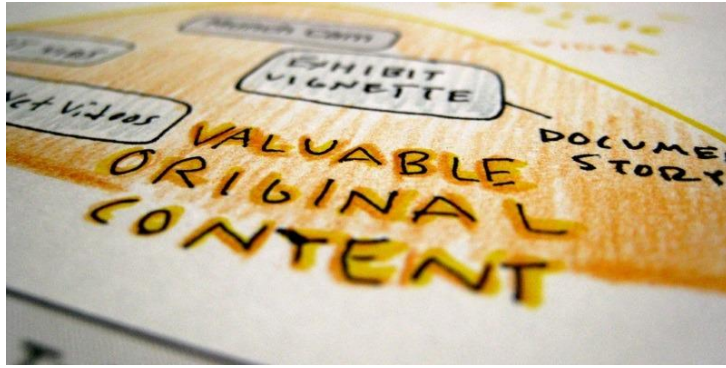
on Business Insider that looked the most readable without looking *too big*. Aside from the few outliers, a majority of the blogs opted for either 15px or 16px as their choice of font size. Whenever possible, [size 16px or higher should be opted for as a rule of thumb](#).

Content

Last but certainly not the least, we looked at the length and relative difficulty (or ease) of comprehension with respect to the content.

Post length

Due to the extreme variation in post lengths where one post could be a 100 word update and the next could be a 4,000 word think piece, it was difficult to ascertain a post length that was reflective of a blog or demonstrated a trend, so we looked at the last five posts from each blog and calculated their average to arrive at an indicative number.

The average post length for all blogs turned out to be 518 words per post. TMZ, Perez Hilton, Gawker, and Engadget all had an average post length of under 300 words per post — this makes sense because the first two focus on publishing small snippets of celebrity gossip and the latter two have a heavy focus on curation. All the others have an average post length of over 400 words with Boing Boing, Mashable, and the Daily Beast clocking in the highest at 738, 784, and 1205 words respectively.
There's a lot of debate about what the average post length should be — some say it should be no less than 1500 as it helps with better search rankings, others say it should around the 2000 mark, and yet others claim

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that the sweet spot is 2500, but these blogs prove that blog length is not the only yardstick real-world performance — although admittedly they all have a post frequency much higher than your average blog. [Here's an interesting take on the subject](#) by Neil Patel, which essentially states that you shouldn't restrict yourself to any hard and fast rules.

Ease of reading

The second thing we measured as part of our content analysis was the ease of reading. We used the widely accepted Flesch–Kincaid reading scale to measure the blog content. As with post length, we first calculated the score for the last five posts for each blog individually and then took an average to arrive at an indicative number. Here's the scale:

- 90.0–100.0 easily understood by an average 11-year-old student

- 60.0–70.0 easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students

- 0.0–30.0 best understood by university graduates

As you can see, a higher score means that the text is easier to comprehend and a lower score indicates that it's tougher. **The average number we got for all 10 blogs is 67.73 with Business Insider being the highest on the scale at 83.3 and TechCrunch being the lowest at 57.64** — all blogs fall within a range that's quite readable according to the scale. It's difficult to know if this is a conscious effort on part of the editorial teams of the blogs, but chances are that such a thing is not an "accident". A high score obviously has the benefit of being accessible to a larger group of people as proficient readers can read easy text but relatively unskilled readers will struggle with complicated text.

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