**Why Blog?**

Your blog is your platform and your online CV. It tells the world who you are and what you write about. When you seek publication in other venues, whether online or in print, having a “platform” is EVERYTHING.  A successful platform tells potential publishers and agents that you have already established a following – and that is built in marketing for you and all of your material.

**But – I’m a screenwriter!**

YES. Good. But you also need to have a body of work and a bigger set of muscles as a writer than just scripts.

Two VERY big reasons for this:

1) If you have a wider audience – other things you write about and people who know you exist as a writer, it is very impressive to agents and managers. It puts you on the map in a much bigger way. It is an impressive calling card.

2) Interestingly enough, screenwriters are among the most desperate, pained, overlooked writers around and they do it to themselves – why?

They focus on ONE script or ONE type of writing career to the exclusion of anything else. This ramps up their desperation and tunnel vision and then when it all falls away – as it can do – they have nothing else that they have developed. Ask my friend who was a Disney screenwriting fellow and earned over $200K a year until the fellowship ended (as they do) and she spent two years and five scripts trying to get back in that door – as a former Disney fellow. It never happened. Now she’s writing romance novels and in love with life again.

Now – those two points ought to be compelling enough, in and of themselves, so let’s go back to more basic points and benefits of blogging:

Your blog is your publisher. Even if you write prose mostly as a hobby or a creative outlet (as opposed to your screenwriting) your blog is a nicely designed, curated space where your writing lives in an organized fashion. Your blog is only as visible as you make it, i.e., if you want to keep your blog only for yourself or your immediate friends or family that is easy enough to do. Blogs can even have hidden pages (mine has several) that readers can only access if you specifically give them the link.

Blogging makes you a savvy writer and having the basic - and I mean basic, I'm doing it, guys - skills to create and maintain a blog is important in many ways. Get with the 21st century. Successful writers no longer live in turrets nor have butlers. You must also know how to market yourself and to interact with readers online.

**What Do I Blog About?**

Again, your blog is your online CV, your "store" so to speak. It's all things you. There are many uses for blogs:

1) As your professional CV, where your writing and links to it can be found.

2) As your personal webpage, with links to things you love, photos, etc. can be found.

3) A place to showcase your other writing. Which you ARE doing, right? Don’t handicap yourself, screenwriters. You are a rare breed, a special one, but in the big picture, you are a very small group.

4) A place to highlight your essays about particular subjects of your expertise OR a place in which you muse about your particularly unique yet universal life. These essays can be expert essays, instructional in nature, or they can be purely for entertainment's sake.

5) A place to write your novel serially - should you so desire.

6) All of the above.

Again, you can create hidden pages so that your blog is 99% professional in nature but perhaps you have a page only for family members or friends.

Here is a link to a member of the RSWR – Gary Thomas, and his very nice screenwriting blog. Notice how simple it is and how easy it is to get to know more about Gary.

[Gary’s Blog](http://garythomas.co.uk/about)

**So - What is Important in Blogging Well?**

Writing What Grabs Readers Online: Truth

Readers love authenticity and honesty because in our day-to-day lives people so often push the uncomfortable stuff under the rug.

Journaling about what annoys you has a short life span. It’s only mildly entertaining and a lot of people write in this way. But it is forgettable writing.

Be provocative, push the envelope, be funny, be serious - be YOU. You want your readers to keep coming back for more. You want your readers to become fans of your work.

Finding Your Niche

If you want to blog in a bigger, more meaningful way, you have to come up with a brand - who are you? What is your niche? What is unique about you and your life? What is your take on life? Once you identify that, couch every essay/blog entry you write in your niche. Say you were to blog about the marriage equality debate in the US right now. How does that relate to you and your particular niche? Where are you from? How did you grow up? What is your perspective both personally and more globally? What opinion or specific experience do you bring to bear on the subject?

Authentic and REAL is what readers crave. Don’t you? When I read stuff online that skates along the surface and is pat and pre-packaged, I get really bored really fast. Readers LOVE to read writing that is confessional and real, that takes risks. Because we all have things we think about or experience that we want to share. But most of us can’t write so we read what somebody else has to say on the topic and when we do that, we find comfort in the commonalities of the human experience.

Organize Your Writing Around YOUR Unique Perspective and Story

 I am the woman who worked (and works) in the Hollywood entertainment industry but who also moved to the Middle East. Quite a strange combination of things. I am an expert in a particular area: story and writing. Those are my calling cards. My writing revolves around those things. What's your unique story?

Organize every blog post like this

1) This is the topic I am writing about today and here is how or why this idea came to me, struck me, crossed my path.

2) This is how I relate to this topic from my unique experience/brand, point of view.

3) This is more on this topic that is universal that you can relate to also.

4) Conclusion: this is what I conclude about this topic in a universal way for you, the reader, and I am also giving you my particular point of view, which is unique.

Each blog entry has a beginning (a set up) a middle (the meat of the blog post) and an end (the conclusion, the wrap up, the lesson and the point).

A good essay adheres to the same story telling techniques as fiction. So we could look at numbers one through four above and notice that number one is the beginning (set up) numbers 2 and 3 are the middle (the delving deeper, the details, the questions the topic raises for you) and number 4 is the end (the wrap up, the conclusion, the point).

Make each blog entry short – perhaps 500 words at the most. Readers have short attention spans today. Your fiction can be longer but make sure you label it as such.

What the Blog-o-sphere Has to Offer

The blog-o-sphere offers us an opportunity to discuss ideas more than ever in an endless space with endless possibilities. Most people use their blogs in only a couple of ways: to sell their product or to write about themselves in a way that is not really about sharing ideas that matter. If you can blog about something that manages to entertain, share about yourself but also put forth ideas that matter - well, that's the brass ring. That should be a blogger's goal: entertain, provoke dialogue, share universally as well as personally and leave something behind - a new idea, a new inspiration - that adds to a conversation that has legs, that leads to more.

**Gaining and Monitoring Your Readership**

Use Google Analytics

It will help you analyze just how your site is working for you - how many readers you have, etc. There are visitors, unique visitors and bounce rates that factor in. It can feel a bit complicated at first but if you click around enough, you can figure out how to use it and how to understand what is working - and not working in your blog. You can find out how your readers are finding you (from Google searches as one example, or from links on other blogs, etc.). Having this type of analysis at your fingertips will be one of your most helpful tools in figuring out how to go forward with your blog. Do not check your numbers obsessively, I only check once a month or so.

Quantity/Frequency of Blogging

Question:

How often do you have to blog? What kind of a commitment are we talking about?

Answer:

How successful do you want your blog to be?

Your readership will go up significantly if you blog consistently on particular days a week. Schedule your blogs ahead of time rather than working on your blog daily. You will save tons of time doing this. [My blog](http://www.rswriters.com) is scheduled at least one month ahead of time. Every time you post, you can choose when your blog will publish. Get out a calendar and schedule your blogs for at least two to three days per week and no more than five. I used to blog every day and it was a huge time suck. Not to mention that I lost momentum and inspiration. Now I just set aside time once every few weeks and make sure to line up lots of interesting things to do and read on my blog for the month.

Google Analytics, for example, told me that readership fell off quite a bit on the weekends. So I don't post on weekends or holidays. Do what feels right and works for you. Maybe you want to blog just a little bit every day. Use your analytics to see when your readership is the highest.

You need to get the RSS feed of your blog and have it be at the end of every blog so that users can get notified every time you update your blog with a new entry. You can find the RSS feed of your blog in your dashboard. If you are not signed up for Feedburner, please look them up.

Marketing Tip

Title your non-fiction blog entries provocatively but plainly: How to, How I, Top Five Ways to.... This is a good way to lure readers in but you want to keep them coming back with good content. A one off reader does not a platform build.

Design

Readers need to see immediately your name and what your blog is about. This will lower your “bounce” rate. Bounces are when people go to your blog and immediately change their minds and leave. It goes without saying that you want as few bounces as possible. Personally, I find that reading white print on top of a black background is really hard on the eyes. Choose a theme and color palette that you like but that is also easy to read and can be seen well on mobile devices.

If you are a member of the RSWR, you get a $50 coupon off a consultation with [Gina Kashuk Designs](http://gkashdesigns.com) to give your blog a quick go-over to make sure the design works for you. Gina worked with me on the Red Slipper site and she is amazing. A normal consult is $150 so that’s only $100 with your RSWR discount. [You can contact Gina HERE.](mailto:gina@gkashdesigns.com?subject=RSWR%20Discount%20)

About YOU

You really need this on your blog. Readers want to learn about who is writing this, where you are from, what your professional creds are or anything else. Who is the personality behind this blog, in other words.

Categories

Create a “category cloud” so that every blog post is listed in a way that readers can easily check out what you’ve written on a particular subject.

Keyword tags

 Users use Google to search for what they are looking for. Google itself “crawls” your site every day (creepy, right?) and looks for keywords so it can index your site.  Your Google Analytics will tell you which phrases or keywords people used to find your site. Look at those keywords and USE THEM constantly.

Tip: Include your NAME as a keyword in every blog post so that if someone searches for you the blog will come up. Try to use keywords that are specific that really point to your blog, like “chicago bloggers” or anything you can think of about you and the post that is specific.

A Blogroll

Find as many other sites and blogs as you can that you love, that blog about similar things and put their URLS in the Blog Roll section of your blog. This will show up on your home page, as a long column on the right, usually. List blogs on your blog roll that reflect your tastes and interests so that readers of your blog can go to other sites and enjoy similar content. Go those blogs and leave positive, sincere comments. Leave the name and URL of your blog in your comment (that is usually automatic). Link backs are very powerful for driving traffic.

Help Your Posts Get Shared

Go to [Share This](http://sharethis.com/) and get the share buttons. Put these at the top of every single blog post so that someone who reads and likes the post can share it on FB, Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest, Stumble Upon, email and others. Stumble Upon and Reddit are both very powerful.

There is also something called [Add This](http://www.addthis.com/) which helps analyze what people shared and how many clicks you got.

Network Your Blog

There are a number of [blog networks](http://www.searchenginejournal.com/9-networks-you-can-use-for-guest-blogging-and-blogger-outreach-2/50801/) and networking tools that will connect you automatically to other blogs in similar categories as yours.

Share your blog posts on your Facebook, Google+, Twitter and any other social networks. Stumble Upon and Reddit are both great sites for sharing.

The Content and Presentation of Your Blog Posts:

Make sure that each blog post is no longer than 500-750 words. 500 words is the sweet spot.  Readers have come to expect bite sized pieces. Blogs that are longer than 750 words or so will be too much for most readers.

Make SURE to have a visual, a picture of some sort with every blog post. It makes your post instantly more appealing.

Make SURE you edit each post so that it is perfect. No grammatical errors, typos, etc. This will erode your credibility immediately. We're all human, a mistake or two occasionally happens - but strive to seek out and destroy errors before you hit "publish".

Make sure that each entry has some kind of “take away” for your readers – some wisdom if not an action step they can take. Also see if you can end the blog with a question so that you can get your readers to interact with you and with each other.

Link to other articles and websites in each post

Direct your readers to other sites. This will stimulate web traffic for you and make your posts more dynamic.  Every time you mention something, say even a definition that people may not know, link it to the definition on Wiki, or to another article on the same topic.

Monetizing Your Blog

This falls firmly under the category of "hold your horses". It takes a lot of time and work to grow your blog and it's readership to the point where you have enough meaningful traffic to warrant advertising. There are many ways to go about monetizing your blog and it is a good goal but until you have a least several hundred regular monthly visitors, this is a non-issue.

There are basically three ways you can earn income from your blog:

Using the subscriber model, in which readers must be a member of your blog/community to access the best content.

Pros: You can make a regular income - if it costs $9.99 a month to belong and you have even 100 subscribers, that's $1,000 a month you can earn.

Cons: The value and the content you must provide must be wide, varied and copious. Most of your content you give away. The website back end for this model is complex and not inexpensive to create. This is not a simple WordPress blog. There is a lot of controversy regarding subscription websites; Haaretz lost a large number of readers immediately upon conversion. Their numbers are coming back up but this is a news source. Unless your site is truly commercial with ebooks, podcasts and a number of other valuable items, this is not the way to go for you.

Paid Ad Space: This is obviously the best kind of monetizing you can do. Once you have a high readership, you reach out to businesses in your space and offer ad space. There is a metric of hits to bounce rate to page placement that is taken into account. Bottom line you are renting space on your page. This can be lucrative if you have the numbers to get these types of advertisers. It is, however, not what many big advertisers so, in favor of affiliate marketing.

Pros: Your site will not be cluttered with small, annoying ads that are often dubious (casinos and the like). You can get paid handsomely. I do.

Cons: Really, none. But you have to have a relatively significant readership (at LEAST a few thousand a month) before you would be considered for this.

Affiliate Marketing: This is when you feature an ad on your site and you get paid by click through. That means if someone clicks on the blog, you get a few pennies. It takes time to add up because you can't control whether or not people click and the pay is fairly low on the whole. Unless your blog is covered in affiliate ads but then this of course cheapens the look of your blog. However, this is quite common. Advertisers would much rather pay you per click than rent the space outright. This puts the risk on you not them. Very crafty. [Google Ad Sense](http://adsense.blogspot.co.il/) falls under this category as well and while it is the same idea, it is slightly less onerous to use.

Pros: Those pennies can add up.

Cons: Can clutter your website and can be time-consuming on the back end as you manage your affiliate partnerships. This is a daily if not weekly task.

**-Links to articles on the topic of monetizing**

[When to Start Monetizing](http://heartifb.com/2013/07/19/when-to-start-monetizing-your-blog/)

[Affiliate Marketing](http://mashable.com/2013/02/09/monetize-affiliate-marketing/)

[How to Monetize Your Blog](http://createblog.co/how-to-monetize-your-blog/)

**Resources**

[Best Blog Platforms](https://www.udemy.com/blog/best-blogging-platform/)

[Set up a Wordpress Blog](http://wordpress.com/)

[Write to Done:](http://writetodone.com/category/blogwriting/)

[Wix.com](http://www.wix.com) (what I used to set up the RSWR)

[Square Space](http://www.squarespace.com) (another do-it-yourself option)

[Gary Thomas Blog](http://garythomas.co.uk/blog) (for inspiration)