

Blogging by Ruth Cotton

**HUNTER
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Starting a blog is easy. Fuelled by momentum and the desire to succeed, you'll keep going for weeks, months, even years. Then, at some point, your commitment will be tested.

Just as our world changes, so too does the environment in which we blog. Blogging is not a 'set and forget' endeavour – in the fast moving world of digital technology and capricious consumer preferences, bloggers must constantly read the environment, and adapt to survive.

What follows is a distillation of a few things I've learned in the course of two years of writing my blog Hidden Hamilton (<http://hiddenhamilton.blogspot.com.au/>).

Purpose! Purpose! Purpose!

Successful blogs are clear about their purpose. Why do you want to blog? What about? The purpose of my blog Hidden Hamilton is - 'discovering stories about Hamilton' - but there is room to roam within the rest of my tagline– 'its people, places, past and present'. Linda Drummond's Pink Patent Mary Janes blog (<http://www.pinkpatentmaryjanes.com/>) has a clear focus on 'lifestyle and meal-planning' with ample roaming scope in 'all the awesome things that Newcastle has to offer'.

Invite a friend to mentor you through clarifying your purpose and writing your tag line. I promise you will be rewarded for the time and effort.

Writer first, blogger second

Writing for a blog is different from writing for other genres, especially in the use of short paragraphs, but the foundation is being able to write well. Good blog writing:

- Grabs readers with an engaging opening – if not, they are lost at the starting post
- Breaks content into digestible bits, interspersed with images
- Avoids the easy reach for clichés
- Never forgets the reader - asks questions, uses humour and offers surprises
- Brings the writer into the story, but is not self indulgent. Eden Riley's post of 1 December 2014 is good writing that is personal and deeply moving (<http://www.edenriley.com/>).

Getting started

The internet abounds with resources and tips on blogging – for example, <http://www.elleandcompanydesign.com/blog/2014/12/3/finding-your-blogging-niche>, <http://www.problogger.net> and <http://beginnerblogginglesson.blogspot.com.au>

Your first decision will be what platform to use – Blogger or Wordpress?

Other essentials:

- Search for blogs with appealing designs and layout – but don't get trapped in indecision. Check out <http://www.bloglovin.com> to find blog variety beyond your wildest dreams.
- Prepare drafts of posts, with captions, then copy and paste into the blog (I add images last, making sure they are low resolution).
- Have a few posts in stock before going live, to give momentum.
- Be scrupulous in acknowledging sources, and attribute images to their owners.

— Back up your blog.

Expanding readership

Pay early attention to SEO (search engine optimisation) so you can be found quickly on the web. Mastering tags/categories/labels and ensuring social media buttons and links are well placed helps promote reach and readership.

Reader statistics provide useful feedback about which posts are most popular, and which specific actions increase traffic to your blog or Facebook page. Becoming obsessed with statistics is a dangerous occupational hazard.

Changes in the blogosphere

As more consumers choose to interact with content via social media rather than blog sites, subscribing to blogs is in decline. My most effective strategy to increase blog readership was creating a Facebook page linked to my blog (<http://www.facebook.com/hiddenhamilton>). My readers love the small bites of content, and the ease of commenting, interacting and sharing. Concentrate on increasing your social media presence on a couple of platforms that your readers like, and that are a good fit with the style and content of your blog.

Peer support, and local resources

While a cyberspace community can be wonderful, there is no substitute for face to face contact with fellow bloggers. The Hunter Writer's Centre has a Blogging Group that meets monthly in Hamilton, Newcastle. Another local resource is www.newcastlewrites.com, a website created by 'Belinda'. It showcases blogs and their writers from Newcastle and the Hunter – read this profile of Kimberly O'Sullivan, who writes the blog West End Adventures <http://www.newcastlewrites.com/meet-newcastle-blogger-kimberly-osullivan>.

Newcastle Writes also has a directory of resources for bloggers.

Life cycle of a blog

While blogging does demand commitment, it's not for life. Recognising when it's time to close your blog is like ending a relationship. It needs to be done, respectfully, and your readers informed. There is no shame in ending a blog. Other priorities or opportunities may have arisen; we may want to spend our time differently; or the blog may have simply run its course.

Concluding the personal profile of her blog A Geriatric Grandmother <http://mimsie-ageriatricgrandmother.blogspot.com.au/>, 82 year old Mimsie writes: 'Will I keep it up? Goodness alone knows, only time will tell but here goes anyway. I don't have a lot of followers but those I do have are very precious to me.'

Ruth Cotton's recently published book 'Hidden Hamilton' captures the highlights of her blog, and is richly illustrated with historical and contemporary photographs. It can be purchased for \$39.95 online at hunterpress.com.au or direct from various Newcastle outlets listed on that site. Ruth's blog 'Hidden Hamilton' has been selected for preservation by the State Library of NSW and included in Pandora, Australia's web archive.

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