Twenty Essential Tools and Applications for Bloggers

By Charnita Fance

A blog is an interactive, proactive, and effective marketing tool. As a lawyer, it allows you the opportunity to provide constant, up-to-date, and relevant information to your target audience. It turns visitors into readers, who in turn become return readers and potential clients with whom you hopefully develop relationships. A blog provides a place for conversations to happen.

Keep in mind, though, that blogging can be quite a process. First, you may have to do some research, then put your thoughts together, and of course add any necessary screenshots and images. Let's not forget the optimization part (SEO, or search engine optimization; keywords; etc.) and sharing your content on the web so others will read and hopefully share it. With all these steps, blogging can be quite time consuming, and many bloggers get burned out rather quickly.

Lucky for us, the process doesn't have to be so difficult anymore. Thanks to the web and technology, there are hundreds of tools out there to assist with the blogging process and make it less of a headache. This article will explore some of the top tools and applications for easier blogging.

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—JoAnn Hathaway and Diane Ebersole, **Practice Management Advisors**

Save Ideas for Later

Tools that let you save items for later use are great time-savers because you can save web pages, images, and files as you're reading or browsing. If you come across an interesting tool that you may want to blog about later, you can save it with a single click and look at it later when you have the time. These tools are also great for storing and organizing all your ideas and finding them again when needed.

Read-it-Later

With this tool, you can save web pages to your Read-it-Later list to be read at a later time. Items can be saved from your computer or mobile devices through numerous applications and integrations. You can access your list just about anywhere for online or offline reading.

A similar tool is Instapaper, which works in the same way but doesn't have as many applications. One of the best things about Instapaper is that you can forward full e-mails to save for later (Read-it-Later only allows you to save links via e-mail).

Evernote

You can capture anything from web pages to images, text, and voice notes with Evernote. Just like Read-it-Later, there are numerous applications and integrations that let you save items to your account. Your notes can be accessed from just about anywhere by a computer or mobile device. Plus, with the ability to search all your notes, including text within images, you'll be able to find things quickly.

Springpad

Springpad is much like Evernote, but refers to itself as "really, really smart notes." It's about more than just saving notes; you can also save tasks, set reminders with alerts, and look up items to save like products, restaurants, and recipes. With Springpad, you don't have to worry about organizing your thoughts because it does it all for you automatically. So if you want to blog about a specific product or location, Springpad lets you remember and access these items conveniently from your computer or mobile device.

Catch

Don't let the simple design fool you— Catch is a very effective tool for privately saving notes, ideas, images, places, lists, and more. You can then sync those items between your computer and mobile device. It uses a hash-tag system (much like Twitter) to add tags to your items for organizing. If you're looking for a simple tool without all the bells, whistles, and extra features, then Catch is a great option. It has a variety of browser extensions and mobile apps.

Trail-Mix

Trail-Mix lets you "squirrel away" notes, images, web pages, and files within your browser. It currently works as a Firefox sidebar only. You can drag and drop items like links, text, and images into the sidebar to save for later.

If you're looking for a similar tool to use in Chrome, you may want to check out Read Later Fast from Diigo (no relation to Read-it-Later). Items are added through an option in the right-click content menu. It's a Chrome app, so it works in its own tab as opposed to the sidebar (like Firefox).

Diigo

With Diigo you can annotate the web by highlighting, adding sticky notes, bookmarking, taking screenshots, saving images, and more. You can then manage it all and reference your findings from your Diigo account for later use. Best of all, whenever

you return to a page that you've annotated, your notes will still be there. You can even see annotations that others have added to pages. You can use Diigo to annotate specific parts of web pages you want to use for a blog post or save items you want to read at a later time.

Blog Editors

While many prefer to use the editor that comes with their blogging platform, it can be much more convenient to use a blog editor—especially if you have more than one blog to update. Most blog editors allow you to write offline and then publish whenever you're online, and often make it easy to add pictures to your posts via drag and drop. You'll also find many other features you often can't find in your blogging platform.

Windows Live Writer

Windows Live Writer is one of the most popular blog editors for the Windows platform. You can create and edit blog posts, preview posts on your blog before publishing, and set up multiple blogs. You can add things like images, videos, and Bing maps. There are more than 100 plug-ins you can use with Windows Live Writer to add more features and increase its functionality. Best of all, Windows Live Writer is free.

BlogJet

BlogJet considers itself to be the "most advanced Windows blog editor and manager." With its WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor, you don't need any HTML knowledge. It's very speedy and lets you add Flickr images, YouTube videos, and file attachments. There are numerous other amazing features, and it works with multiple blogging formats. Unlike Windows Live Writer, BlogJet isn't free, but there is a free demo version.

ScribeFire

ScribeFire is an extension that you can get for Firefox, Chrome, Opera, and Safari. It's a full-featured blog editor that lets you create and publish blog posts from your browser. You can drag and drop text and images, schedule blog posts for later, tag and categorize, edit pages, post to multiple blogs, and more. While some find the end-

> If you are going to use one of these applications for secure client data (like Dropbox), be sure you understand who holds the encryption key. Some encrypt at *their* server level, while others encrypt at *your* desktop level.

less features in ScribeFire overwhelming, others just can't live without them.

Qumana

Qumana is another desktop blog editor that lets you edit and publish posts to one or more of your blogs. It can also be used offline and includes text formatting, Technorati tagging, and the ability to add images and advertising to your posts. Qumana works on both Windows and Mac and lets you type in the WYSIWYG editor or source view (for editing your own HTML).

Veeeb

Veeeb is a unique editor that integrates with your blogging platform (currently only WordPress and Drupal). It uses a process called "semantic text analysis" to scan your content for significant keywords and suggest relevant media and links. You can then drag and drop images and videos into your posts or store them for later use. If you need to find out more about a topic, you can do that as well with the integrated search.

Deepest Sender

Deepest Sender is another blog editor that lives in your browser. It runs inside Firefox, SeaMonkey, and XULRunner. You can add multiple accounts to be used with the WYSIWYG editor. It can be used as a full-page editor in a new tab or right from the sidebar, which lets you drag and drop text and images from the web into the editor. Other great features include crash recovery, drafts, post editing, and offline mode.

Content

The following tools will help you create content more quickly and make your posts more interesting to your readers.

Zemanta

Zemanta is a tool that works on the side of your blog editor. There are quite a few browser and server-side plug-ins you can use to enrich your blog posts. As you're typing in your blog editor, Zemanta will analyze your words and then suggest images, tags, links, and related articles for your content. Zemanta features more than 10 million images that you can use, all with the proper licensing.

PollDaddy

If you're looking for a quick and easy way to get opinions or feedback from your readers, creating surveys and polls through PollDaddy is a great option. You can get quick responses, plus it's an easy way to tally your comments instead of going through them individually. PollDaddy has a survey editor that is customizable and very easy to use. You can even get immediate responses from people using your iPhone, iPod Touch, or iPad with the iOS app.

Mobility

Dropbox

Dropbox is the ultimate tool for syncing files between your computer and mobile devices. There is a Dropbox app for just about every device and system, and there are even more integrations with other apps. Not only are your files always secure, but they're always with you wherever you go. If you need to save files for use later, just add them to Dropbox or sync them using a supported app.

Google Docs

If you're looking for a way to access your blog posts from anywhere, one of your best

options is to create and save them in Google Docs. Since Google Docs is a web-based word processor, you can access your account whether you're on a computer or mobile device. This allows you to work on the go from anywhere. You can also collaborate in real-time with others, which makes Google Docs great for collaborative posts and projects.

Dragon Dictation

While the Dragon Dictation computer software is pretty expensive, you can currently get it for free on the iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad. With Dragon Dictation, you can speak right into your device and have your words automatically transcribed for you. This is great for recording quick notes, thoughts, or ideas for your blog posts. You can then e-mail them to yourself to review and reference when needed.

Screenshots

If you're looking for a quick and easy way to grab screenshots for your posts without downloading any software, these three tools are very convenient.

Awesome Screenshot

Awesome Screenshot is a capture, annotation, and sharing tool by Diigo for Chrome, Firefox, and Safari. You can capture the visible part of a page, a selected area, or an entire page. Annotation tools include adding shapes, arrows, lines, and text. There is also a blur tool that is great for protecting your privacy and personal information you may capture. You have three options for saving your screenshots: save to the Awesome Screenshot website for a month, save to Diigo forever, or save on your computer.

FireShot

FireShot is an extension for Firefox, Chrome, Thunderbird, SeaMonkey, and Internet Explorer. It lets you capture, edit, annotate, organize, export, upload, and print screenshots from the web. There are quite a few capture options: entire page, visible part of page, selection, or browser window. One of the unique things about FireShot is the full set of editing and annotation tools that it provides. It also allows you to capture flash content.

Pixlr Grabber

With Pixlr Grabber, you can copy, save, edit, and share screenshots and images from the web. There is an extension for both Firefox and Chrome. You'll be able to grab only the visible part of the page, a defined area, or an entire web page. You can then share it on Imm.io (an image-sharing site by Pixlr) or save it to your desktop. Saving it to your desktop allows you to drag and drop or upload it to your blog post, depending on what you're using to create your content.

Optimization

SEO Blogger

With SEO Blogger, you can "find the most sought-after keywords for your subject without ever leaving your blog editing screen." It currently works only in the Firefox sidebar through an extension. It allows you to research keywords, see how popular they are, and compare them instantly with other keywords. You'll also be able to see how many times you've used specific keywords in your content. This is great for tracking the keyword density in your posts, which is a big part of SEO.

SEO Book

SEO Book isn't just a single tool; it offers a large selection of free and premium SEO tools for bloggers, webmasters, and SEO professionals. The tools offered range from Firefox extensions to web-based tools. SEO Book includes numerous tutorials, tips, and articles to help you learn how to properly optimize your blog to increase traffic and rankings. It's like an SEO gold mine; you'll be glad that you stopped by.

Ping-O-Matic

Ping-O-Matic is a pinging service that lets search engines know that you've updated your blog. You can select the different services that you'd like to ping. The services listed are updated regularly, so you can be sure that only the most important ones are listed. You can ping your blog directly from the Ping-O-Matic site or by using the bookmarklet.

Shareaholic

Shareaholic makes it easy for you and others to quickly share your blog posts all over the social web. There is an extension for just about every browser, plus a WordPress plug-in called Sexy Bookmarks that you've probably seen used all over the web. Shareaholic supports more than 100 services for sharing and saving your content.

Another great all-in-one sharing tool is AddThis; you might want to try out the Sharebar or share buttons for your blog.

Feedburner

Feedburner is an RSS (often called "really simple syndication") management service that provides custom RSS feeds and management tools for blogs. It also offers traffic analysis so you can see how many people are viewing and clicking on the content in your feeds. There is an integrated advertising system that lets you insert ads in your RSS feeds and earn money. A great feature is the ability to add links for content sharing at the bottom of your feed items through Feedflares. Feedburner gives you total control and the ability to easily optimize your RSS feeds.

Conclusion

A blog can benefit your practice in so many ways. It shows your readers who you are and provides you with a completely new way to communicate with clients, prospective clients, and fellow lawyers. A blog can position you as a thought leader and the go-to place to find information. So don't get left behind—consider blogging to stand out in the crowd. ■

Charnita Fance is a freelance writer and blogger with more than three years of experience. Along with managing her own social media blog, Social WebTools.info, she also regularly contributes to five other blogs related to technology, Internet marketing, social networking, and blogging. In addition to writing, she is a student at Full Sail University, where she studies mobile development.