

# Death of Blogging? Not So Fast

Steve Matthews | November 2012

Adrian Lurssen's recent piece, "Are We Heading to a Post-Blogging World?" [<http://socialmediatoday.com/adrian-lurssen/804336/are-we-heading-post-blogging-world>], made waves last month, and I've been mulling it over ever since. In short, Adrian discusses the growing trend of writers foregoing their own blogs to publish under branded media platforms such as the Huffington Post. He cites the presence of a built-in audience and the ability to piggyback on brand reputation as answers to the problems of "how to be read" – reasoning that "how to publish" has never been easier.

Adrian is spot-on in his assessment of the value of developing a targeted readership. I agree that creating a blog without consideration for your intended audience is a critical error. But this, of course, is not new. Since the earliest days of blogging, there have been two groups: those who treated "web logs" as a solitary journal-writing experience, and those who invested heavily in two-way conversations.

Both strategies have their success stories, but I think most would agree that solitary publishing has consistently been the tougher road. Even with thought-provoking ideas and fantastic writing, bloggers who don't build the requisite channels to push their message "off the blog" tend to lag in terms of exposure. It's hard to fault anyone for being tempted by the promise of an immediate, wide audience. But in many ways, that's taking the easy way out. It's easy to inherit an audience. The much harder route, the one that contains all the value, is earning an audience.

Writing for branded media platforms may be the "the future of blogging", as Adrian suggests, but there's absolutely no reason for lawyers to kill their blogging aspirations. The two pieces support each other quite nicely. If you truly want to build reputation, create a self-controlled domain where you can direct readers who want to know more about you, read more of your writing, and even reach out to you for business. Don't get me wrong, audience is an essential element. But lawyers are not journalists, and exposure is not the only value factor here. Having a self-published professional blog creates significant added depth to lawyer's online persona. Blogging also goes a long way towards helping lawyers be found for their name in the search engines — a value delivered to both lawyers individually and their firms.

## Writing for Someone Else vs Writing for Yourself

The point I want to drive home is that we just can't ignore or downplay the value of self-publishing:

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Steve Matthews is the Founder and Principal of Stem Legal, a company dedicated to bringing web visibility to the legal industry. A prolific blogger, Steve co-founded the Canadian legal blogging cooperative Slaw ([www.slaw.ca](http://www.slaw.ca)), and maintains his own blogs: Law Firm Web Strategy ([www.stemlegal.com/strategyblog](http://www.stemlegal.com/strategyblog)) and Vancouver Law Librarian Blog ([www.vancouverlawlib.blogspot.com](http://www.vancouverlawlib.blogspot.com)). Steve can be reached at [steve@stemlegal.com](mailto:steve@stemlegal.com).



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publishing in a venue that we have complete control over. Being your own publisher means that:

- you have complete control over the display of secondary messages related to your writing: your byline, disclosure of what you do or where you work, your social media networks
- you can maintain brand control (you control the company you keep)
- you get final say on editorial decisions; there's no topic too small or too controversial to cover
- you can include your own professional disclaimers and make sure they are properly placed
- you have the flexibility to cover far more than articles (which is the nature of most publisher-controlled writing gigs) with a blog
- we don't retreat back into a world where institutional publishers make all the final decisions

Every set of benefits comes with its own costs. In the post-blogging scenario that Adrian ponders, writers are provided with an immediate audience, but that comes at the price of reduced editorial and publishing control. Personal publishing is more of a "diet and exercise approach": you have to market your own blog in addition to writing it, and as Adrian points out, that's an additional chore. But diet and exercise is also the only way people lose weight and keep it off; get-thin-quick programs rarely pay off.

Another important factor to consider is which method has a greater impact on building your professional reputation. For me, personal publishing wins out every time; but luckily, we aren't forced to make a choice between only publishing on our own platform or only publishing on someone else's. We can do a little of both.

Most well-respected bloggers are taking this kind of "multiple channels" approach: they publish their own blog, maybe write a column for a newspaper or magazine, possibly write for their firm's blog, and do guest-posts for others. Generally, writing begets opportunity. Write a remotely good blog, and doors to other platforms will open for you.

From my perspective, there are clear benefits to having multiple distribution channels, writing from more than one online publication, and for more than one audience. Locking into any single platform or audience, even if it's a fantastic fit, can limit the exposure of your brand. Also, each audience brings its own agenda to the table, so you can tailor your message on each platform to fit each one. For example, if you were writing an article for distribution within your own referral network, you'd likely use a very different style (and potentially, topic) than if you were creating an article expressly for clients.

Since SEO is my bread and butter, I'd be remiss if I didn't also point out the enormous risk of essentially handing over your online footprint to another entity. If you opt to sign on with a branded media platform, I recommend that you also purchase your own name as a domain, even if you already have a firm website biography, LinkedIn account, etc. You don't want to lose all your hard work if that media platform goes belly-up, or if you decide to end your relationship with them. In the midst of writing for another channel, you should be building a portfolio of your best work, where you can provide additional context, not to mention a far more in-depth bio than HuffPo will ever give you.

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Obviously, getting your content in front of target audiences is a boon, but that doesn't have to mean the death of self-publishing. The two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Self-publish on your own blog first; then look to expand your publishing efforts elsewhere. Outsourcing your web presence entirely to third-party websites is a dangerous game.

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