Dream of Travel Writing

Best Practices When Writing on the Web for Travel Companies

Today we are talking about Best Practices When Writing on the Web for Travel Companies. —that sounds so not sexy right? It's so interesting, because every week we have a certain number of people who register for webinars and a certain number of people who show up. I can tell you that this definitely does not seem as exciting as a topic to people.

It was so interesting when I was researching it because when I was looking around online about blogging for companies, being a freelance blogger, all of these types of things, all I found was business information. It's so funny because when I started this company that we have Dream of Travel Writing, it was because nobody was talking about the business side of how to be a travel writer. There is lots of stuff out there but how to do the writing, how to set up a blog, and all these things–but not how to run a business as being a freelance travel writer.

Whereas, with freelance blogging it's quite the opposite. Nobody is talking about how to do the writing, how to do the writing in a way that makes your clients happy, that gets you more clients, that gets you referrals. Everybody just sort of talks about how they sent some pitches, they got some gigs, then they got some more. Nobody really talks about what you're supposed to be doing once you get those gigs. How you make sure that not only you're keeping your clients happy but that your clients clients are happy. That's why you get money, because they're getting money.

Today we're going to talk about the unsexy, but absolutely important Best Practices When Writing on the Web for Travel Companies. If you have taken a class on copywriting before or on writing for the web before some of these things may sound familiar. We are specifically talking about them in the travel context.

There are three main overarching milestones on this journey that we're going to take together today. We're going to start with, what is the difference between your blog and a company blog. In travel this is much more of a difference than other areas. Some of you may have heard me say I came from food and entertaining blogging originally. In those areas, company blogs can be more similar to what people are putting on their websites in terms of the concept of a recipe with a little bit of an introduction and some great photos. Whereas in travel, the divide is quite continental in terms of its being like the divide between two continents.

Then, I'm going to use a framework for five rules to help you remember (or as guideposts in your blogging for others) to make sure that you are really sticking with what belongs in a company blog. As we're talking about that we're going to get into really the writing mechanics of writing, generally the writing for the web specifically and how even though we're talking about writing it's actually much more about how it looks.

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This webinar is brought to you by Dream of Travel Writing and as I mentioned at the top of the call, everything that we talk about is about how to grow your income as a travel writer.

As I mentioned, this is kind of a rare departure, where we are talking about the mechanics of writing but it is always within the setting of selling your writing.

I've actually been blogging for more than 10 years now. I'm actually looking forward to speaking at the International Food Blogging Conference, which I went to kind of as a baby blogger when I first had my own blog. It was the very first blogging conference that I had ever gone to. In this time that I've been blogging, I've blogged for myself but I've also blogged for large companies, small companies, startups– always within the travel or freelance space.

If you have questions about how this operates in different settings, for instance, if you're blogging for travel tech companies versus tour companies versus destinations versus city destinations (as opposed to country destinations) drop those in the chat box as we go along. I would love to, as we go, talk about some more specific examples from you guys about other places that you're thinking about pitching or people that you might be writing for now in terms of how these best practices play out.

Let's get into it. What is the difference between personal blogging and company blogging in the travel space? I'd love to hear from you guys in the chat box, just the kind of main word or a couple words that jump out for you. In this vein, a conference talk I refer to often (and I tried to get the slides but nobody has them) it comes from TBEX in Greece a few years ago.

Robert Reid, who was an editor at Lonely Planet for several years, put up an article about the same destination in The New York Times against an article in that destination written about somebody's or written on somebody's blog. He compared the difference between the two blogs. What is the difference? In this case, it was the difference between a personal blog and editorial content. I feel like it's very similar to the difference between a personal blog and a blog for a company or for destination.

If you have some thoughts on what you think that difference is, drop that in the chat box and I'll tell you a little more about this Robert Reid example.

When he put up these two things he color-coded them. He had colors for things like statistics, descriptive language, sentences that start with I, or that were narration of the person's trip. He

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had different colors for history. He had different colors for conversation or quotes from locals, and as I'm sure that you can imagine the personal blog (and yeah a lot of you guys are chiming in about that one) the personal blog tends to be more about that one person's experience. It tends to have a lot more I.

Whereas, when you're writing for a destination or a tour company, obviously your writing more in this third person general way. The interesting difference that I think a lot of us forget (I'm going to quote another conference talk on this) is that when we are writing, whether it's for a destination tourism board or for an editorial outlet like a magazine or for a company blog. The trip that we need to be talking about and focused on, it's not that it's just not our trip, but it's not everyone's trip, it's the reader's trip.

At the recent TBEX in Huntsville, the editor or an editor from Coastal Living said, "You know it's not about your trip—it's about the reader's trip." Even though I think that makes sense I think a lot of us forget that we need to be talking to that one individual reader. When we're writing on a blog we think about writing for lots of people. We think about the different makeup of this audience, about the different types of people that might be in it. We don't necessarily remember always, that only one person at a time (or rather you know that the person consuming it is consuming by themselves) that only one person at a time is reading this article and that we need to speak to that person.

One of the main differences, is if not the main and most important difference, is in the type of language. Particularly that, the language needs to be there to persuade. That's going to be a lot more about what we're going to talk about further down. It really harkens back to, I'm sure you'll remember when you were in school and you had to write persuasive essays, right? We all learn this maybe in the fifth grade or sixth grade (and it probably depends where you went to school and what the curriculum was) but this concept of the persuasive essay is something that we've all learned decades ago. The problem is that when we think about blogging, we think about conversational, we think about something that's accessible–perhaps even casual. That concept of the persuasive essay feels much more formal.

However, there's a difference between formal and professional. Professional and conversational can still be friends. As we look today about the different things that go into your blogging, it's really important to remember that the voice should never be to the masses, it should never be "corporate." It should always be like you are having a one-on-one conversation with another person. However, rather than as on your own blog, you yourself, as an individual, with your own travel history, your own voice and your own opinions, are having that conversation. In the case of writing for a tourism board or for a company that voice, that person speaking, it's no longer you–it's the company.

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However, that doesn't mean it needs to become formal. You just need to be writing from the professional, yet conversational standpoint as a representative of that company. A good way to think about it if you're struggling with this professional not formal conversational tone, is to imagine you are on a press trip and you're chatting up the guy behind the bar who is pouring your beer at a craft brewery or when you're at a conference and you stop by the table to talk to (Kerri says Cozumel) you stop to talk to Cozumel talk about what they have to offer. When you sit down and you talk to that person they are representing that company, but they are still talking to you like a person. They might use slang, you know, make jokes, they might draw things even from their personal experience but they're doing it a different way than if they were at home chatting with their friends. Throughout your blog writing for CVBs, companies, you do need to maintain professionalism but it should still be conversational.

Where is the line between selling (which we can call copywriting, sales copy, sales pages) and blogging for companies. I think this is one of the big icky points that we all get into. Is that we don't feel good about selling and when we're writing on a blog for a CVB, for company, we feel torn between these two masters. We feel torn between the kind of "bland writing" that is, you know, $10-a-blog-post-style copy of these really boring who-wants-to-read-it sentences and city guides versus feeling like we should be hyping or selling whatever it is that the destination has to offer, that the company offers, or that your blog post is about.

So where exactly is the line between copywriting and blogging. Here's the thing, remember I talked about persuasion before and persuasive essays? Persuasion is very different than selling, obviously you use it when you're selling and writing sales copy and whatnot, but you're persuading somebody about a point. You're not necessarily persuading them to make this sale. That's why I like thinking of company blog post as persuasive rather than sales. Because you have a point that you are making, but that point doesn't have to be get out your credit card, book the $6,000 Safari right now. The point that you're making might be why October is the best time to take a safari in Namibia (I know nothing about Namibia or safaris so please don't quote me on that). The point that you're making might be that a small group safari is better than a large group safari. The point that you're making might be that safaris that focus on seeing big game end up being less fruitful than safaris that are more about getting to know a region and you often end up seeing more or more interesting animals.

There are all sorts of different points that you can be persuading about in your blog post aren't the same as persuading somebody to get their credit card out and pay for a safari right now. That's a really important thing to both distinguish and remind yourself of. We're going to talk later in the call about what these different points can be, that you're trying to make in your blog post and about why to have just one.

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The main difference between blogging for a tourism board or company and actually doing copywriting or sales copy or sales pages is that we are not either expressly or implicitly talking about the sale. We might not even be discussing particular tour options that the company has. We are almost definitely not discussing prices. We are informing the reader to a specific point and that's where the persuasion comes in.

How many of you guys are familiar with the website Copyblogger? Great, so some of you. Copyblogger is a website which has been around, gosh, probably for about 12 years now. It is all around writing for the web, essentially in a persuasive way, in a way where your blog posts are effective, let's call it that. It is called Copyblogger because they take historic (when I say historic, there's tomes of tips on copywriting that go back a hundred years of people study). They focus on strategies that have worked for copywriting for hundreds of years and how those translate into blogging. Obviously that means they talk a lot about headlines. They talk also a lot about structure, they've been around for so long they get much more granular with what they're going to talk about. If you're interested in reading up more on web writing best practices, Copyblogger is absolutely the number one best place to go to.

However, with the caveat that they have been around so long that a lot of their really great fundamental stuff about how to write for companies in a blog format is much older. When I say much older, maybe it's even in 2006. I think I might have even seen some posts from 2003 when I was researching this call today. So definitely dig a little deep if you're going on Copyblogger looking for basic stuff.

These five Laws of Persuasive Blogging that I want to talk to you about today come from Brian Clark, who's the founder of Copyblogger. Here's the thing, if you guys are familiar with Copyblogger then you might know they also have some other things that they sell.

They have something called The Rainmaker (which is actually a competitor to WordPress) to host your blog, that also provides you with hosting, abilities to do podcasts, really great templates, all sorts of other things. The person who started Copyblogger, Brian Clark, you might be really surprised where he comes from. I've heard his entire life story a couple times, but he formerly worked in (I believe it was real estate) but he came from a different sort of work background not working online obviously, but where he was really, really the one who was on the hook for coming up with sales leads.

At the time he wasn't strictly doing a lot of writing or a lot of copywriting, but he was doing a lot of in person, on the phone talking to people oriented sales. The thing is that all of these things that we're talking about today, you know headlines, hooks, how to–the things on this list that we are going to get into. They are not just important when you're blogging for

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companies they are also important on your own blog. They're also important when you're writing articles. They're also important when you are pitching.

You can think of a lot of these things that we are going to talk about as effective writing practices generally. What I wanted to talk to you about specifically is how they apply in travel. Like I said, Brian came at this from a totally different industry and all of these laws are true everywhere across the board. Where people can sort of fall off and be like, "oh, well that's nice" but then not do it, is where you don't see the connection to the type of work that you're doing.

These are the five laws. If you are calling from the phone and on the slide, The Law of Value, They Law of Headlines and Hooks, The Law of "How To" (which he actually puts in quotes which is important), The Law of the List, and The Law of the Story. Let's dive in and talk about each of these.

The Law of Value, the first law he has listed. It's really important that this is the first law, guys, because this is the easiest one to forget and also the fundamental basis of every blog post that you will be writing for company. Here's the thing on your own blog, when you're writing a blog post there's so many different motivations for why you might be writing a blog post. It might be that you were on a press trip and you really need to get some content off and you're trying to figure out how you can write about that destination. Or how you can incorporate the hotel that you stayed in. Or how you can someway, somehow cover your bases of providing a blog post related to that trip. Now that is motivation that has nothing to do with the readers of your blog.

Here's another example, you might have discovered something when you were Googling, that's a trend, that's happening on other travel blogs. But your readers are not necessarily travel bloggers, your readers are, you know travelers hopefully, not just other travel bloggers. Something that is trending in this blogosphere, something about the blogosphere is also not necessarily relevant to your reader, even if it's of interest to you. Similarly, you might get a question from one reader that sounds like something that you can answer on your blog, but it's not actually very applicable to the majority of your readers or people who may be coming in from Google search.

There's a lot of reasons that you might write a blog post on your own site to feed the content beast so to say that don't start with (start with is the important part, because I'm not saying that they can't have value in the end), but don't start with the value you are providing your readers as the jumping-off point.

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However, when you are writing for a company it doesn't happen quite the same way…There are so many reasons why you might write a blog post for your own blog that serve other initial motivations, but that's never going to happen on a company blog and here's why.

When you're writing for company blog somebody is paying you for that content. On your end, you might feel like, "Okay, I'm writing this blog post because I have a blog post due. A blog post needs to be created. I have four blog posts that I have to do every month." However, on the company side every single blog post that they commissioned from you, that they're paying you for, they expect that it will in some way help them get more customers.

You absolutely have to be crystal clear with every piece of content that you're creating on what that value is. How it's going to get more eyeballs in from search. How it's going to convert more people, which is have more people who are coming to the website read this blog post and become closer to purchasing the thing that the company sells or the destination is promoted by the tourism board.

Here's the thing, there are so many different ways that you can provide value to a reader (and to go back to our laws of persuasive blogging) interestingly, a lot of them are in here–The Law of the How To, The Law of the List, The Law of the Story. These are three different ways that we can provide value to our readers. I'm going to get into how to do that with each of these but the most important thing is that at the beginning, you always think about that.

Say, for instance, this is actually a really great way to both turn less sexy, less interesting gigs that you might have into something that interests you, and also how to make yourself stand out from the other people who are providing this content. Let me give you two different examples.

I feel like we all think that we know what Google does. Google is in the search engine aspect of the Google not the whole company. You put a question in and it's supposed to give you the most relevant results, right? We often talk about people who have blogs or who work in online anything about SEO and changes to Google's algorithms, and how that tanks various things that we're doing and black hat SEO (which is ways to trick Google) verses good SEO which is things that are useful to the reader.

At its core, what Google search engine is trying to do, it's not just to provide answers, it's to provide the best answer. I believe I mentioned that the last week's call as well, but Google actually has something where you, as the user, can file a bug. You can say I put in this search

and none of the results had anything whatsoever to do with what I was looking for, what I was interested in. To Google that's a problem because it's not what they aim to do.

They then turn and look at what are the results they're providing and are they actually answering users questions. This is a great thing with your blog post for instance, often you will write a headline or even a first sentence that might be in some way askew from what you're actually talking about, from the how to you're going to provide, or the list for the story that you're going to tell. Readers get confused just in the same way that they might Google something and see search results and feel like, hmm, this isn't answering my question. If at any point in that entire blog they feel like they aren't getting value from what you're saying and it's not the value they were looking for, they're going to go somewhere else.

Back to how we're not selling, we're just persuading. One of the things that most companies (travel and otherwise), there's some really interesting examples from the finance sector (if you're somebody who likes case studies). One of the things that all of these blogs that we're looking at writing for whether they're tourism board blogs, or companies that are selling tours, or selling a travel tech solution like a booking site for hotels, or selling itinerary services, or selling award airplane ticket booking services, all of the blogs are there to establish an interest in the product the company is selling right.

Sometimes they do it in these weird ways. Sometimes they're doing it by establishing trust. Last week I used the example of a blog that Adobe runs which is called CMO, for chief marketing officer. It's all about how to do your job as a chief marketing officer. It's how to fire people, how to make the best hires, how to make decisions, how to evaluate your budget. It has absolutely nothing to do with any tools that Adobe provides. Adobe provides design-oriented tools in Lightroom and things like that. It serves to establish trust with a group of key decision-makers who will make the decision of that product.

Company and tourism board blogs can do the same thing. For instance a lot of tourism boards now (I also mentioned this last week), a lot of tourism boards now have blogs that are for meeting planners. People who plan corporate meetings and conferences and sales events and things like that, about how to do their job as a meeting planner, to establish themselves as the destination, as a trusted source, that is there to help you so that when you go to book your meeting you think of them first.

Sometimes the ways that we're providing value to the reader (to go back to what I mentioned about selling versus persuading) don't have a very direct, if it all direct, even an indirect link with what the company is selling. That doesn't mean that it can't be of value. For instance a

couple things that jump to mind, and I'm sure a lot of you guys are familiar with these opportunities for blogging on various websites are city guides that airlines do.

Also just don't forget, I also got this on the slide, but I wanted to make sure to say this. When we had the call a couple weeks back with Dan Gibson from Visit Tucson he was saying that he thinks of it as his blog, but the things that he posts his "blog articles" don't show up in an RSS feed as something that would technically be defined is a blog. He puts up three of these new articles every month on permanent links on his website.

In a lot of cases, what we might be looking to do for other companies are actually static pages as opposed to a blog that has new posts coming up overtime. Some of these examples that I have below don't look like a blog when you go to these companies website. They look more like static pages.

Again, back to this example of this city guides for airlines. This is a very rich type of content that's being provided that people need, and it's not just airlines, there's a lot of things like hotels, which are developing city guides. There's a lot of people in the travel industry that are developing these very general (well, the content isn't general) but they're developing something on the general city guide level which is not specific to what they're selling in order to provide value to the reader. If you go to a lot of airlines, this also works for cruises, a lot of cruises have very deep information about the ports they service and what to do there. There's a lot of "how to" and helpful valuable information for travelers who might be looking at booking these transportation methods about what to do in different areas.

You even see these for credit card companies, like MasterCard has a whole series of articles they are doing on this as part of their Priceless Cities campaign. Where they have different itineraries, they have a lot of local written content about how best to experience something that might be called the "off the beaten path" or "like a local" aspects of a city. The thing is that the way that the value is provided, like I said, it's often not going to be central to what the company provides. That's not only fine, but that helps with what I was saying about persuading rather than outright selling. Whether or not a blog post is valuable, like I said, needs to be central to what you're writing and it's something that's going to differentiate you from other writers.

Now I used example of Google, of how what Google is really out there to do is to provide the best most relevant match to the search that the reader has put in. Over time they've added all sorts of different bells and whistles to how they do that, right. They use your search history, right. We all think that's horrible, but they do it in the vein of differentiating from me putting in the best cafes in Sydney because I really want something that's also going to have good

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food, a place I can sit with my laptop and all this other criteria to somebody else who really just wants a coffee snob best cafe or somebody else who doesn't want a coffee snob best cafe they want something that's more of an old diner. You know first wave coffee sort of cafe. They're using your search history to help do that, to help accomplish their aim of providing the most valuable piece of information for you.

We also need to think about, when we think about value with the blog post that we're writing for companies and tourism boards, not only how are we providing value to the reader, but how are we providing value to our clients which is the editor, or the communications director of the tourism board, or the communications director to a company. How are we providing them with value? On the one hand yes, we are doing it by providing value to their potential client, to their potential reader, but we're also doing it by making their job easier, their life easier. The same way that Google is trying to make people's lives easier by giving them more focused results around their search histories.

So what does that mean? It means that we need to think higher level. We need to think in terms of higher-level. We need to think in terms of algorithm changes.

What I mean by that is if you have an assignment, let's take the context of you are writing a blog for a food tour company and they have told you what kind of blog post they want. They want blog posts that are profiles of different stops in their tour or perhaps they want blog posts that are itineraries that they don't do on their tours, but they're things that you can do on your own. They've given you a particular format of a blog post that they want you to do.

The way that you are providing value to them, besides just creating those blog posts and thinking about, the people who are coming to the website reading the blog posts, what else are they looking out for. It's to think about what else might somebody, who is looking for this type of information, somebody who's the type of person who might book this food tour, what else do they want to know? What else will provide value to them?

In the case of food tours, often food tours are at these kind of awkward times because the way that food tours are able to work with a lot of restaurants is that they go in off times, when the restaurants aren't busy with customers. For instance, food tours might go between 10am and 2pm or they might go between 1pm and 4pm, but they're not typically a full sit-down dinner meal type thing. Something else that might be useful to customers on a food tour would be guides for where and have dinner based on where the hotel is or based on an attraction they might visit.

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You could do a whole series on if you're here, here's where to go to dinner, if you're here, here's where to go to breakfast or here's where to go for lunch, or here's where to stop and have a coffee. These are ways where you can take the assignment that you already have from your editor or whoever that may be in the tourism board or company contacts and continue to apply this Law of Value to get yourself additional work.

For instance, I've used this with a company that I was working with that was in the points and miles air travel market to get a lot, a lot, a lot more work, like six times as much work or something like this. For instance in that case, we had certain types of blogs were very prescribed. That we were supposed to be writing certain types of blog posts.

I said to my editor, "Look, I was just at this conference with people who travel often. They have good salaries. They have good credit ratings, good stable jobs. They should have credit cards that get them points and miles but they don't." I asked them all the various reasons why they don't. What their objections are, and why they think that it's not useful for them. I really think that it would be useful for us to have a series for that type of person, who's really the type of reader we're going after, that addresses all of these kind of beginner questions," and she said, "Great!" I got 25 to 35 more posts out of that which are about $100 plus a pop. There's a couple thousand dollars just from having that idea right there.

This providing value law doesn't just apply to your reader, it also applies to your relationship with the person who is assigning things to you and to your editor. Like I said, all of these laws are applicable in so many different formats. We're going to talk about headlines, about how to, about lists, about stories. You can also use all of these different laws to pitch your editor to give you more work as well.

Let's talk about headlines. How many of you guys, let me know in the chat box, feel like you have a good grip on what is a really, really fantastic, click-baity, gets lots and lots of views headline. Just say yes or no in the chat box. Like: "yeah, I got it" versus "no, I wish I could be better at headlines." The thing about headlines is that (a lot of no's, so that's actually good. I see a lot of headlines on people's blogs or that people are writing for clients that I think people think that they're good. I think that they think that they're really click-baity, but they're actually kind of falling flat) so I'm very happy that you guys all want to work on headlines.

Here's the thing, is that when you're sending a pitch to magazine editor, the headline (also known as the subject line in this case of your email) is literally, the most important thing right. It's the difference between whether they open your email or not. Online it's the same in that the headline is going to be, are they going to click through and read this whole blog post.

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I think somebody out there is teaching that headlines should be short and direct. I don't know why, but I've been seeing a lot of headlines lately that are, what I like to call encyclopedic. For instance, there's ones like, "cultural etiquette in Prague" or (I have a bad time even saying bad headlines) they're ones that are very much just a noun or maybe a gerund, like "learning to order a coffee in Italy" or something. They're very noun oriented and very uninspiring.

Obviously, we know a certain kind of clickbait things right. When there is a sensationalist tack, or when it says how-to, but with a purposely long headlinee. By long headlines, I mean about seven to 11 words. These statistically perform much better than short headline. That right there is one of the reasons to banish these encyclopedic headlines.

The main purpose, let's go back to this example, of what Google's real goal is. Google's real goal is to make sure that readers get the best answer that question. Let's think about that again, so Google trying to help readers get the best answer to a question. Even if you are reading a blog post, at the bottom there's a related post. So much of the stuff online is about helping people find the answer to some question that has led them to be reading about this thing on the internet. Headlines are very important in helping with that.

However, especially when I go on company websites and also tourism board web sites are pretty lacking in this area, that headlines are so bland, that I as the reader, looking at them have no idea why I would ever want to read that thing. It maybe wonderfully written and may provide exactly the information that I'm after, but because the headline doesn't have a promise, it doesn't make me curious or interested, I just don't click.

When you are ready for companies, this is one of the hugest things that you can do to help whoever you're writing for generally have a better, more effective website. In fact there's some people who I coach who specifically built a service offering not around writing new blog posts, but just around going back through the company's existing blog post and changing the headlines to make them more clickable. Headlines are an enormous topic, we can talk for hours and hours. I can give you so many examples, but what kind of send you to if you really want to dig very deep on this is that Copyblogger which I mentioned before has some download and some courses on headlines. If you want to really geek out over headlines that's the number one resource I recommend, but here is your cheat sheet.

The four U's cheat sheet to helping you craft a headline that's going to be way better than the encyclopedia. The four U's are: useful– this goes back to value right? Urgent– this one can be a little hard to put your finger on. It's kind of like a time peg with a pitch. Unique–also can be

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a little hard to put your finger on, but I'll talk about some examples, and ultra-specific. I feel like ultra specific and unique kind of go hand-in-hand but let's look at this in the context of the type of blog post that you might be doing for tourism board or for a company. Let's take the example of when we were doing TravelContentCon this weekend. There was somebody who wanted to do blog posts for some companies that we're doing walking tours in New York City.

Now, let's attack this point–useful, we've kind of talked this to death already with value so let start with the urgent. How do you make a headline urgent? Obviously, you can put things like, the thing you really need to know before booking your New York City walking tour, right. If you're thinking about booking a New York City walking tour you're like well I want to know that thing before I book obviously. You can also make it seasonal, such as "seven tours that you need to do before the crowds descend for Labor Day." You can make it seasonal more generally such as you know "the seven best ways to experience New York on foot in the winter" or in the summer or during when Central Park is in bloom right.

Urgent has some sort of time mechanism. Sometimes it's very clickbaity, like you need to know this right now. Sometimes it's a type of or piece of information useful to somebody in a certain time of year.

Now: unique. Like I said, this ties in quite a bit with ultra-specific. Unique and ultra-Specific, these are here for a reason that's a bit counter-intuitive. You guys may be familiar with the term long tail keywords. Long tail keywords are essentially things that someone might type into a search engine that are similar to the headlines we are talking about like seven to 11 words.

Rather than walking tours in New York, somebody might put walking tour with food in the Soho neighborhood of New York. Or they might put walking tour for elderly people in the Lower East Side of New York or they might put walking tour along the waterfront in the summer. People today, to make sure that when they put something in Google they're getting exactly what they're looking for, tend to put some more words in there and then that string of words becomes known as a long tail keyword. The same way that I just took walking tours in New York and added all these other words to it to create the long tail keyword. It's the same way that our headline should be unique and specific.

If you're writing for a tourism board or a company and you're at a loss for what to write about that is ultra specific, the best, best way to figure those things out is to look up what people are searching for already when they look up your destination.

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There's some various tools (some of which are paid and some are free) that you can use to do this type of keyword research. You can also just look and see, for instance when you start typing into Google, what else does it suggest. This is a totally free way to do that. I just start typing and see what other options it gives you. You know you can start typing walking tours. You can start searching food tours. You can start typing a number of different things and then just pull out the options that it gives you.

Now one quick thing I want to say on the topic of headlines to wrap this up, actually has to do with subheads. As you hopefully know, when you're running blog posts for both readability and also search optimization purposes, it's really important to have subheads. Which are things in bold or preferably like H2 tags throughout your content that break up the content. However, just as I'm talking about how headlines, we need to banish the encyclopedia from our headlines, we need to do the same thing with our subheads.

As I was looking up some examples (I'm going to show you some examples of blogs that are good or not-so-good later) as I was looking up examples I was really surprised to see how many kind of sleepy subheads there are out there. Especially when you are writing these kind of bland unsexy city guides, or things for tourism boards or specially itineraries, it's so tempting (say you're doing a 36 hours weekend piece) it's so tempting to just let the subhead for Sunday be "Sunday." Instead you could say "Sunday in Central Park with your family." There's just so many more things that you can put in there and they don't always have to be one hundred percent sexy. You can definitely make them more useful and more unique and/or ultra-specific.

Alright, we talked about value and we talked about headlines. Now we're going to talk about those three different types of post. They're the Law of How To, the Law of List, and the Law of Stories.

The reason that these three types of posts are in there as laws is that these are essentially the three types of things that should exist on all blogs. In terms of, there aren't really more blogpost than this, there aren't really more variation. What about profiles? Well, that's a story, but it can also be done as a list. Basically the list becomes an interview. The list items are different questions that you ask the person.

Pretty much everything that you should do on a blog in terms of writing, needs to fall into one of these three categories. That goes back to the Law of Value. Other things that you might want to do, are probably not providing as much value for your reader.

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Now how-to is really clear in terms of, obviously we're providing value for the reader by showing them how to do something. Here's the kicker (this quote at the top here I pulled from that post of Brian Clark's about the Five Laws of Persuasive Blogging) if you feel like you're giving away too much, you're on the right track. When you are doing how to posts for companies and tourism boards they are probably going to want you to be vague. There is a tendency to be a bit vague, to be a bit general, you know "how to experience New York in the Spring," go to Central Park see the flowers, go walk along the waterfront on a nice day. There are all these super general things that you can say but here is the problem, being general is not useful to the reader. We all know this right, when we see blog posts, especially lists, how to blog posts.

When we see blog posts on how to do something and they start from (I saw a lot of these when I was a freelance blogger) they were like, find a niche, get some clips, get more clips, yea! Success! They were so vague and general and reading that I have absolutely no idea how to accomplish anything.

When we're writing how to content for companies and tourism boards it's important to be incredibly granular and specific. We do that through details. The same way that we would in writing articles for magazines except the details are more in terms of specifics of exactly what somebody wants to know.

For instance a really great one that you would do would be "how to get a table at (and insert name of really hard to to get a table at restaurant here). Let's say Babbo, I've gotten tables at Babbo before. The first time I called to get a table at Babbo, which is Mario Batali's original flagship restaurant. I called them and I said, "Hi, I want to make a reservation for blahblah." This very bitchy sort of hostess was like, "Let me stop you right there. So, I can't do that. We don't take reservations for blahblah date until blahblah date, except because the month before that is Christmas you're actually going to need to call on this day. But because we're going to taking reservations for two different days on that day you want to make sure that you are like the 10th person, whatever." He goes through for me, you know granted in this kind of condescending tone, but he went through for me and in very exacting detail what I need to do to make sure that I got a reservation for the date that I wanted.

That is the kind of how to content (not with the condescension and the attitude of course) but that is the type of content that you want to be providing. That is what is valuable to the readers of the destination or the travel companies blog. That's what's going to build trust.

The problem is that when you're talking to your editor and they are talking to people above them they don't want to provide such granular how to content because they feel like they're

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giving away the farm. They feel like they are giving away what they are selling. There's certain types of travel blogs where this is particularly pervasive (I'm going to give you a couple of work around for those) so in terms of tours, people who operate tours absolutely do not want to put their secrets, or exactly why you go here, exactly how to get from point A to point B and avoid the crowds. They don't want to put that in blogs because they feel like, that is what we sell. That's what we provide. If we tell people how to do it, they're not going to book with us. Here's the thing, and this is really the thing across the board for all the different one's we are going to walk through.

The people who would read about it online and then not book the tour, are going to do that anyway. If they don't find out from you, they are going to find it from somewhere else. They never would have booked the tour in the first place. They are just not good customers. This is how you can explain it to your client who is the…

Oh somebody said they lost me. Are you guys hearing me okay? Let me know if you can hear me. Great.

You can explain it these exact words to your client, to the company owner, or the people who are editing blogs. That if people would read about it on their website and go do it themselves they are not people who would spend money on a tour or on a custom itinerary in the first place. They're just not your client. But, the people who would read about it and say, "Huh? That sounds like too much work. I just want somebody to do it for me." They've seen that you clearly know how to do it and so they booked with you. It's this odd psychological catch-22. It's very important that you use these types of How To blog post for companies to show exactly how to do something in a way that shows an incredible amount of authority but at the same time makes them feel like they would rather not do it. They would rather just have you do it.

What are we persuading them about in a post that says that? We are persuading them exactly this, that we know exactly how to do this kind of thing and it is better to just let us do it for them.

A similar thing is happening to tourism boards. I mentioned that tourism boards are starting to develop itinerary content. Not all of them are (and this is really good opportunity for you) but the issue with tourism boards around itinerary content is that they are in the awkward position of that they shouldn't highlight certain things in their destinations above others.

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If they put together an itinerary that says this winery rather than that winery, that winery is going to be upset that they're not in the itinerary. I've heard a person from The Long Island Tourism Board explains how she talks about it to tourism board clients, which is my job is to get people to the destination. Not to sell individual attractions. That's not your job either (the tourism board), but by getting them interested in the destination, they are more likely to do other things in the destination. They're not necessarily going to do this exact itinerary but seeing this itinerary, seeing that it's possible is going to make them then say, okay let's start from this and then turn it into something for us.

Now the people who get really, really persnickety about this are people who are selling tour itineraries. As in for the tourism boards, they're not selling those itineraries or putting those itineraries online to help people explore a destination. People whose whole bread-and-butter is to get on the phone with somebody, figure out what they're looking for, and then write up a custom itinerary for them. They don't want to put any of their personal recommendation in any of the destinations that they cover on their website because they don't want people to steal them. This is a huge, huge issue.

However, the problem for those type of–they're called concierge travel planner or booking service. The problem for those travel concierge companies if they are not showing their prospective customers, through their blog, the types of things that might go on their itinerary (if they keep everything vague) then those customers will never book with them because they can't imagine what the trip will look like. They don't know what they could be getting. Someone who's a travel agent, who is on the call, is chiming in on this.

This is the thing, is that the same way where we have travel blogs, and we have a voice and people value our recommendations, these concierge travel bookers (who are really great people to do blogs for because they really need it) but their whole bread-and-butter is their opinion. Their opinion is the currency. Their ability to judge the client, their taste in restaurants, their black book basically into their very reticent to give it away.

You have to talk them into (the same way I mentioned with the tour) but you have to talk them into this concept that if they're not giving a little peek at the black book or up the skirt or whatever analogy you want to use, then people have no idea what they're getting. They're much less likely to book with that itinerary planner.

We talked about how to. What about list posts? Everybody hates list posts, right? I hear this over and over again with people who I coach who have had blogs for a really long time. They are so sick of writing List Post but they find themselves writing more List Posts than ever because they know that's what gets in the best traffic. They just hate them.

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Why do List Posts work? They're skimmable, right? That's one thing that really comes to mind. The reason that Brian Clark from Copyblogger has a Law of Persuasive Blogging just for list posts is that they work. It's not just about that they're skimmable. List Post are an excellent organizing format for blog post because they provide absolute clarity.

When you have a list and your headline is "The 10 Must-See Spots in New York in One To-Hour Walking Tour." You have to have 10 spots. They must be must-sees, and they must fit into a two-hour walking tour. It's very difficult for your blog post to not deliver on the promise if it's a List Post.

Having a list post forces you to write in a readable framework. It also offers a lot of options for people who might have different interests. It really comes back to forcing you to write in a readable framework. You can do a lot of the same things in a list post in a different format but it's much, more difficult to accomplish.

The thing about list posts is that they're actually in many ways harder to write effectively than a lot of other types of blog post. Because you have to write well and very short in those little paragraphs that go between the list items. I want to take this opportunity to talk about the actual writing part.

You guys might be familiar with this book, The Elements of Style (anybody who's going to journalism School or taking writing courses). This is kind of one of the really fundamental books about how to write, period. There's a quote in there that I wanted to share which is especially poignant in the subjective of writing the copy round list post, but also generally. That is, "a sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all of his sentences short." This is very important. I think we often think with writing online, there's this whole thing that you should use very, very short sentences, but that's not exactly the case. William Strunk says, "this requires not that the writer makes all of his sentence is short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."

In terms of writing structure on the web, visuals matter. I mention this up at the top of the call and I don't mean about photos. I have some examples of some different blog post that are like duck duck goose, it's like good good bad. I'm going to show you that after I go through points.

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Visuals matter, but that comes a lot down to structure. As we looked at in that last post, structure is important, but what's more important is that all of the words matter. To make sure that all of the words matter, each of your posts has to have a point, as in one point. The thing about that is, something that I was reading on Copyblogger actually, in preparation for this call, was from somebody who was a newer blogger but had really taken to it. She said, "When I sat down to write first blog post, I didn't have one point, I had 47. But that was great, because I had 47 other blog posts that I could write to keep me going for a while."

The thing is, you have to make sure that you take out all of those other 46 points. You cannot publish a blog post, especially not for a company where that reader is going to click away, because they aren't there for the voice, they aren't there for the trust that you've built your own blog. The blog post needs to be building that trust. If you haven't stuck to a specific point, a specific promise of value, then you're going to lose that reader.

What feeds into that point? Every sentence, as was in that quote about William Strunk, needs to do its job. Every word in every sentence, there should be no words aren't doing their job.

A good way to think about it, that a lot of people teaching writing classes say, is that the job of the first sentence is to get to the second sentence, the job of the second sentence is to get to the third, and so on and so forth. Each sentence has to hold its own in persuading the reader to keep reading.

You may have heard about this before—it's very commonly said in writing classes, but you need to really think about this. Often when I'm attacking—I feel like that's the best word for it—when I'm attacking people's pitches, when I'm doing pitch critiques. I find a lot of sentences that aren't doing their job. When I have my editor hat on, they jump out to me immediately. I'm just like, "Why is this here? I don't understand the point of it."

When you are writing it you have all of your reasons why you put that sentence in there. It's an important part of the process of writing blog posts, especially for clients, to take off your writer hat and even your editor hat and put on your reader hat; and say does this sentence really make me want to keep reading the next sentence.

Some overarching structures that you can use to do that are something that I call narrow to large. You open with an anecdote. You open with a scene or a small story, and then you use that to get to bigger picture lesson. That bigger picture lesson is the point that you're trying to persuade people about. Whether it is that October is the best time to visit Tuscany or whether

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it is that taking a ferryboat tour is one of the best ways to experience New York in the summer.

Whatever that point is, you can start with a scene, you can start with a picture, then you can give some details that are more how to, more service-oriented. Then you can wrap up with your conclusion with your point.

We looked earlier specifically in this quote previously about how the writer need not make all of their sentences short. It's very important that when you're writing on the web, and this goes back to the visuals and I'm going to get into some examples now, that you consider the type, length, and variation of your sentences and paragraphs.

Here's why, this is a blog post that I saw, I am not going to tell you the name of the blog you can Google it if you really want, but this is an example of a not awesome blog post. It's because of the lack of variety in the sentences/paragraph. When you look at this blog post, it seems insubstantial. It doesn't really even matter what the words are. There's so many visual cues that you are getting from your laptop screen that don't have to do with the words that you need to think about it. In this case, the sentences are very short, the words are very simple, and the paragraphs are just one sentence. You look at this without even looking at the words and feel like it's written by five year old. Now again, nothing about this writer or this blog post, it gives you these visual cues that are not awesome.

Here is the opposite example, in this post each paragraph is exactly the same number of lines. There are four lines, they are clumps. If anyone's ever told you that you're writing looks clumpy on the web, this is what they mean. Is that everything is incredibly uniform and furthermore It's relatively dense. Particularly, if these were a little longer, like if these were six-to-eight-lines-long, this gives the sense, to the reader, "Whoa! There's a lot to read here." Then their Internet brain is like hopping around saying, "This looks like not necessarily what I want right now," and they leave. If this started with a couple short sentences to draw the reader in and then went into these longer paragraphs and might be totally fine. But right now it has this uniform look that feels formal.

This is an example from Copyblogger itself actually, you'll notice how the sentence lengths very. This first sentence is about seven to eight words, but it starts with "you" right. Think back, it's pulling you in. It's actually all, the whole first part is written in "you" but we start with a short sentence. Then we have a much longer sentence, than another short sentence, longer sentence. Then we have a very short sentence; it's a paragraph on its own. It keeps jumping around.

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There have been studies showing that you, as the reader, need these variety of substances to keep your brain interested. Especially when reading on the web. Reading on the web is very different than reading in print in terms of these visual cues. Because of the lighting in the background and all the different things that are around it.

When you're reading on the web visuals matter and especially the variety of both sentences (like here's two very different length sentences in one go) and paragraphs, this whole example that I told you, the paragraphs are all very, very different lengths.

Let's look at the last law. The Law of the Story, right. This is what we all want to write perhaps, perhaps some of us want to write easier blog posts but what I hear from you guys is that you really want to write stories. That's great because corporate and or travel company and tourism board blogs really need stories right now. They need profiles. They need narratives and all these things because storytelling is an incredibly important way of persuading.

The reason for that is that obviously, if you pick up a work of fiction or if you go to somebody's personal travel blog, or personal food blog, you're expecting stories. Kind of ironically, MRI imaging studies have shown that when the study subjects are looking at images of companies and of products and things like, the parts of their brain that are actually responding are the emotional parts, not the logical information comparison parts. Brands, companies and tourism board destinations, anybody that's a brand needs to speak to emotions, not to information logic, not just to the benefits of the product. They have to communicate emotions because that is part of the brain that their prospective clients, their prospective buyers, their prospective visitors are using to evaluate that destination. We speak to those emotional parts with stories.

What kind of stories can your brand tell and what kind of stories can you tell about them. This is up to you to dig up. If you are writing, let's go back to the concierge travel planner example, if you have lived in (I'm trying to think of an example) if you have lived in California wine country or you know it very well and you're writing for somebody who does custom itineraries there. You already know the stories that can be told. You have experience them yourself. You can also find them by interviewing different wineries, by interviewing the owner of your company, by interviewing the tour guide to unpack all of these stories. They're not hard to find, but you often have to ask a couple more questions to get the actual story. The narrative, the anecdote part. I have a horrible pun here about examples I've spelled it like EGGGGGSAMPLES here for a reason.

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It's really important when you think about stories as a blog post to think of them as actual stories–a beginning, middle, and an end and something has changed from the beginning to the end.

We're not just telling scenes. We're not just kind of sharing description or a quote. We're saying a story has something that has changes from the beginning to the end and it has a message, a meaning, a lesson and this is important, it's important that it's complete. Because again, to go back to psychology, if you give the reader an incomplete story they're going to get hung up that they don't know what the end is. It's going to keep them from absorbing whatever else you're trying to tell them.

The other thing is that stories, even though they are specific teach lessons that can be applied to other situations. For instance, if you are telling a story about (to use the example about California wine country) if you are telling a story about one winery, about its history and how fascinating it is and so on and so forth in this kind of you know rags-to-riches story, it's going to make the reader wonder what stories the other wineries have. They want to know those too.

The other thing about stories, rather than just telling them what we want to tell them, rather than telling them why this is the best time to visit New York and give them 7 reasons, is that we allow the reader to come to conclusions on their own. To come potentially, to different conclusions. That's really great because they feel like they have their own autonomy in their own agency in that situation.

This is one of the reasons why stories are just very effective things for companies to tell in general. Particularly, why they should be in your blog posts is that often people are expecting List Posts, they're expecting How To, they're expecting bland, non useful, overarching information. When you give them stories, it's so refreshing and they're so thankful, especially when it comes from something like a company or a tourism board that they're expecting to give them these force-fed lists or this very basic information.

Those are the five Laws, Law of Value, Law of Headlines, Law of How To, Law of Lists, and Law of Stories. Take these with you into your considerations of what blog clients you can approach or what tourism boards or company websites you can approach to work on your blog. Take them into the way that you discuss even selling these things to those tourism boards and companies. Take them most importantly, into your writing.

That's what I've got for you today. It was really great chatting with you**.** Thanks, guys!