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A Blogging Primer for Childbirth Education Professionals

by Lee Stadtlander, PhD

Abstract: Blogs are frequently updated websites where content (e.g., text, pictures, music) is posted on a regular basis and the information is displayed in chronological order. A blog provides a mechanism to establish an online presence as a childbirth education professional. The new blogger does need to learn new software and terminology; however, there are many resources available to help get a blog started. Keys to successful blogging include maintaining a regular schedule of posts, keeping the posts fun and interesting, and providing information that is useful to the audience.

Keywords: blogging, social media, childbirth

Weblogs, commonly referred to as blogs, are frequently updated websites where content (e.g., text, pictures, music) is posted on a regular basis and the information is displayed in chronological order. Blogs often take the form of journal posts and usually focus on a particular topic or subject. Most blogs are interactive, allowing readers to comment and leave feedback; frequent interactions can facilitate development of relationships between authors and readers via conversations and feedback. This article will walk you through the basics of blogging and give you resources to get your own blog started.

How Could You Use a Blog?

It is a good idea to have a definite purpose in mind for your blog: will you be giving opinions? Announcements? Educational info? Who will be your audience? You might want to provide ongoing childbirth education information to your clients or you could provide news and announcements of your classes/ plans. Check with your employer as to whether there are policies and/or resources related to blogging.

An additional plus to consider is that Google will index and archive your blog's content and deliver it when someone is searching for your topic (Baumann, 2012). Regularly blogging useful and interesting information will bring people to your site repeatedly.

Setting Up a Blog

There are a number of blogging sites available; a few examples are blogger.com, which hosts your blog on their server and livejournal.com, which is hosted on your own server. These sites provide directions for using their specific software through their help area. Consider having a code of conduct for your blog, keeping in mind that people may respond to your comments. Some possible inclusions in such a code might be no swearing, no personal names or photos of clients, must be on topic, and no commercial messages.

How often you post on your blog is really up to you. Lenhart and Fox (2006) conducted a survey of bloggers, finding that 25% of bloggers post one to two days a week, 15% of post three to five days a week, 28% every few weeks, and 19% post less often than every few weeks. Most bloggers spend about 2 hours a week blogging (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Regular contact between blogger and reader can build close relationships and creates a strong online identity (Wright & Webb, 2011). How often you post is your choice, but keep in mind that regularly posting on specific days (e.g., Mondays and Wednesdays) makes it easier for people to follow your blog regularly.

Typically, there is a way to allow people to follow your blog by email (also called an RSS feed), whereby, an email is automatically sent to readers when you post. For example, in blogger.com, there is a "follow by email" option that can be set by you in the layout or settings page.

Blogging requires more thought and preparation than other social media, such as Facebook. There are some ways to make blogging easier: develop a posting calendar and stick to it. Consider recruiting a team of bloggers, so you do not have to do all of it. Keep your posts short and to the point, fewer than 400 words is a good target. Use your word processor tools of spell and grammar check so your posts look professional. Each post does not have to be perfect; the important thing is to do it.

You might want to write and save several posts in your

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word processor and have them ready in advance. Another option is to write, over several posts/ days, a series of posts on a specific topic (e.g., "How do I prepare my home for my new baby?") Each day's posts covering different rooms/ items with links to example items and/ or videos).

Some useful tips (Hinmon, 2012): be friendly, conversational, and interesting. Write with your audience in mind; you want your site to be the go to place for childbirth education. Avoid technical jargon and explain any medical/ anatomical words that you use. Do not be discouraged if it takes a while to build up a readership. People will find you if you consistently post information that is useful and interesting.

The best bloggers (the "A-List"; Saleh, 2014) tend to be concerned with likeability and competence. They are quick to respond to readers' comments and questions and are highly aware of their readers.

One advantage of blogs is that you can link to other sources of information. Short statements can be used to introduce a scientific paper, article, or video clip from the internet. Be sure you provide enough information in your introduction that people understand the material to which you are linking.

Ethics and Blogging

The International Childbirth Educator's Association (ICEA, 2007) has provided five tips to avoid Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) problems with social media. They include:

1. Remember the standards of birth professionalism are the same online as in any other circumstances.
2. Do not share or post information or photos gained through the birth professional-client relationship.
3. Maintain professional boundaries in the use of social media. Online contact with clients may blur this boundary.
4. Do not make negative remarks about clients, employers, colleagues, or birth facilities even if not clearly identified.
5. Do not take photos or videos of clients on personal devices including cell phones. (ICEA, 2007, p. 2).

How do these tips relate to blogging? You can discuss classroom content and provide general childbirth information and announcements. You may not mention any clients by name, post photos of clients or their children, nor can you post testimonials in your blog.

Blog Resources

Here are a few resources for learning how to blog. Most blogging sites also have a help section to get you get started.

- **Blogger Tutorial** (www.blogger.com/tour_start.g). This is a simple tutorial by blogger.com about what a blog is and how to get started.

- **List of tutorials for Blogger** (www.simplebloggertutorials.com/). This site lists many tutorials on how to use Blogger. It includes subtopics like basics, templates, tips and tricks, widgets, etc.
- **Training videos** (www.teachertrainingvideos.com/blogs-wikis/). This site provides videos on blogging related topics.
- **CDC's Guide to Writing for Social Media** (www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/guidetowriting-forsocialmedia.pdf). This document provides a lot of examples of dos and don'ts for writing for social media like blogs and tweets. It also includes social networks sites and web pages.
- **Health Works Collective** (www.healthworkscollective.com/node/30402). This page focuses on how to market your health care blog.

Summary

A blog provides a mechanism for you to establish an on-line presence as a childbirth education professional. As a new blogger you will need to learn new software and terminology; however, there are many resources available to help you get your blog up and running. Use the tools available in your word processor – such as spell and grammar check. Keys to successful blogging include maintaining a regular schedule of posts, keeping your posts fun and interesting, and providing information that is useful to your audience.

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Lee Stadtlander is a researcher, professor, and the coordinator of the Health Psychology program at Walden University. As a clinical health psychologist, she brings together pregnancy and health care issues. She maintains a blog on writing a doctoral dissertation at www.phdrealities.blogspot.com/