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NEXT STEP

A guide to Blogsville

Blogs are not only the tools for expressing personal opinions, creativity and heritage – a blog is also a great way to advertise merchandise or service. The loyalty of the followers depends on the content and popularity of the posts. In Bangladesh, e-commerce has flourished through online ads and pages and we have yet to fully explore the power of blogs.

A blog is a site where people publish information and display it in a chronological order starting from food, travel, poetry, fashion, work hints and the list goes on. Blogs started out as a doorway to an individual's mind but recently multi-author blogs have developed, with posts written with the effort of a number of people sharing the same interest.

So how does a blogger get people coming back for more? How can one upgrade his or her profile and win more business? Once you catch the eyes of the firms who are looking for fresh faces to promote their brand, you can even earn money through your reviews!

Here are a few tips that will give a boost to your blogging!

Setting up

There are many free options out there including Wordpress, Tumblr, TypePad, Stylebubble and Blogger. All of them offer free design themes so you can customise your own blog so it's very easy to get started. You can also watch online video tutorials on how to work around the options. Instagram, on the other hand, is a hassle-free option for publicizing that uses photos, videos and hash-tags to attract followers.

Choose a topic and let your blog be dedicated to that one special topic and find a niche audience.

Readers and search engines will find it helpful. Most importantly consider integration by providing links to websites, profiles, folios and other links to build content and make the search engines more user-friendly.

Marketing mix

A really impressive blog will not get the attention it deserves if it lacks good marketing. You can actively market your blog by leaving worthy comments on other people's blogs and this will help people notice you. Interact with existing people on your blog and ask for feedback, respond to queries, build a community around online peers, and be friendly.

Make the commenting option accessible so that people can interact with you and others as well, and this will keep them coming back for more. Be careful about the blog comment hosting service you use. For example, Disqus has fallen out of favour in recent times due to load time. It's preferable to use social media comment hosting.

If you invest in any online advertising, your analytics will also help determine your ROI (return of investment) and how efficient it is. Keep an eye on your web analytics and ensure your blog is working as it should be. However sometimes, when you dislike any comment it can be deleted or responded to positively. Do not let any negativity clutter your mind; what a needle in a haystack thinks is none of your business.



Go all out!

It is essential that you make sure to test automatic updates via Twitter or Facebook after you link it to your blog's RSS feed and update your followers and fans with your latest post. Twitterfeed is a great tool that automatically publishes your posts to your Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Even during holidays, make best use of scheduling tools on the blog so you can post articles automatically while away from desk. This will help the followers remain updated and prove consistency. Place "follow" badges on your blog wherever possible. For example, on Blogger you can add a free widget which encourages people to "follow your blog" in their own Google readers.



Eye candy

Some of the most popular creative blogs consist of plenty of imagery. This is partially because people love to scan quickly through web pages and enjoy seeing photos and images that help to break up the monotony of texts and adds visual interest.

Texts can get boring if it is not organized properly so try and keep your articles as easy, quick reads. Keep the layout clean, fresh and uncluttered and avoid adding unnecessary features. Provide lists wherever possible and break up the text, add in bullet points or lists because it will hold people's attention more. Titles that are appealing and catchy will draw people in and spark their curiosity.

The real deal

People love it when you reveal about yourself and give a little peek of your life. Being genuine has it perks because it will attract the like-minded personalities. People want to follow people not brands so include something heartfelt in the 'about me' section and maybe add a photo of yourself. Tapping into readers' emotion will encourage loyalty and bring happy followers and visitors to your blog.

Be confident about your work, put in the hours, and blog away!

TANISHAA ARMAN

Type your heart

If you don't write about what you love then your content will suffer due to lack of passion. Select a topic and branch out by sharing information and facts about it or admiration towards it.

Writing about popular topics is a good way to make use of the search engine.

It is crucial to check spellings and proofread the article again and again. Bad spelling will not only ruin credibility, it will damage your SEO (Search Engine Optimization) as the search engines will have difficulty recognizing the poor copy. Make sure to check everything before posting it.

Add value to the content and people will be pleased with their web experience.



Innovation Xtreme makes its mark on the startup scene

Let me paint you a picture from the recent past, at best ten years back. A young graduate after finishing his or her studies would aspire to work for a local corporation or a MNC. Why? Because it gave him or her stability, a steady paycheck at the end of the month, and the laud of the society. And mostly it would inflate the individual's value in the matrimony market.

Now, the scene has changed drastically. In the last two years the word 'Startup' is, simply put, all over the place. Everyone with a brilliant idea has a startup, irrespective of their educational or social background. This radical shift from the mentality of being an employee to being an entrepreneur has been one of the positive things that delight many. And to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship and educate the youngsters with the basics of running a business, several small events were held throughout the year. But Innovation

Xtreme, held last week and organized by Startup Dhaka, was probably the grand daddy of them all.

Innovation Xtreme, coolly dubbed as IX, took place on November 22nd at Radisson Hotel Dhaka and hosted more than 350 attendees. The entire crowd was a cocktail of prospective investors, experienced entrepreneurs, corporate professionals, young and student entrepreneurs, local and international media, etc. But the rock stars of the event were probably the international and local startup veterans with vibrant backgrounds, including Nepal's billionaire businessman Nirvana Chaudhary, Zarif Munir of Boston Consulting Group, former Grameenphone CEO Vivek Sood, founding partner of Golden Gate Ventures Jeffery Paine, Kyle Kling and Abul Nuruzzaman from Fenox Venture Capital, and the list goes on.

Mustafizur R Khan, founder of Startup



Alan Garcia, co-founder and COO of Gemroc, Guilio Xiloyannis of ZALORA Malaysia, and Sam Bretzfeld, Chairman of Direct Fresh, share their ecommerce learnings at the event.

Dhaka, described Innovation Xtreme as a "never-seen-before event for the startups of Bangladesh that validated our vision of technology-enabled businesses in Bangladesh." When asked about the motivation behind holding such an event, Fayaz Taher, co-founder of Startup Dhaka and host of the event, exclaimed "We are here to disrupt the way business is done in Bangladesh. At IX we have showcased the brightest, inspired the early starters, and connected everyone together."

The event started with an inspiring session by Zarif Munir explaining why it is the perfect time to be in Bangladesh and invest in the startups. Next on line was the fireside chat with former CEO of Grameenphone Vivek Sood about 'Telecommunications Impact on Startups and Businesses'. The next session was probably one of the highlights of the event: the keynote speech by Nirvana Chaudhary, MD of Chaudhary Group. FYI, Chaudhary Group (CG) is Nepal's largest business house that has now expanded globally, operating in over 32 countries around the world and has offices in over 18 countries.

Other highlights of the event included panel discussions about mobile money and online payments, common problems of start-ups, the startup showcasing featuring Augmedix, Jaago Online School, and Solaric, etc.

The last, and the key attraction of the event, was the 'Lighting Round Pitch Session and Investor Activity'. Let me explain how it works: you get to pitch your idea in 60 seconds. After that you haggle with the investors to raise funds for your startup. The top three companies that raised the highest money have to do a two-minute lighting round pitch with only three slides. Amused? So was I. Bongo, ZuumZuum and Dam Com were the three to secure their places in the final round.

At the end of the event, people got to network, chat with fellow entrepreneurs, find partners, talk to potential investors, enjoy good food and receive cool gifts. Except for me – The Daily Star being a media partner, I was not entitled to the cool gifts that everyone was showing around after the post-event networking sessions. Everything else – spectacular!

SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

ABCs of startups with Kalsoom Lakhani



Kalsoom Lakhani is the Founder/CEO of Invest2Innovate, or i2i, which supports startups and the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem in developing markets, beginning in Pakistan. She is a Global Ambassador for Sandbox, a global network of innovators under 30, and is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers. She has trained young entrepreneurs and change-makers in tech forums in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Kiev, Ukraine and Almaty, Kazakhstan. The George Washington University graduate shares how someone should get started with their very first startup.

If someone has a startup, what are the things they need to address first?

Whether you are currently running a company or aspire to run one someday, the number one thing to think about is not what you are doing, rather how you are doing it. First, you need to answer why you want to do it, and then, how you plan to do it. After that, you can come to the question of what you are doing. Most people talk about what they do, i.e. I run a services company or I run a digital media company. The reason why people buy what you create or invest in you or join your team is because of why you do what you do. The reason why I started my company is because I get to meet interesting people every day, people who have great ideas but need the resources to implement or scale their businesses. And we have so many wonderful partners and investors. They sign on because they believe what you believe. We focus more on why because it helps you grow your company, especially when it gets really difficult – and trust me, it gets really difficult.

Secondly, get to know who is in the field with you,

who else is doing what you are doing – investors often ask these questions. It's good to have a vision, but the next step is to figure out how you are going to do something radically different that people are going to buy.

What is the best approach to start the operation of a startup?

I would recommend the 'Lean Startup Methodology'. It ultimate says: Build, Measure, Learn and Repeat. You don't need to spend a lot amount of money in order to figure out if people like your product or not. It's all about what your customers like and don't like. The only way to figure that out is the smallest, most efficient iteration of your products. After building the model you measure the feedbacks. You learn from what you did and repeat the cycle by tweaking the necessary parameters. Whenever you hit a roadblock, make sure you get back to the drawing board, do the necessary improvements and repeat the cycle.

How important is the target group of a particular startup?

A lot people will spend a lot of time and money to build something really big that no one wants to buy. So if no one buys what you are selling then there is no actual value behind what you are creating. So what you should really care about is what the customer thinks.

This week's free course is "Professional Networking Essentials: Finding Opportunities to Make Connections"

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Overview

In the modern connected business environment, knowing the essentials of professional networking is a major asset and key for success. Networking is all about people and making beneficial connections that will help you build a stable and fulfilling career. Unleashing the power of a network isn't something to be taken lightly. Poor networking skills and lack of etiquette can create roadblocks for you. However, with the right approach and techniques, the impact of a well-developed professional network can help make you more effective at work. This course demonstrates the

basics of establishing a relationship through networking. From choosing the proper venue to developing mingling skills for the real and virtual worlds, this course shows you how to make an impact on professional contacts and strategically develop a flourishing professional network.

Target audience

Individuals, at any level in an organization, seeking to develop confidence and skill in their ability to network in a modern professional environment

Expected duration: 1.0 hour