



RUNNING A CONTRIBUTOR BLOG

BEST PRACTICES & SMART SUGGESTIONS



WordPress isn't just our platform, it's our passion.

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INTRO

You've got a great business and a great WordPress website to back it up. You value sharing yourself and your brand with your audience through storytelling, knowledge, and thought leadership; so naturally, you have a blog.

Your audience likes your writing and you're connecting with potential customers, but what's the next step?

For most active and successful blogs, the next step is finding other contributors. These contributors can be part of your in-house staff, members of your audience who also want to share with your community, outside writers you admire, or up-and-coming writers who need to start somewhere.

Why Contributors?

Why take on contributors? Well, if you don't, you're going to be handling all of the content creation yourself.

Taking on all of the writing and content duties yourself can lead to:

- An audience that grows bored from repetition
- Burnout
- Just producing enough content to get by or going through the motions (your audience can tell when your heart's not in it)
- A lack of outside perspective
- Writer's block or lack of new ideas
- Giving up the blog entirely

Thankfully, WordPress makes it super easy to work with other contributors and publish cohesive content from multiple voices. Marie Dodson, Editor for Torque, says:

"Torque is a WordPress news publication operating on the philosophy 'for the community, by the community.' Contributors are central to this strategy.

With more than 50 contributors since 2013, Torque boasts content from community experts, freelance writers, and up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

We have a steady flow of content from five core writers, who contribute weekly, and regular contributions from different guest authors in the WordPress space. Each contributor brings new perspective and insight into leveraging WordPress to successfully grow, market, and improve your website or blog."

Contributors are fantastic—they give your audience additional perspectives, come in with fresh ideas, bring their own unique voices to the table, and spice up your blog with variety—no one likes a stale blog that repeats itself. Contributors can also become fantastic ambassadors of your brand and your business.

Dan Levy, Content Strategist for Unbounce, says:

"We've had more than 160 people write for the blog over the past five years or so. Most were one-offs – marketers tend to treat writing for the blog as a campaign – but we try to maintain a stable of core contributors who we can count on to write for us every month or two.

Our blog provides advanced online marketing advice for professional marketers and so it's important that we have some of the world's best conversion-centered marketers bringing their expertise, their experience, and their real-world campaign war stories to the table."

Contributors bring additional knowledge and life experiences to the table. They can show new, different actionable processes, tell fresh stories, and approach problems from angles you may have never thought of.

Working with outside contributors also brings networking opportunities. You never know when you'll make a friend. Many writers already have an established audience, which they'll bring over to your website when they contribute. Who doesn't want new readers?

Contributors are a boon to you and your audience—that is, if you manage them correctly.

Raven Tools runs a popular Internet marketing blog, and they occasionally allow high-quality contributors. Raven's Lead Generator and Senior Digital Marketer Nicolette Beard says:

“Contributors offer a different point of view. There are so many aspects to online marketing that no one person can be an expert in all marketing channels. Publishing a variety of voices allows us to provide readers deep industry knowledge, and Raven veteran are able to offer insights on how to be more productive with our campaign management and reporting tools.”

So, why wouldn't you want contributors for your WordPress blog?

The Dangers of Guest Blogging

Many people in the blogosphere are afraid of allowing an outside contributor to guest blog on their site.

That's because SEO (search engine optimization) people, link builders, and others in the marketing world used it (and still use it) as a way to point backlinks back to their site. Those backlinks theoretically boost their search engine rankings.

The problem was that many of these guest bloggers wrote paper thin content, plagiarized content, spun content, and manipulated webmasters into hosting these spammy, subpar posts.

In January 2013, Google decided enough was enough. Matt Cutts, the head of Google's Webspam Team, wrote [a detailed blog post](#) that essentially said “stick a fork in guest blogging, it's done.” At least, that's what it said on the surface.

From Cutts' post:

“Okay, I'm calling it: if you're using guest blogging as a way to gain links in 2014, you should probably stop. Why? Because over time it's become a more and more spammy practice, and if you're doing a lot of guest blogging then you're hanging out with really bad company.”

Back in the day, guest blogging used to be a respectable thing, much like getting a coveted, respected author to write the introduction of your book. It's not that way any more.”

Cutts goes on to say:

“So stick a fork in it: guest blogging is done; it's just gotten too spammy. In general I wouldn't recommend accepting a guest blog post unless you are willing to vouch for someone personally or know them well. Likewise, I wouldn't recommend relying on guest posting, guest blogging sites, or guest blogging SEO as a link-building strategy.”

Seems straight forward, right? You shouldn't accept contributors. We're done here. This book is finished.

Just kidding.

Cutts actually updated the post when the Internet took umbrage with his anti-guest blogging stance. After all, how could sites like the Huffington Post, Gawker, Salon, and Forbes function without contributors?

Here's more from Cutts:

“It seems like most people are getting the spirit of what I was trying to say, but I'll add a bit more context. I'm not trying to throw the baby out with the bath water. There are still many good reasons to do some guest blogging (exposure, branding, increased reach, community, etc.). Those reasons existed way before Google and they'll continue into the future. And there are absolutely some fantastic, high-quality guest bloggers out there. I changed the title of this post to make it more clear that I'm talking about guest blogging for search engine optimization (SEO) purposes.”

I'm also not talking about multi-author blogs. High-quality multi-author blogs like Boing Boing have been around since the beginning of the web, and they can be compelling, wonderful, and useful.”

I just want to highlight that a bunch of low-quality or spam sites have latched on to 'guest blogging' as their link-building strategy, and we see a lot more spammy attempts to do guest blogging. Because of that, I'd recommend skepticism (or at least caution) when someone reaches out and offers you a guest blog article.”

Ahhh, there's the truth. So you need to be skeptical and you need to keep your wits about you, but you don't by any means

need to be afraid of taking outside contributions.

You run a great, legitimate website that's not trying to game the system and you want some outside voices to supplement your own. So here's the deal—be careful about who you let write for your website. We'll talk about vetting contributors in later chapters, but for now you should know that guest blogging is not illegal and the sky is not falling.

Seriously, go look out your window. The sky is still right there and it's still beautiful. Thank you, mother nature.

So, now that you know you're safe, how do you actually manage those contributors?

Management Concepts

There are a few things you'll always need to keep in mind when you're managing and working with contributors. Even if you don't know exactly how you're going to handle these aspects of contributor management, at least having the ideas floating around in your brain will guide you.

Guidelines: At some point (early on, hopefully), you'll need to write down some guidelines for your contributors. What's your website's overall tone and feeling? Are you straight-forward and scientific? Are you conversational, friendly, and casual? Are you a little bit edgy and irreverent? Your contributors will need to fit at least a little bit so your audience isn't turned off.

What's your policy on images? On videos? On citing sources and crediting others for their work? What's your ideal word count? There's more to it than this, but let your subconscious formulate it a bit while you read some more.

You'll also need to enforce these guidelines once you set them.

Editorial Calendar: You'll need some way to keep track of who's posting what and when, otherwise things will turn into a boondoggle quickly. Above everything else, you'll need to choose an organizational method that works for YOU. Your contributors can and will adapt.

Hierarchy: You'll need to establish a hierarchy for your website's contributors. It might sound downright feudal, but

it helps avoid lots of headaches, heartaches, and cases of frothing at the mouth. If you value one contributor more than the others and they give you something good, RUN IT. You'll know where your strengths are and you need to play to those strengths as much as you can.

The Internet is an unforgiving place, so pick your dukes and barons wisely.

Backup Plan: You'll also need a backup plan for when your contributors fall through, because it will happen. That could mean posting a funny and relevant video from YouTube that day or just having some evergreen content ready for emergencies.

Your backup plan will also need to fit with your website's overall tone and feeling—again, you don't want to alienate your audience.

Saying No: This is a big one. Sometimes a trusted contributor is going to turn in something you don't like. Sometimes a first time contributor is going to turn in total garbage. Sometimes you just won't like someone's idea, a site they're linking to, or an image they want to use. It's your website, not theirs.

Consistency, Honesty, and Communication: Your audience craves consistency, and your No. 1 job is to fulfill that need. That means you'll need to keep close to a planned posting schedule (that calendar's already coming in handy!) and keep your content relevant to your viewers' interests.

Additionally, prepare to be honest. You'll have to be honest with your audience, your contributors, and yourself. When something's not working or when something falls through, you'll need to tell the truth. You'll need to own up to mistakes and have unpleasant conversations.

Communication is something I can't stress enough. Even when you don't feel like replying to an email or a blog comment, you have to. It's your job. Trolls and other hellraisers aren't worth your time, but sometimes you'll have to type an awkward reply and feel bummed about it for the next two minutes until you realize you did the right thing.

If you choose to allow comments on your blog, you will need to moderate them on a regular basis. Even if you're using a

plugin that minimizes spam, such as Disqus, at some point, it will still find its way into the comment section of your posts. You can view the comments in the backend of WordPress. If you notice a suspicious comment, don't just delete. Be sure to flag it as spam; this will alert your comment service and help them prevent similar activity in the future.

You'll need to be in constant contact with your contributors, your audience, and your staff— if you procrastinate, it's just going to get worse.

Responsibility: This is probably the toughest part for most people. I don't mean being responsible with your funds, your content, and your website—I mean taking responsibility for your contributors. If you end up publishing something from a contributor that your audience vocally dislikes, you need to take responsibility.

Yes, your contributor wrote it, but you approved and published it. It's your website. There are ways to minimize damage and make amends, but realize that sometimes you'll need to apologize and let the blame fall on you.

Hopefully it won't happen, but you'll need to be prepared if it does.

Contributor Guidelines

Before you start taking on contributors, it's a good idea to write out some guidelines. These guidelines can evolve and change over time, but a rules and best practices document will always have your back. It's the easiest way to get good results and weed out the crappy would-be contributors. After all, if they didn't pay attention to the guidelines, it's their fault. If you don't write any guidelines, well—things are going to be a bit tougher for you.

That's not to say that your guidelines need to be negative, mean-spirited, and elitist. They should actually be the opposite. You're excited about your website and you want others to share in your excitement. Never write your guidelines when you're in a bad mood.

Levy explains how Unbounce crafted and updated their guidelines:

"Our guidelines have evolved over the years as different people have managed the blog, but what hasn't changed is that we expect every piece of content we publish to be credible, educational, actionable, and entertaining. We're very clear about our expectations up front and won't publish anything that doesn't meet our standards or, more importantly, our audience's standards; our audience isn't afraid to call us out if they think a post is too fluffy or not based on reliable data and we wouldn't want it any other way. Our editorial process is pretty rigorous – it's not uncommon for posts to go through three or more drafts – but that's because we respect our contributors' expertise and want to help them tell their stories as accurately and delightfully as possible."

Creating Guidelines

Creating guidelines requires some thought and foresight, but don't let it stress you out. When you're just beginning to take on contributors, you can keep it simple. Here's an [example of a simple contributor's guidelines](#) page.

Even when you're taking on several contributors a week, you can still keep it easy and breezy. Here's [an example](#) from one of the marketing world's most cherished blogs, Moz's center for User Generated Content aka YouMoz:

YouMoz Guidelines—Read Me First!

Thanks for your interest in writing for YouMoz, Moz's user-generated content blog. We feature posts on all kinds of online marketing topics—SEO and inbound marketing, content, social media, CRO, brand marketing, and more. Do you have expertise on a topic that you'd love to share with our audience? Here's how to submit your post for review.

Guidelines for submitting to YouMoz:

- Please submit your own original work. Previously published content will be declined.
- We're looking for content with in-depth and actionable information.
- Observe any copyright or usage restrictions regarding images, obtain permission for use, and cite the source of your image.
- Please resize your images to a maximum of 738 pixels wide.
- Links in a post are welcome, but must be non-promotional and relevant to the post. We do not allow affiliate links.
- Off-topic posts and spam will be declined, and may result in your account being banned.

For detailed information about what we're looking for in a post, the review process, and technical tips, please read our [blog post about contributing to YouMoz](#). Our [survey of our blog readers](#) also offers some great insight about what kind of content our audience really likes to read.

It looks nice, it's easy to read, and says everything it needs to. It uses excellent formatting, including bullet points, to get would-be contributors all of the information they need.

Here's another [example](#) from Salon, a pretty big website that welcomes plenty of contributors:

submissions

Salon welcomes article queries and submissions. The best way to submit articles and story pitches is via email with the words “Editorial Submission” in the subject line. Send your query or submission in plain text in the body of your email, rather than as an attached file.

Please spend some time familiarizing yourself with Salon’s various sections and regular features. If you wish to contribute, please send us an email and tell us a little about yourself — your background as a writer and qualifications for writing a particular story. If you have clips you can send us via email, or URLs of pages that contain your work, please send us a representative sampling (no more than three or four, please).

Email your submission to the appropriate editor for your content — either the politics, culture, life or news editor. You can find the editors’ names and email addresses on our [Salon Staff](#) page.

We do our best to respond to all inquiries, but be aware that we are sometimes inundated. If you have not heard back from us within three weeks, please assume that we will not be able to use your idea or submission.

Also note that Salon does not solicit fiction or poetry submissions and will not be able to respond to such submissions.

They keep it short and simple. It’s not quite as user friendly as Moz’s guidelines page, but that could be by design. Many websites want to make sure their contributors read every word of the guidelines before submitting a post or even contacting them. That’s all up to you.

As you evolve and put more tried and true processes in place, you can go all out with your guidelines. Check out music website [Consequence of Sound’s handbook](#). It’s huge, but it’s everything an aspiring writer needs to know in order to fit the site’s format, tone, and aesthetic.

What to Consider

When writing your guidelines, here are a few elements to consider. Some will be more important than others depending on your website, but it’s helpful to at least think about each of these.

Word Count: How long is your ideal blog post? Does word count not matter at all to you, as long as the content is good? Sometimes it’s best to have a minimum word count if you take open submissions, as that will eliminate bare bones posts that less trustworthy or less skilled individuals might submit.

Images: Do you have an in-house designer or do you need

your contributors to provide their own images? Either way, you need to make sure you have permission to use your contributor’s images. An image policy is necessary for any set of guidelines unless you plan on taking care of all of the images yourself.

Accreditation: An ideal contributor will do their research, use information from credible sources and cite those websites. If you have a certain citation, linking, or accreditation preference, it’s best to note it in your guidelines. It might just be worth saying “cite your sources.”

Tone/Style: This is one of the most important sections you’ll include in your contributor guidelines. Though each contributor you feature should have their own voice and insights, it’s vital for them to “fit in” with the rest of your website. Are you funny? Practical? Scientific? Positive and uplifting? Urge your contributors to re-read a few of your blog posts and provide a summary of your blog’s overall tone and style.

WordPress Experience: If you’re expecting your contributors to enter their own posts into the CMS, you’ll need to mention that you use WordPress. It might be as simple as writing “some WordPress experience preferable” somewhere in your guidelines, but it’s worth mentioning.

Formatting: Is there a certain format you prefer? Maybe you use short, snappy paragraphs and lots of subheadings. Maybe you prefer slightly longer text blocks with lots of pull quotes. Whatever the case may be, mention your formatting preferences in your guidelines. You’ll almost always have to fine tune your contributors’ blog posts to your liking, but it’s better to have them get it closer to right the first time.

Self Promotion: If you’re writing on the Internet and associating with other writers, then dealing with some amount of self promotion is inevitable—but how much is too much? That’s up to you, but be aware that many contributors will try to abuse your trust and generosity. It’s best to state up front how much self promotion you allow. Linking to a contributor’s social media profiles is a nice way to say thank you, but letting them link to their own website nine times in a blog post comes off as a bit tacky. You need to find the balance.

Motive: This goes hand in hand with self promotion, but it also goes a bit deeper. Curbing excessive self promotional

tendencies is a good thing, but you also need to make sure that your contributor's motivations line up with your own. If they just want a backlink, that might not be the best bet for your site. If they want to share a great piece of content with your audience, that's much better. Write a sentence or two about motives and how your values might match with your contributor's intentions.

Crafting Your Guidelines Page

Beside including all of your content and contributor desires in a simple, easily digestible package, you also need to make it look presentable. The examples shown at the beginning of this chapter are a good source of inspiration.

You might organize your guidelines with:

- Bullet points
- A numbered list of requirements
- Bold key terms and essentials

Let's face it, even the best content creators in the world might just scan through your guidelines and look for bolded words and concepts. You don't want to coddle them and hold their hand, but you should make the important requirements easy to find.

Contact Information

Your potential contributors need your contact information. It's surprising how many websites put up a nice contribute page with clear, set guidelines but no contact information.

You can use a contact web form ([Content Form](#) is a popular, well-regarded plugin for that) but if you want a more personal touch, you can just place your email address in the content.

Tell your contributors who they'll be addressing (your name, nickname, Friendster handle, etc.) and lay your email out like this: **youraddress (at) domain (dot) com**.

That keeps some of the spammers out of your inbox, and it also requires your contributor to put a few more seconds of thought into sending you an email. More involved contributors and fewer Russian Pharmacy emails are both good things.

These are just two suggestions on how to display your contact

info that reduce spam and clutter while making it easy for potential contributors to get in touch.

Public or Private Document?

Assuming you're making your guidelines public, you'll need to make them easy to find. You can link to your guidelines page from your main navbar, link to it from a contributors page or just put up a link to a PDF. Whatever you choose, WordPress makes it easy.

Just remember that no one can follow your guidelines if they can't find your guidelines.

You can also keep your guidelines on an unlinked page on your site and send out the URL to potential contributors, which functions as a compromise between public and private guidelines.

Pros of Public Guidelines

- Your guidelines are readily available and accessible without any further action on your part
- Potential contributors know what they're getting into and they can see beforehand if it's a good fit
- Potential contributors will know if they have the time and resources to meet your guidelines before you go through their contribution
- It makes it much easier to reject an unsatisfactory piece; ie: "You didn't follow our guidelines."
- It shows transparency and provides a sense of openness and community

Cons of Public Guidelines

- Not ideal for sites that want invite-only contributions
- Might encourage sub-par contributors
- Sometimes your would-be contributors won't even bother reading your guidelines

That last bullet point is a total bummer, but it's 100 percent true. Even writers don't always like to read. Granted, the good ones generally do, but you can't force someone to read your public guidelines.

If you want to project an air of inclusiveness and community,

choose public guidelines. If you want to seek out each of your contributors on an individual basis for an “invite-only” site, then public guidelines are not for you. Dodson talks about Torque’s private editorial guidelines:

“Our guidelines are constantly evolving. Private editorial guidelines allow us to continuously modify them at any moment.

Sharing our editorial guidelines with contributors has also become a step in our editorial process. Prospective contributors are encouraged to first reach out to us directly with a pitch, the next step is to share our editorial guidelines with them in a Google Doc.”

Pros of Private Guidelines

- Contributors see guidelines only at your discretion
- An air of exclusivity makes contributors feel privileged and wanted
- You’re in total control of guideline content and can modify at any time before contributors see it

Cons of Private Guidelines

- An exclusive or invite-only system may deter excellent content creators you have not heard of
- An “elite” atmosphere sometimes hinders sense of community
- Action is always required on your part—you must always manually send out guidelines

Private guidelines can be contained in a PDF hosted on your website, in a Google Document, or in another text document. They can easily be sent over email—and even pasted into the body of an email itself.

Making your guidelines public or private totally depends on the kind of site you run, what you hope to achieve, and the kind of contributors you hope to attract.

Staff Adhering to Guidelines

If your staff is creating content for your website, you need to make sure they’re adhering to guidelines. If they’re not, then there’s no way outside contributors are going to stick to the

rules. That means much more work for you (or your editor) in the end.

If you have on-staff contributors, it’s best to sit down with them (or connect via Skype or Google Hangout) for a meeting about your guidelines. You should go over why each specific guideline is important and how you can all work to play by the rules. It makes for a unified, pleasant product for your audience.

Try expressing to your staff:

- How your guidelines serve your website’s and business’ overall goals
- How your guidelines serve your existing audience
- How your guidelines will increase your audience by serving consistency
- How your guidelines maintain your site’s overall tone and aesthetic
- How your guidelines will soon become second nature

There will be some rough waters and some editing for the first little while, but it will become much easier as time goes on.

Once your staff is on board with your guidelines, you won’t be the only one enforcing them and praising their usefulness.

Outside Contributors Adhering to Guidelines

When you’re not dealing with your own staff, asking a contributor to stick to guidelines is a little bit tougher.

Even if a content creator has read your guidelines, they might forget an item or two. They might be rushed and disregard your guidelines altogether—even if they say they’ve read them. What can you do?

The bulleted list in the last section applies here as well. If a valued contributor is just disregarding your guidelines, it’s worth explaining why the guidelines are in place.

That being said, you can’t force anyone to adhere to your guidelines. It can be said, however, that a little bit of guilt goes a long way.

If you continue to have problems with a certain contributor (that you still want to keep), mention that spending so much time editing their work takes away from your other work. Don't exaggerate or twist the knife—just be polite, honest, and to the point.

Very few people like making more work for others or making others' lives more difficult.

Explaining the “whys” and what's happening behind the scenes is the best way to coax a contributor into following guidelines.

FINDING CONTRIBUTORS

You've decided to invite contributors to your WordPress site and you've set your guidelines, but where do you find contributors?

Well, it all depends on your goal.

Contributors will diversify your content and build your audience, but do you want open submissions or do you want to keep it invite-only? You can meet somewhere in the middle, but where you find your contributors depends on what you want to do.

What makes a good contributor? Beard weighs in:

“A good contributor, first and foremost, is a strong writer – authoritative, interesting, and knowledgeable. Secondly, a good contributor knows how to meet a deadline. Other than that, our contributors have the freedom to express their unique personality.”

Contributors on Your Own Staff

If you don't have a staff and you're a solo operation, go ahead and skip to the next section.

Otherwise, let's talk about two things—talent and resources.

First, let's talk about resources. Is everyone on your team full to capacity? Would adding an additional task (such as content

creation) to their workload be unreasonable?

If you have the budget and time to let your staff put together some content, you might be surprised at what you'll get, even from non-writers.

If you don't have the resources on your staff to generate content, it's best to seek outside contributions.

Let's assume, though, that at least someone on your staff has the bandwidth to create content. You might even set up a rotating content calendar where several members of your staff take turns writing something for your website.

That brings us to talent. If you have skilled writers on your staff and the resources to let them write then it's a no-brainer.

If you don't have any natural or trained writers on staff, prepare for some editing. Alternately, your non-writer team members can produce videos, graphics, or anything else under the sun.

Most of you will focus on writing, though, so let's talk about that. If they're not writers by trade (and even if they are), you'll need to put in some editing work. Editing is less time consuming than writing, and it means you can save your next content idea for another day.

Your staff members should write about what they know. Even if they come up with an idea that's already been spoken about on your site and others, their unique voice makes it valuable. Encourage them to be themselves (within your guidelines) and do something that only they can do.

You'll often find that non-writers produce some of the best occasional content. They have ideas they've wanted to put in writing but they haven't had the chance until you give it to them. That produces great results, even if it requires editing and formatting.

A good on-staff contributor:

- Has a steady flow of good ideas
- Is adaptable and willing to work with an editor
- Gets content turned in on or near a set deadline
- Does not let their usual tasks lapse during content creation

- Either has WordPress knowledge or learns software quickly

Also remember that your business and website still need to run smoothly when one of your team members is creating content. You'll have to weigh the value of your content as far as conversions, audience growth, branding, and community engagement go—if they don't do much of that for you just yet, you might want to stick with outside contributors until you can afford to allocate more staff time to content.

It's ideal to hire someone solely for content or create a rotating content calendar for your staff and you'll figure out what works best for you as you move forward.

Outside Contributors

If no one on your staff has the bandwidth to make regular contributions, outside contributors are your best option. Most of this book focuses on outside contributors, but the information should work well for both scenarios. Or even a mixture of on-staff and outside contributors.

Outside contributors require more intense communication than in-house contributors, and that starts with the selection process.

Letting Contributors Come to You

If you've set up a guidelines page and a specific page or post welcoming contributors, you can let them come to you.

This approach requires patience, however.

In the early stages of your site, you might not have much traffic or much engagement. That's why you might need to seek out contributors before they come to you. Even before you get popular, make sure that your contact information is easy to find so that rare person who wants to create content for your site can get in touch!

"Wait and see" is the only approach to letting contributors come to you, even when your guidelines and info are easy to find.

You need to make sure, however, that you respond to

potential contributors who contact you within a reasonable amount of time. If you never get back to anyone, word will spread and deter other potential contributors.

Verifying "Real Person" Status

When contributors are coming to you, there's a little extra detective work involved.

Spammers and other ne'erdo wells are an unfortunate reality of the Internet. People are looking to score easy links to their websites, post tons of affiliate links, or pull other shady tactics using your site. This is especially true if they have direct access.

Though WordPress makes it easy to edit any post or page before or after they go live to mitigate (or stop) damage, it's best if it never happens in the first place.

If a contributor you've never heard of or seen online approaches you, it's best to:

- Google their name. This might show you their prior work or at least verify they're a real person. Unfortunately, though, this doesn't work well when a potential contributor has a common name.
- Check the easier social media profiles first—Twitter and Facebook. Twitter is almost always the easiest way to tell if someone's a real person. Glance through their tweets. If it's just a bunch of inspirational quotes and retweets or if the account is brand new, chances are they're using a fake name and they're up to no good.
- Check Google+ just like you checked Twitter. Keep in mind, though, that a lack of followers or people in their circles doesn't mean they're not real—it could mean they're just getting started.
- If you're still not sure, check LinkedIn.

Ask your potential contributor for a link to their website and their social media accounts if your quick detective work hasn't yielded any real results. When all else fails, a polite question will suffice.

Writing Samples

If a contributor who has beginner status contacts you, ask for a writing sample. We all start somewhere, and sometimes people who are just getting into content creation are way less jaded, more eager, and more creative than some veterans.

Still, you have standards to uphold. If you're unsure of a content creator's abilities, ask for a sample. Even if they don't have any live posts, videos, or images elsewhere on the web, they should be able to send you a Word document. They can even write something new—just make sure it's short so you don't spend all day going through the document.

You might help start a novice content creator's career, and they will always be thankful for the opportunity, so don't rule them out.

Determining Motives

Some would-be contributors are just in it for some quick links for their website. These links are usually gratuitous and sometimes sneaky—they won't help your audience and they won't contribute to the content. They're just a quick SEO tactic and, as mentioned in the first chapter, Google frowns upon that.

Other contributors want to insert affiliate links into every piece of content they produce. Affiliate links, in most cases, are a huge turn off to readers. Some people might have motives that are even shadier than that, so you need to figure out what your contributor's motives are.

If you're speaking with a well-established content creator or someone you already trust, then there's no need to worry. If your gut tells you that something might be amiss, then you need to do some detective work or ask your potential contributor outright.

Usually, content creators just want to share content, gain exposure, network, and gain credibility within their field.

Be extra cautious of an unknown contributor's motives if you give them access to your WordPress site. We'll go over WordPress permissions in the next section, but it's something worth thinking about.

Where to Find Contributors

If you don't want to play the waiting game, it's time to go out and find your own contributors.

If you see a piece of content in your niche that strikes your fancy, reach out to the author. Even if they don't have time to produce something for you, you can strike up a relationship. Those relationships might yield results in the future—and if not, you're at least talking to another expert in your niche on a regular basis.

It's best to start small though, especially if your website is relatively new. Once it's gained a little momentum, **one of the best places to find potential contributors is in your website's own comments section.**

WordPress has a robust comment system that will, by default, require a user to leave a name and email address. If a commenter is particularly active in your community, drop them an email and ask them to create some content for you.

Twitter is another great place to find contributors. Using its advanced search function, you can check out people who are talking about your industry. It gets even easier if you're looking through hashtags. You can always join a relevant hashtagged Twitter discussion as well and make some friends that way.

Twitter is a nearly infinite place. Poke around a little bit and you're sure to get the conversation rolling with some potential contributors.

Other blogs in your niche are another great place to look, especially if they accept outside contributors. If you find a content creator you like, follow their social media links and contact them through G+ or Twitter. You can also find the contributor's website and contact them via email.

If you find a website you really like with an in-house writer you'd love to have on your site, you can certainly ask. Just understand that person's plate might already be full and don't be offended if they reject your offer.

Offering Payment

Once you've secured a contributor, another question rears its head—do you pay them or not?

The answer obviously depends both on your budget and your bandwidth for paperwork. Contributors almost always appreciate monetary reward for their work, but you're going to have to fill out a W9 and either mail out a check or send a payment through PayPal.

Also, some content creators have employers that frown upon them receiving outside payment for work.

Some contributors will not work without monetary compensation, and that's perfectly understandable. Some content creators, however, love sharing their work. Never get offended if someone refuses on the grounds of payment, it's not a personal attack.

If you decide to pay contributors, keep in mind that there are several factors that may affect a freelancer's rate: depth of topic, skill, and experience, and the type of content being created, for example. Rates typically range from \$0.08 to \$0.15 per word. It's important to determine your budget and bandwidth before negotiating rates. If you can only pay \$0.08 per word but a writer that you really want charges \$0.13 per word, don't be afraid to ask if they're willing to negotiate a lower fee.

If you don't have the funds then don't sweat it, but try to offer as much non-monetary support to your contributors as possible.

CONTRIBUTOR ROLES & PERMISSIONS WITHIN WORDPRESS

Whether you give your contributors access to your site or not, you're going to have to create user profiles for them. This is done in the "users" tab within the WordPress CMS. The next chapter focuses on how to create robust contributor profiles, but this chapter focuses on user roles.

From the [WordPress Codex](#):

"WordPress uses a concept of roles, designed to give the site owner the ability to control what users can and cannot do within the site. A site owner can manage the user access to such tasks as writing and editing posts, creating pages, defining links, creating categories, moderating comments, managing plugins, managing themes, and managing other users, by assigning a specific role to each of the users."

So which user role should you assign your contributors? WordPress has six default user roles (which can be edited to your preference, as explained in the Codex) that will generally serve your needs.

WordPress is careful to note that there's no real chain of command (with the exception of admin roles) or superiority between user roles. Each role is just ideal for a certain set of tasks.

Super Admin

What is it?

The Super Admin role has access to all capabilities. The Super Admin has permission to perform any task within the CMS, and also the capability to perform any task related to site network administration. A Super Admin can perform any task across a site and, if it has one, a site's network.

Who's it for?

If you own your website, you should have access to the Super Admin user account. If you don't feel comfortable with the responsibility, the account should be utilized by your IT or networking expert. If you're the site owner, you should always have this username and password and you should also severely limit who you share that information with.

Administrator

What is it?

If you run a single WordPress site, an Administrator's role is the same as a Super Admin's role. If you run a multisite WordPress installation, however, the Super Admin role has

network admin capabilities and the Administrator role does not.

For most WordPress installations, Administrator represents “the one in charge,” although there can be multiple Administrator user accounts.

Who's it for?

If you own your WordPress site but don't have a multisite installation, then you need to have an Administrator account. You can have multiple Administrator accounts, but for most sites it's best to just have one. As with the Super Admin account, only give this username and password or make a separate admin account for employees you trust.

The Editor user role has many of the Administrator role's capabilities and should work well for editors, blog managers, and senior writers. In some cases, such as when an editor or manager is very hands on and needs to make site changes and installations often, an Administrator account is warranted. For example, if your blog manager or primary editor needs to create user profiles for contributors (and you're not handling that yourself), manage plugins, or make theme changes, you'll definitely need to set them up with or give them access to an Administrator account.

Editor

What is it?

The Editor role has access to many of the capabilities as the Administrator role, but cannot install or uninstall plugins, edit themes, or create/delete users.

An Editor can read, create, delete, and modify all pages and posts—even those that are set to “private.” An Editor can also publish or unpublish any page or post, moderate comments, manage your site's categories, upload files, and manage links.

Who's it for?

An Editor is ideal for a trusted employee or contributor who focuses more on content than on contributor management. An Editor can perform any content-related duty within your WordPress installation, but cannot add or delete users. If you don't see yourself or someone else with the Administrator role managing user accounts, plugins, and themes, then you'll need to set up your editor or blog manager with an Administrator

account.

The Editor role is ideal for someone who only manages the content itself. If you have an employee or contributor who is overseeing all content, but no other functions, then the Editor role is ideal for that person.

Author

What is it?

A user who is assigned the Author role can read, publish, edit, unpublish, and delete their own posts. An Author can also upload files. They cannot view, publish, delete, or edit another user's posts.

Who's it for?

The Author role is ideal for a trusted contributor. An Author can publish or edit their own posts at any time, so only assign this role to contributors who have already proven that they can create high quality content, adhere to your contributor guidelines, and edit their own work.

If you assign this role to someone you don't know or trust, they could (in theory), publish a post full of spam and irrelevant hyperlinks.

A contributor you trust, on the other hand, can take full advantage of the Author role and save you or your blog manager plenty of editing and publishing time.

This is the role you'll want to assign to reliable, tried-and-true contributors.

Contributor

What is it?

The Contributor role is similar to the Author role, but a Contributor cannot publish or unpublish their own posts, nor can they upload files. They can only edit and delete their own posts—they cannot view or do anything else with another user's posts.

Who's it for?

The Contributor role is perfect for a first time contributor, as it allows them to enter their content into WordPress, edit it to fit

your guidelines, and add it to a queue. At that point, an editor or manager can take a look at it, edit it, add images/other files, and then publish it.

Frankly speaking, someone who is assigned the Contributor role can't do any damage. A user assigned the Contributor role can always be put into an Author role if it's warranted.

This is the role you'll want to assign to new or unproven contributors.

Subscriber

WordPress also offers a Subscriber role, but it is not used for publishing. Instead, the Subscriber role allows a user to register to your site with a WordPress account in order to keep up with your posts. Dedicated audience members will often register (or request, depending on your setup), Subscriber accounts, but they are not used for Contributors.

CREATING CONTRIBUTOR PROFILES

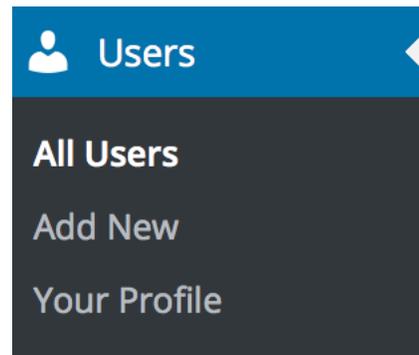
Even if you're not planning on giving individual contributors access to your WordPress site, you still need to create a profile for each contributor.

Technically, yes, you can publish every post from your Admin account, but that will hinder your publishing attempts in several ways:

- You and your users will not be able to sort posts by author name
- Your contributor's biographical information, including links, will need to be inserted into the post itself, which is not recommended
- Reduced usability/aesthetics
- Will possibly make contributors feel under appreciated
- Less professional look

Giving each contributor a user profile does require a few more minutes of work, but it is worth the effort.

To create a user profile, go to your WordPress dashboard and click on the "users" tab.



There you'll be able to create a new user profile. You have the option of sending each user their password (or not), but you will need a unique name and email address for each contributor.

Next, edit the user's profile. Here, you can fill out more information about each user and choose a contributor role for that user.

You can also fill out the rest of this information.

Add New User

Create a brand new user and add them to this site.

Username (required)	<input type="text"/>
E-mail (required)	<input type="text"/>
First Name	<input type="text"/>
Last Name	<input type="text"/>
Website	<input type="text"/>
Password	<input type="password"/> <input type="button" value="Show password"/> <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 5px;">A password reset link will be sent to the user via email.</p>
Role	<input type="text" value="Subscriber"/>

Biography Plugins

WordPress has a robust user profile creation system, but it doesn't automatically come with a way to generate a biography for each user. In general, a biography is a little box that appears on the top or bottom of each post on your site—it usually includes a short biographical snippet, a photo of the author, and several links to the contributor's social media profiles.

Both users and contributors like biographies—they give the user more information on the contributor and puts their social media links all in one place, so it makes both camps happy.

This connects your audience to your content creators and gives your site a much more human touch.

You'll need to choose and install a biography plugin in order to have a biography box displayed on each of your posts.

WP Biographia is simple, highly customizable, and works well with most WordPress themes.

You can choose which posts or pages will display the bio box, the box's border and color, where the box is displayed, and even which users get a bio box. This is all done through a very simple settings menu, and there's plenty of documentation to go with all of it.

There are plenty of other choices, of course, but WP Biographia is nearly perfect for most endeavors. It also adds support for a ton of different social media links, which are fully customizable.

From the plugin's download page:

"The plugin expands and enhances the Contact Info section of your user profile, adding support for Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Delicious, Flickr, Picasa, Vimeo, YouTube and Reddit profile links as well as Yahoo! Messenger, AIM, Windows Live Messenger and Jabber/Google Talk instant messaging profiles. Your Contact Info links can then be displayed as part of the Biography Box, either as plain text links or as icon links. Further contact links can easily be added to the Biography Box by using the wp_biographia_contact_info and

wp_biographia_link_items filters."

You'll want to ask each contributor to submit a short (two- to three-sentence) bio, a headshot, or other photo, and links to their desired social media profiles. You can then easily plug that information into the user's profile section in WordPress.

Avatar Plugins

Along with a bio box plugin, you'll need a plugin for contributor photos and avatars. Users like seeing your content creator's face, and it also helps the contributor build recognition for themselves.

A plugin called Simple Local Avatars adds an avatar upload field to each user's profile within WordPress, so you can just insert the photo when you're creating the user profile. It works seamlessly with WP Biographia, too, which is a huge plus.

If your contributor already has a Gravatar set up, Simple Local Avatars will just pull that photo, put it in your bio box and save you the hassle.

Again, there are many other plugins that will do the same thing, so feel free to look around and read some reviews.

Social Media Links

Brenda Barron



Brenda Barron is a writer from southern California. She loves all things WordPress so it's not much of a surprise she's a big ol' nerd, too. When she's not writing, she's spending time with her husband and two beautiful children.

Posting your contributor's social media links in their bio box is usually part of the unspoken contract between a website and a contributor. If your audience really likes a contributor's work, they'll often want to know more about that content creator—and following them on Twitter or Google+ is one of the best ways to do that.

WP Biographia allows for the easy insertion of just about any social media link in an unobtrusive manner that's safe for your website.

Furthermore, social media links help prove to you and your audience that your contributor is a real person. It's wise to include at least one link to a contributor's social media profile within the bio box.

Biography and Avatar Standards

Now that you have your biography and avatar plugins installed, you'll want to put them to good use.

So what makes a good biography? What makes a good headshot?

Something like this, from Torque Mag, is just about perfect: The bio explains Brenda's professional role, and conveys a bit of her personality. It's quick and to-the-point. The photo, likewise, is simple and clear. Notice the links to Brenda's social media accounts.

A great bio is one to three sentences and expresses both something professional and something personal about the contributor.

Raven Tools' Beard says:

"Bios [at Raven Tools] run one to two sentences, highlighting their area of expertise accompanied by a headshot. Our WordPress install includes an area for both authors and contributors, giving us flexibility in customizing social media and other information and longer descriptions and contact details for Raven staff. We typically include links to Google+ and Twitter and an external link to either their LinkedIn profile or company website."

Unbounce's Levy adds:

"The contributor's bio is their space to use as they see fit. We let them link to whatever they want, though of course we encourage them to follow conversion marketing best practices and stick to ONE call to action/link and link out to a dedicated landing page :) In fact, the contributors who have seen the most success guest posting for Unbounce are the ones who link their bios to lead gen landing pages that are tailored to our blog audience. And you won't find leads more qualified than Unbounce blog readers!"

An ideal bio includes:

- The contributor's job title
- The contributor's business or employer
- The contributor's area of expertise, experience, or education
- Personal info, hobbies, and interests

Some contributors like to include little quips or jokes in their bios, as well. If that gels with your site's tone, feel free to indulge them—your audience will appreciate it.

If your contributor is having a hard time writing a bio, point them at other bios on your site (or even the bio included above) and show them the above list of requirements.

As for photos, any photo that clearly shows the contributor's face and isn't horribly pixelated will do. Some contributors like to use cartoon images as well—it's up to you if you'll accept those. In general, a photo of a real person's face is preferable.

A Quick Note on Bio Box Links

As mentioned in the beginning of the book, you need to be careful with giving out backlinks to contributors.

Usually a branded link (a link to the contributor's website with the website's name as anchor text) is just fine. If you're concerned about that though, there are a few ways to go about it.

WP Biographia creates a website blank/form in the user profile section, and you can insert the contributor's website there.

You can also nofollow the link (handy guide [here](#)), although some contributors will take issue with that.

If you want to insert a link into the bio box with WP Biographia, you'll need to manually insert the HTML. It's easy, and it should just look like this:

```
<a href="url">link text</a>
```

Ex: `WP Engine` published this ebook.

Giving a link back to the contributor's site is generally a

nice thing to do—it will give them exposure and traffic. Just remember that it's your site and that you don't have to create and hyperlink that you don't want to create.

KEEPING TRACK OF CONTENT

Once you have a few steady contributors sorted out, you'll have to put some effort into organization. Using an unorganized approach can work for a while with a few contributors, but you might find yourself having promised two people the same publish date. It's never fun to tell someone you won't be publishing their work on time.

A content calendar, or an editorial calendar, is the easy solution.

Beard agrees:

"We use Google Docs to manage the intake process and CoSchedule to manage collaboration and editorial calendar. In fact, Arienne Holland wrote a post detailing the advantages of using an editorial calendar, like CoSchedule. <http://blog.raventools.com/productivity-tools-love-coschedule/>"

Creating an Editorial Calendar

There are plenty of options when it comes to editorial calendars, but let's start with one that's both free and easy—Google Calendars. All you need is a Gmail account.

A Google Calendar is easy to set up, easy to maintain, and easy to share with your contributors.

Levy agrees:

"We're basically Google Docs freaks and our editorial calendar lives in a massive spreadsheet that includes our production pipeline, an ever-evolving calendar and tabs for ideas (organized by category), potential contributors and other brain dump things. We have monthly editorial meetings that include our social team and co-founder Oli (who started the blog) to brainstorm ideas

around key topics, upcoming campaigns and marketing problems that we've identified through our customers and community and then our blog manager, Amanda, matches up potential topics and titles with the appropriate author. We're always refining our process and expect it to evolve as our content team grows and we continue to explore more content channels (we just launched a podcast, for example. You should listen to it!)."

Here are the basics:

1. Create a Google Calendar
2. Create a recurring event called 'blog post' (or anything else) on the calendar that fits your publication schedule (M-W-F, all five business days, etc.)
3. Modify each individual event with details as you get them—who's writing the post, etc.
4. Share the calendar with your contributors

It's that simple. If you want more details, check out this in-depth guide from [Hubspot](#).

Google Calendars works well because almost everyone uses a form of Gmail, whether their business uses it company-wide or they have a personal address. Checking an external calendar is easy to forget, but when it's integrated with your regular email habits, it becomes easy. Google Calendars can send you and your contributors notifications whenever you need it to.

It also has full calendar functionality—modifications are straightforward and simple. Coordination becomes an easy and interactive task.

Asana

Asana is another good way to organize content and contributors. It's not free, but it's relatively inexpensive. It's an email-free project management system that integrates into Chrome, Google Drive, Github, Dropbox, and even WordPress itself.

Asana is ideal for sites with a larger group of contributors that require project management solutions that go beyond a simple Calendar.

If you need a project management platform for marketing

campaigns, content strategy, and an editorial calendar, it's something to consider.

Asana offers a widget that works with your WordPress dashboard, allowing you to assign, complete, create, and modify tasks from within your CMS.

Google Calendars should work fine if you only need an editorial calendar for two to 15 contributors, but you might need something more robust if you go beyond that. Asana is a good choice, but it requires you to pay attention to the software itself since it's not email-based.

Keeping in Touch

There will be times when you want to check in on a contributor but you also feel like typing up an entire email might seem like you're nagging them. You want to nag them (gently), of course, but you don't want it to seem like nagging.

Chat programs like Skype and Gchat are a good way to keep in touch.

Most people use Gchat by default, since it's built into their Gmail account. It's easy to drop a quick, "Hey, how's it going?" with Gchat, and people will generally respond with how they're doing on their content.

Communication platforms like Slack and HipChat also enable easy collaboration with contributors. Both Slack and HipChat are 100 percent free, but require some initial setup and installation. After you get everyone on board, however, you'll find that centralizing your conversations with contributors provides better organization and overall more efficient communication.

You can also say something like,

"Hey, I don't remember if I shared our content calendar with you, but we plan on publishing your piece next Wednesday"

along with a link to your content calendar.

It's also a great way to actually chat with your contributors and

former a better relationship—if you both have time, that is.

CONTRIBUTOR OBSTACLES

We've talked about finding outside contributors and how to nudge them into following your guidelines, but what do you do when you encounter a hangup?

Management

Prevention is the best way to avoid contributor obstacles.

It's hard to effectively manage someone who doesn't work with you or for you, so outside contributors can be tricky to supervise.

Keeping in touch and setting expectations ahead of time are both important. Contributors should know what to expect based on your initial email conversations and contributor guidelines, but there's always room to double check if you're not sure they understand your expectations.

Upfront, communicate:

- The importance of reading and/or re-reading your contributor guidelines
- The contributor's deadline
- Your editing standards (even if they're already in your guidelines)
- What else you need from the contributor (photo, bio, social media links, etc.)
- Tell the contributor ahead of time that you'll check in if you haven't heard from them
- How your most successful contributors operate

In reality, preventative communication and follow-up communication are the only management techniques you'll have available with any contributor you're not paying. Manage expectations with clear communication up front, using both your contributor guidelines and email/chat communication. If that doesn't work, your only recourse is checking in with your contributor.

Also understand that people get busy and don't take it personally when a contribution falls through.

Can't Fire a Volunteer

It's inevitable that eventually a contribution will fall through. You'll be disappointed and, if other steps aren't taken, that missing contribution might mess up your publication schedule—but never take it personally.

Unless you're paying a contributor, they're volunteering for you with their time, talent, and expertise. If you are paying a contributor, either they'll come through or they won't get paid.

With a volunteer, though, you can't really fire them. You can use good communication skills and check in on them, but sometimes they still won't come through—that's something you'll need to make peace with.

When a contributor misses a deadline, you have two options:

1. Take the content when it finally comes your way
2. Politely refuse the contributor's content and future contributions

You can't really fire a volunteer, but you can sever your relationship. How much leeway you give to contributors not meeting expectations is up to you.

Being Prepared

The best way to prepare for a missed contribution is with backup content.

What works as backup content for you depends on your site and your site's overall purpose. Beard explains:

"As a software-as-a-service (SaaS) company, Raven has a lot going on in developing new and updated product features, so alerting our customers and visitors about those take priority. As a result, I intentionally create an editorial cushion. That way I'm not dependent on needing a post to run on a specific day. But, if a contributor drops the ball, it's unlikely I would invite he or she to publish in the future. There are just too many quality writers who would love the chance to contribute to the Raven blog and share their knowledge with thousands of online marketing professionals who read us every day."

If you're pressed for time, these things make great content for filling in a gap on your editorial calendar:

- A post with a relevant video embedded and a brief write up on why that video is useful/worth watching. Go the extra mile and link to the video creator's website or social media accounts.
- A post with interesting images and/or memes your audience will enjoy. If the images aren't yours, ask permission, and give credit where it's due.
- A post comprising relevant embedded tweets. Pick the best, most insightful, and most retweeted tweets in your niche from the week. It's fun to poke around Twitter and see what's happening.
- Make a news roundup linking to other sites in your niche and news sites that cover relevant events. As always, give links and credit when appropriate.
- If there's a particular newsworthy event in your site's niche, consider doing a writeup with your own take on the story.

Creating and saving some evergreen content is another way to prepare for holes in your editorial schedule. Evergreen, in this case, refers to content that's not time sensitive or only relevant to a specific event.

Evergreen content, therefore, should be relevant no matter when it's published. Though evergreen content is often less popular than content tied to current events or industry trends, it can still be useful to your audience.

Consider writing some lists, creating some tutorials, or even telling an anecdote that your audience will enjoy no matter when it's published.

Pushy or Difficult Contributors

Missing a deadline isn't the only way a contributor might frustrate you. Sometimes, the opposite happens—a contributor is either too eager or too pushy. No one likes being subjected to endless demands, and a contributor's pushiness can be just as bad as a contributor's tardiness.

As always, honesty is the best policy. Tell a contributor when they're being too pushy, but be polite about it.

If you don't want to outright tell a contributor they're being pushy, you might try saying:

- "Based on our interactions, I think we'll have difficulty working together in the future."
- "You're a talented content creator, but you're just not a good fit for the direction my site is headed."
- "I'm busy and am having difficulty keeping up with you. I think you'd be a better fit on another site."
- "This isn't working out. Good luck on your future endeavors."

If a contributor's piece just isn't going to work out—either because it's not up to your standards or because it requires too much editing, just say so. Something like "Thanks for your interest, but I don't have the time to give this piece the editing it needs and deserves," should work just fine.

Always remember that it's your site. You're not obligated to publish anything you don't want to publish and you're not obligated to work with someone who makes your life difficult.

If worse comes to worse, almost every email service and chat program allows you to block users who are harassing you. In WordPress, you can even flag certain IP addresses as spam to prevent them from leaving comments. Of course, it's best to leave all comments unpublished until they're moderated anyway, but you have plenty of options.

Never be afraid to tell a contributor that they're not a good fit or that their content isn't relevant to your site. If they're passionate about content creation they'll find someplace else to publish.

JUGGLING MULTIPLE CONTRIBUTORS

Once you get into a routine and consistently deliver good content from your contributors, you'll gain new contributors.

It can become a juggling act, even with a solid editorial calendar setup. That calendar will be your lifeline if you're managing multiple contributors.

Consistent Schedule

The easiest way to juggle multiple contributors is to set a certain schedule. Say you publish four times a week and publish a contributor piece every Monday. That's an easy schedule to keep track of—that way you know you need three internal pieces each week and one contributor piece.

You can set it up any way you like, of course, but using a consistent schedule is the best way to prevent future heartache. Also note that this consistent schedule should absolutely be flexible—we're all imperfect human beings, and sometimes things need some shifting around.

Once you know your schedule:

- Email your contributor and tell them about your schedule. Include their deadline and publish date.
- Mark each blog post/contribution as an event on your content calendar with the contributor's name. Invite them to that calendar event via Google Drive.
- Make sure that calendar event is clearly marked and your expectations are clearly laid out.
- Check your content calendar every day.

Setting Deadlines

You need to set deadlines for your contributors, but you also need to be reasonable. Ask them up front how long a blog post usually takes them if they don't offer that information first. Negotiate a good deadline and publish date, using gaps in your editorial calendar for guidance.

Deadlines are never set in stone. Your contributors will miss deadlines and you will miss them, too. Instead of getting upset about a missed deadline, be prepared. Refer to the last chapter for both evergreen content ideas and quick and easy post ideas.

In most instances, giving your contributors one to two weeks for each piece of content is reasonable. If it's a huge undertaking though, be prepared to give more time. Always allow yourself at least a day for editing before your contributor's publish date.

Levy explains what happens at Unbounce when a contributor's

post falls through:

“Hopefully we have another post in the pipeline that we can move up. We try to maintain a decent runway so we’re not scrambling to finalize posts at the last minute. But if we decide that a post needs more work or just isn’t up to snuff, we’re not going to publish it – even if that means not publishing anything that day. We’d rather skip a post than go live with something we can’t stand behind.”

Worst case scenario: your contributor’s content isn’t turned in by deadline and you have no content to replace it with. When that happens, you miss a day of content publication. As long as you don’t make it a habit, it’s not the end of the world.

Drowning Content

If you start to publish enough contributors, you might begin to feel like your own content is being drowned out by external voices. Even if your audience loves contributor content, it’s still your website and you need to maintain a strong presence.

If you ever feel like your own voice is being drowned out, remember: it’s your site.

You can always push a contributor’s content back a few days, a week, two weeks, or whatever it takes. Always notify a contributor when their content is being pushed back, but don’t be afraid to do it if your site is becoming too diluted.

Either your contributor will understand and happily take the changed publication date or they’ll take their content elsewhere.

Consistency, Honesty & Communication

I touched on this earlier in the book, but it bears repeating now that you’re thinking about multiple contributors.

Treat your contributors consistently, keep your expectations consistent, and offer consistent support. You might favor some contributors over others, but you’ll need to treat everyone (at least close to) equally to create a consistent and supportive environment. Keep your editing and publication timetable consistent and always respond to emails promptly—and give yourself some room to breathe.

Some contributors aren’t going to work out and some pieces of content won’t be published on time. It’s important to be honest with your contributors even when you feel uncomfortable communicating bad news. It’s best to be honest, polite, and get it out of the way as soon as possible. Even if your contributor is disappointed with your decision to not publish their work, they’ll remember you much more fondly if you’re direct and honest.

You can’t be honest or consistent without good communication. Usually, that just means keeping up with email. When you’re required to go a step beyond, like moving a publish date or ending a relationship with a contributor, however, more intricate communication skills are needed. Always be professional, polite, and straight forward—and always keep content creators’ egos and feelings in mind. They’re often brilliant but fragile creatures.

IMAGES, EDITING, & CONTENT

Every website needs good, eye-catching images—especially within blog posts. Larger sites are often blessed with in-house designers, illustrators, and photographers but newer businesses don’t always have the resources to keep a full-time artist on staff.

Your content needs images, though. You can contract out image creation, which often produces great results—but it can also be time consuming, which is unfortunate when you’re trying to stick to your editorial calendar.

Stock photos are always an option, as are memes. Audiences don’t always respond to either one well, so they’re best used within the body of a post to make or to accentuate a certain point. No matter what you do, you’ll need at least one eye-catching “main image” for each post you publish.

Contributors Providing Images

Sometimes a contributor is an artist or has access to one, and sometimes they’re just great at finding usable images.

Regardless, most contributors can come up with something if you ask them for it.

Many editors put image requirements in their contributor guidelines. Generally, that means asking for a royalty-free/Creative Commons image with each piece a contributor turns in. It's a reasonable request, and it might save you some time.

It sometimes happens that contributors don't provide proper credit for the images they use, and tracking down the image's creator and the image's license can be more time consuming than finding an image yourself. Giving proper credit is important—it's the law, but it also shows respect to the image's creator and builds your own site's credibility.

Contributors can also provide:

- screenshots
- embedded tweets
- embedded videos
- graphs
- memes (within reason)
- short webcomics

Providing Images for Contributors

Sometimes your contributors won't be able to find an image, but you're not totally out of luck if that's the case.

Creative Commons and public domain images will quickly become your best friends. You can find many cool, interesting images that are relevant to what you're doing—and many of them can be modified with custom text, cropped, or otherwise altered to suit your needs. All you need is a basic photo editor like Paint or GIMP.

Before you get started with those images, you'll need to look into the basic types of Creative Commons licensing. There's a handy guide [here](#).

Once you have that down, check out sites like [Wikimedia Commons](#) and [MorgueFile](#). They're a great resource and they'll almost always have something you can use. If not, Flickr offers many Creative Commons images as well.

You can even modify a Google Image search (Search Tools >

Image Rights) to find something useful.

As always, give credit where credit is due. The licensing on these images will tell you how to attribute them to their original creator.

Since you'll want more than one image per post, it's okay to use stock photos and memes sparingly. Memes can be a funny way to break up text, but they can also wear out their welcome quickly. Stock photos, on the other hand, might look professional—but they also cost money, and many younger readers might find them corny or inauthentic. Use common sense when you're using memes and stock photos: they can both be used effectively and creatively, you just need to put some thought into it.

Making Light Edits

When you're editing a contributor's post, it will usually be light edits—a bit of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and editing for tone.

It's always tempting to rewrite an awkward sentence in your own voice or style, but that's never the best way to edit someone else's work. Always try to keep the contributor's voice intact, and always leave their original message unchanged as long as it gels with your site and your brand.

A quick, if exaggerated, example: if your contributor writes with a verbose, colorful voice, such as:

"It's akin to the saddest funeral on the mistiest day, the sky itself crying with precipitation and loss, when the heroic filter in your favorite fish tank gives out."

Then changing it to:

"It sucks when your tank filter breaks down."

probably won't preserve their voice.

When you can, just edit for grammar and not for style or content.

ESL Contributors

A quick note on editing contributions from ESL (English as a Second Language) content creators: follow the rules in the previous section, but put a little more effort into preserving the author's voice.

Some ESL contributions take a bit longer to edit, but I've had some of the most useful and popular posts I've ever edited and published come from ESL content creators. The grammar and spelling will generally be impeccable, you'll just see a few odd turns of phrase once in a while or a missing word.

Say you get these sentences from a contributor:

"Example of a good bot is 'googlebot' which is used by Google to crawl and index web pages on the internet.

Majority of bots (whether good or bad) don't execute javascript but some do."

It might be tempting to write them in your voice, but you should refrain. A few gentle edits will do wonders:

"An example of a good bot is 'Googlebot,' which is used by Google to crawl and index web pages on the internet.

A majority of bots (whether good or bad) don't execute Javascript, but some do."

Notice that I just added a few articles and commas. That's really all it needs, and even if it's not how you'd write the sentence, it still totally works.

Be up front, as always, with your ESL contributors and let them know you'll just edit for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure (just like you do with every other contributor), but never for message or overall content.

Making Tough Edits

WordPress makes most editing work easy. There's the built-in spell checker, but there are also a variety of plugins that will help you eliminate unnecessary words and handle awkward sentences. A list can be found [here](#).

You'll eventually get a piece from a contributor that's way too long, meanders about for 1,000 words before it gets to

anything useful, and doesn't fit with your site's tone or your brand. You'll have to do some intense chopping and editing to make it work.

When this happens, it's best to do your edits, save a draft, and email your contributor. Let them see the edits, but be firm in saying those edits need to happen. If they're not comfortable with the edits, you'll have to politely decline the piece.

As always, be honest and tactful. Explain why you think the edits were necessary, but avoid insulting the contributor or going on the defensive.

If those tough edits are too much work and you're already running behind, just let the contributor know this piece of content isn't going to work out. They can either try again with something else later or move along entirely.

NOW GO GET STARTED

Now that we've armed you with the information you need to bring aboard content contributors, you're ready to get started. Following these best practices will help you build out a roster of trustworthy contributors and manage the content they send your way. Now go forth and make your blog awesome.



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