



HubSpot

RESEARCH

# COMPOUNDING BLOG POSTS

*What They Are & Why They Matter*

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by MIMI AN

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# 01 /

## STRATEGIC SUMMARY

*“HubSpot recommends that marketers focus on ‘compounding’ blog posts -- posts whose traffic grows steadily over time”*

HubSpot Research analyzed blogging data from more than 15,000 companies.<sup>1</sup> Based on our analysis, HubSpot recommends that marketers focus on “compounding” blog posts — posts whose traffic grows steadily over time. These posts are far more valuable than “decaying” posts which deliver a surge of traffic and then decay over time. While only one in ten posts are compounding posts, they account for 38% of total blog traffic across our sample. To maximize the chance of creating a compounding post, write articles that solve readers’ problems, are easy to scan, and feature words like “how” and “why” in the title.

# COMPOUNDING BLOGGING

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

We reviewed the blog visits of high performing companies over time and found that compounding posts account for a far greater impact on marketing performance.

## DEFINING COMPOUNDING AND DECAYING POSTS

### COMPOUNDING



VISITS INCREASE OVER TIME

### DECAYING



VISITS DECLINE OVER TIME

## 1 IN 10 BLOG POSTS ARE COMPOUNDING

Compounding posts aid organic search traffic by strengthening SEO and domain authority.



One compounding post attracts the same number of visits as six decay posts



38% of total blog traffic is generated by compounding posts

## HOW YOUR CONTENT MARKETING TEAM CAN CREATE COMPOUNDING POSTS



Ensure your editorial calendar covers evergreen, tactical topics



Title posts to reflect common search practices



Ensure your editorial calendar focuses on compounding posts

Titles with  
**6-13 WORDS**

attract the highest and most consistent amount of traffic

WHAT

HOW

WHY

BEST

Include the authoritative words to reflect common search terms

## 02 /

# COMPOUNDING POSTS PROVIDE (AND RETURN) MAXIMUM VALUE

Compounding posts grow. Decaying posts don't. When we measure the long-term value of blog posts, this distinction is central to success.

### Defining compounding and decaying posts

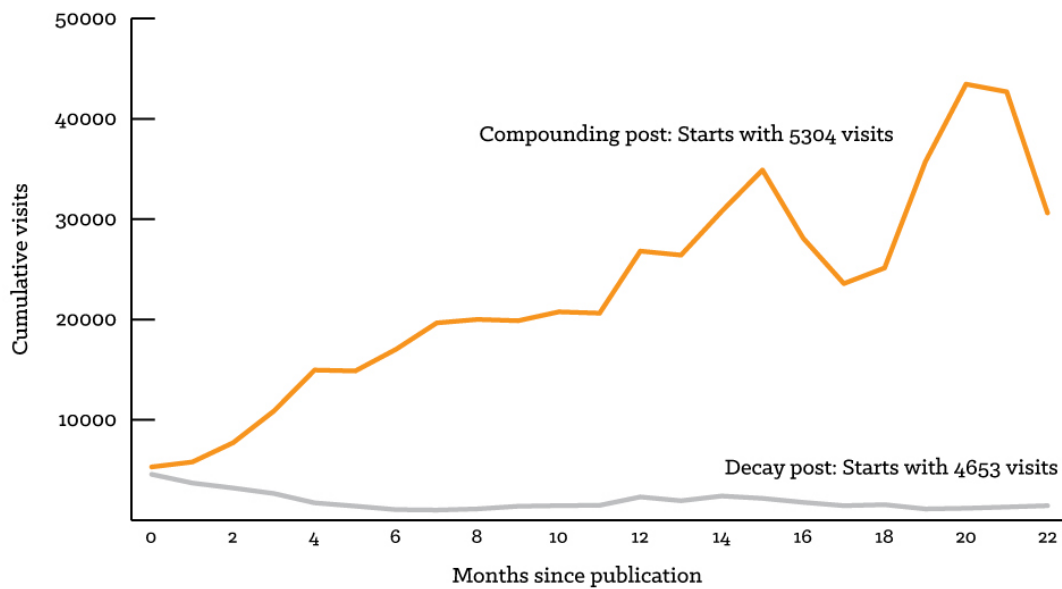


## ANALYZING TRAFFIC FROM COMPOUNDING AND DECAYING POSTS

Let's start by looking at how most bloggers think about traffic. Traffic for a typical blog post peaks when it's published and then decays quickly over time — usually in days if not hours. We call these types of posts “decaying” posts (see Figure 1). Like Hollywood executives tracking opening weekend numbers for a film, marketers focus on generating “big numbers” when the post goes live to recoup the time and effort put into to creating it. This creates a cycle: We expect visits to trickle to a stop, so after a post goes live, we turn our attention to the next premiere.

Figure 1: While marketers expect posts to decay, compounding posts deliver greater value

### Profile of visits to a typical compounding and decaying blog post



This “opening weekend” model is a reliable way to draw an initial surge of traffic to your website and help build an audience from that traffic. Yet given the short half-life of each article, these posts put marketers on a treadmill as they seek to grow traffic overall. A steady stream of traffic demands a steady stream of posts, which in turn requires consistent effort from your staff.

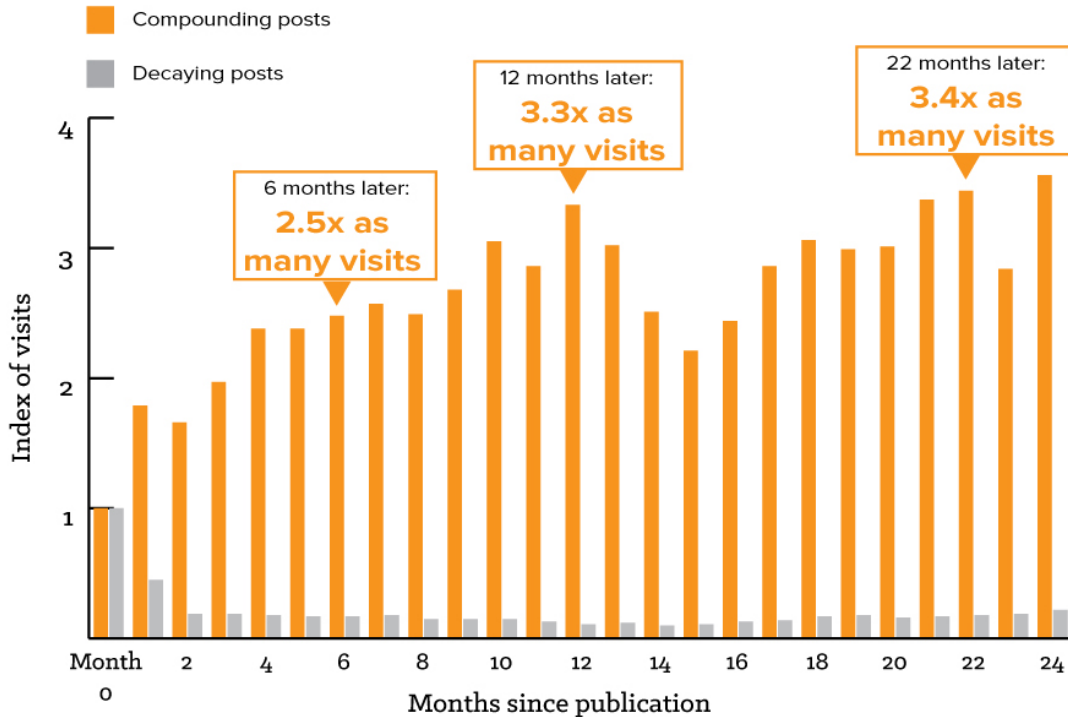
It’s more efficient for content marketers to create “compounding” posts that generate accretive traffic. The signature characteristic of compounding posts is that they eventually surpass the initial traffic that they generate at publication. Compounding posts may not necessarily be blockbusters when they’re first published, but their structure and substance are so relevant that they continue to deliver value and grow traffic organically and without additional marketing.

We computed the rate of growth of almost 2,000 compounding and 18,000 decaying posts from top performing business blogs (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> Based on our analysis, if you publish a compounding blog post in January, you can expect it to receive 2.5 times as many visits per month by July. In contrast, if you publish a decaying blog post in January, by July you will attract less than a fifth of your initial audience.

Note that the trajectory of visits for a compounding post is not a constant, sustained upward march. External factors like seasonality affect the size of the audience at a given point in time. Don't expect a steady increase in visits month over month; short-term variability affects even the most popular compounding posts.

Figure 2: Average traffic to compounding and decaying blog posts over time

## Average profile of compounding and decaying posts over time



Base: 1971 compounding blog posts and 17548 decaying blog posts

*“Compounding posts may not necessarily be blockbusters when they’re first published, but their structure and substance are so relevant that they continue to deliver value and grow traffic organically and without additional marketing.”*

## WHY COMPOUNDING POSTS MATTER

In our sample, roughly one out of ten blog posts are compounding. Blogs that achieve this ratio of compounding to decaying posts are in great shape to build and maximize visits to their website over time.

Over its lifetime, one compounding post creates as much traffic as six decaying posts.<sup>3</sup> A single compounding post provides much higher return on effort to better target leads and are intended to generate sales.

### One out of every ten blog posts are compounding



### Compounding posts produce as many visits as six decay posts

1 compounding post



6 decaying posts



Base: 19,519 blog posts

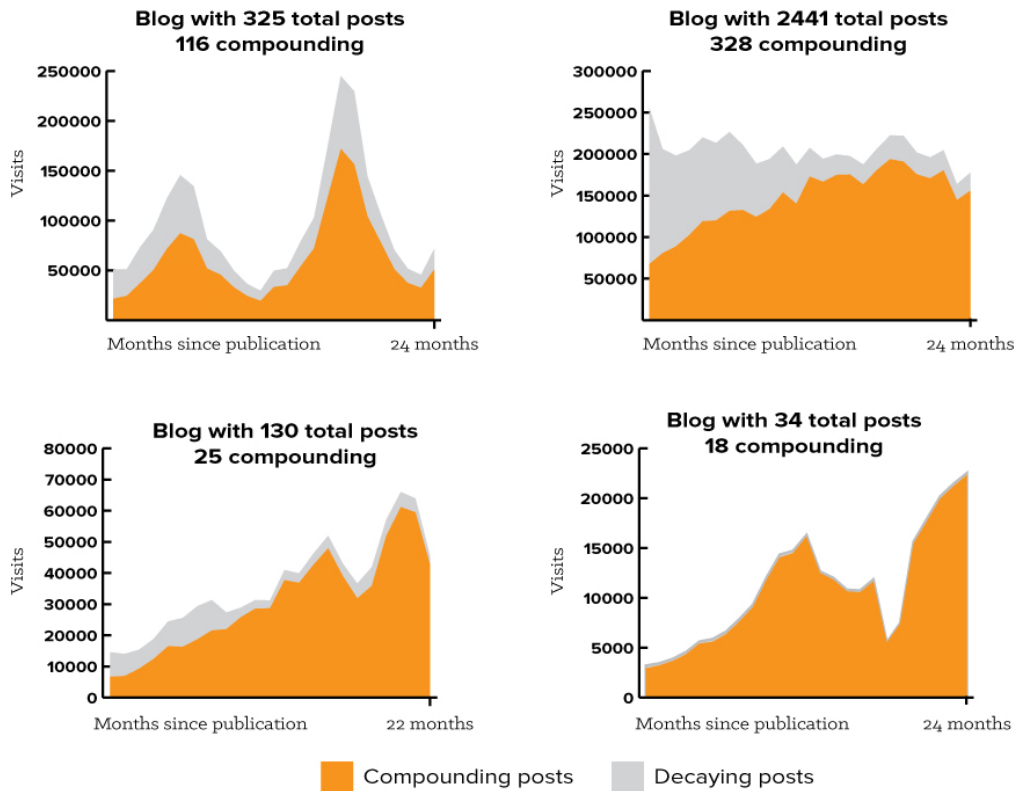
Figure 3 highlights the impact of compounding posts with charts of the traffic to four different blogs over a two-year time span. The orange area represents visits from compounding posts, while the gray represents visits from decaying posts. These blogs reflect the extra value that compounding posts create, especially for marketers that have cracked the formula and generated more compounding posts than average.

*“Over its lifetime, one compounding post creates as much traffic as six decaying posts.”*



Figure 3: Compounding posts can account for large proportion of traffic

### Share of total traffic from compounding posts for four blogs



To gauge the overall impact of compounding posts, we analyzed traffic across 20 high performing business blogs. In our sample, compounding posts made up 10% of posts, but generated 38% of total traffic. Compounding posts contribute powerfully to overall traffic months and even years after their original appearance.

**Compounding posts make up  
10% of all blog posts...**



**...and generates  
38% of overall traffic**

As marketers publish additional compounding posts to their business blogs, they reach a point where a minority of articles generates the majority of visits to their blogs and perhaps even to their corporate websites. This consistent traffic boosts a webpage's search ranking, leading to more organic visitors, and potentially more business contacts and leads.

## 03 /

# HOW TO WRITE A COMPOUNDING POST

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The compounding formula varies according to your industry and customers, but the posts do share common characteristics. While you can't always predict which content will become compounding, we have found some commonalities in posts that grow in traffic over time. In this section, we'll go over which types of posts tend to compound, how to choose a topic focus, how to title a compounding post, which types of content to include, and how to structure the post.

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### TO CREATE A COMPOUNDING POST, GO TACTICAL, NOT TOPICAL

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Most compounding posts are tactical. They intend to help readers, typically by providing instructions. These articles fall into one of three categories: broad tactical, narrow, or topical. Broad tactical posts are the most likely to grow and compound. In Figure 4, we give example of these three types of posts for a hypothetical dental practice focus, how to title a compounding post, which types of content to include, and how to structure the post.

- **Broad tactical posts attract ongoing attention.** If you're trying to create a compounding post, write about a broad topic and offer tactical advice with mass appeal. In other words, write for as large as possible a segment of your potential customers. Broad tactical posts include product reviews, breakdowns of processes, or instructions on how to diagnose a practical, mechanical, or health-related issue. As a compounding post generates more traffic, its search authority increases, generating more search hits and more traffic in a virtuous cycle.

- **Narrowly focused posts rarely grow.** Posts that cover niche topics appeal only to a subset of your total audience. Because the total audience is small at the outset, narrowly focused posts generate less traffic overall. Since the number of people searching for the topic is also low month-over-month, these posts have little search authority and rarely compound. You may want some narrowly focused posts in your content mix to speak to those niche audiences, but note that they are unlikely to compound.
- **Topical posts create a surge, but then decay rapidly.** Posts that focus on current events (a technique known as “newsjacking”) decay rapidly over time. You can expect visits for these posts to taper off as readers move to the next news event.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 4: Three types of posts for a dental hygiene company

Topic	Bad breath
<p><b>Broad Tactical</b></p> <p><b>How to get rid of bad breath for good</b></p>	<p>This broad tactical title focuses on a common issue faced by many people. The topic is constantly searched against. The title uses words that reflect how people search.</p>
<p><b>Narrowly focused</b></p> <p><b>Tonsilloliths’ connection to halitosis</b></p>	<p>This title is less likely to compound since less people display these symptoms or have this problem. This post can still draw regular traffic over time, but because the audience is limited, it will rarely exceed original traffic. Since the language in the title is so technical, it’s also less likely to be searched against by the general public</p>
<p><b>Topical</b></p> <p><b>New study shows x% of people have bad breath</b></p>	<p>This title can draw interest initially but the content is not compelling enough to attract visitors months down the road since it’s a synopsis of a news article</p>

## CRAFT COMPOUNDING BLOG TITLES

Position your blog titles so that they address an evergreen topic within your industry. Titles should be relevant to as many visitors as possible. Remember that most people are searching for answers using phrases like “the best product for xyz” or “how do I do xyz”. Your blog titles should reflect common search phrases, and, of course, the content should provide useful answers. This strategy will increase your post’s chances of growing traffic over time. The chart below highlights how a minor change in focus on a given topic can turn your post from one that follows a standard decay pattern into a compounding post.

Figure 5: Example titles – a slight change in topic focus can impact a post’s longevity

Topic	✓ Compounding title	✗ Decaying title
Bad breath	How to get rid of bad breath for good	New study shows x% of people have bad breath
Refrigerators	Best reviewed refrigerators	This year’s top selling refrigerators
Personal finance	Top rated 401k funds	New 401k rules for 2014
Pools	How much will a new pool cost you	Why you should get a pool this summer

## USE WORDS LIKE HOW OR WHY IN THE TITLE

We analyzed the titles of compounding posts to see what words appear most. Compounding titles contain words that suggest certainty and utility, such as “How”, “What”, “Why”, and “Best”. Words like ‘your’ relate directly to the visitor’s own problems. While the words in Figure 6 appear most frequently in compounding titles, they’re not required; if you have a great title, you can deviate from this list.

These terms are also common in search engine queries. When crafting titles, a good starting point is to search the topic online. Since search engines typically match keywords to a search query, the search results can give you a good foundation for your title.

Here are some common types of posts using these terms:

- 1 | Answering a question by defining an idea or product: *What is xyz?*
- 2 | Breaking down a number of options using reviews, feature comparisons, and/or prices: *Which is better?, What is best?, Or x versus y?*
- 3 | Advising readers on how to accomplish something: *How to do xyz.*
- 4 | Offering a definitive answer on something: *The best way to do x.*
- 5 | Pointing out elements to consider when making a choice: *Be aware of xyz when considering abc.*

Figure 6: Top keywords in compounding blog titles (omits common words like “The”)

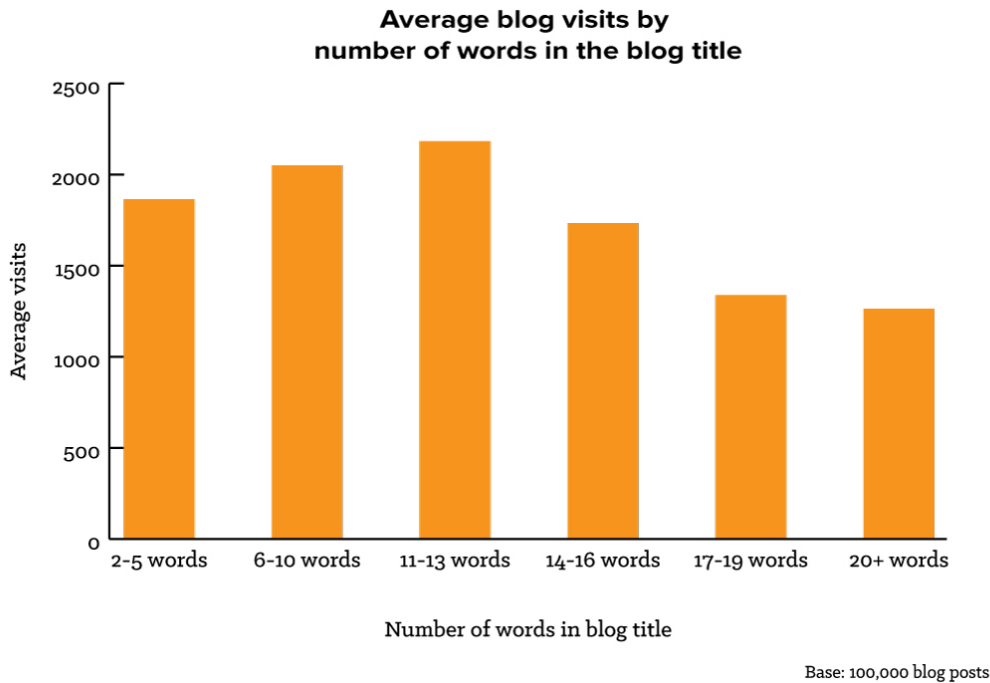
### Common words found in compounding blog titles

<b>How</b>	<b>Your</b>	<b>What</b>
<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Best</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>Tip</b>
<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Base: 1971 accretive blog posts

We also found that the posts with the most traffic consistently had 11 to 13 words in the title. Shorter titles can also pull in substantial traffic. Avoid titles of 14 words or longer.

Figure 7: High performing posts have 6 to 13 words in their title



## HOW TO WRITE A COMPOUNDING POST

Once you've selected a topic, you can write the post. Based on our review of compounding posts, we recommend the following tactics:

- **Write posts that answer the common questions you receive as a business owner or brand representative.** If you have the answer, share it. Topics that may be intuitive to you may not be clear as your customers. Chances are there are thousands of people online asking the questions you hear daily.
- **Anticipate follow-up questions and answer them in the post.** Many compounding posts share content beyond answering a basic question. They further explain a concept, offer additional considerations beyond the core question, or give anecdotal insights on the topic. For example, a kitchen appliance seller with compounding posts included details like a note on the electrical requirements for a washing machine--something that most people don't consider when researching which models to buy. The post also included a comparison of product guarantees offered by different brands and highlighted which had the longest warranty or best terms.
- **Update older posts that have performed.** For example, if a post on popular car models has consistently drawn in search traffic, and new models have been released since your post, update the content with new details. This update keeps compounding posts relevant.

If you sell goods or technical services, visitors to your blog will be seeking practical, authoritative advice. Here's how to deliver it.

- **Build up a set of useful posts.** For complex topics, like understanding electrical components or installing a pool, break down the basic components or steps of that process and outline requirements for each step. In subsequent posts, add updates about advances in the technology or technique and give advice on what type technology is best. Add links to these shorter posts in the original, in-depth, tactical post. Short posts like these quickly build up a library of information.
- **Strive to answer common questions.** Why are certain things set up the way they are? Why is this item designed the way it is? Why do I need to do this? Explain things that may be mystifying to people new to the topic.
- **Help people make choices.** When discussing a class of products, try to include a review, rating, and/or price breakdown of the different options available. If you are recommending one product above the others, include the word “best” in your title, and justify why you made that choice.







If you work for a lifestyle, consultative, or business services firm:

- **Teach your visitors about a topic or how to do something.** Share an easy to replicate recipe or explain a new type of treatment. Explain and diagnose the things that are asked about most commonly in your line of business.
- **Illustrate your points with strong, relevant, and research-based examples.** For example, a career services firm might share sample resumes and discuss the steps someone needs to take to move up in their career in a specific industry. Use data to back up your statements.
- **Decipher confusing processes.** Take a clear, step-by-step approach. Explain a concept or jargon in layman's terms. For example, you could explain how to file paperwork for medical reimbursements with your insurance company or how to submit a certain type of form.
- **Bring in an expert.** Interview them and share their expertise with your visitors. Leverage their knowledge to help build your audience. Engaging with thought leaders also strengthen your blog's reputation and lends an objective third-party legitimacy to your content.

## WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A COMPOUNDING POST

Now that you've established your topic, title, and content goal, consider how you'll structure your post. Your objective is to make the post easy to scan, enticing people to want to read it. Compounding posts consistently include the following elements:

### Compounding blog posts have:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  <b>Images</b>           |  <b>Thorough but short length</b>        |
|  <b>Bolded headlines</b> |  <b>Answers to the reader's question</b> |
|  <b>Bullet points</b>    |  <b>Links to other information</b>       |

- **Images.** Images add visual interest to content and break up long sections of text. For comparisons and reviews, include example or side-by-side photos, and specs of the products you're comparing. When explaining a concept, diagram it out for visual learners. Images can also inject humor and brand values. For example, a fairly dry post explaining how heater ducts worked included an informative hand-drawn diagram of the airflow mechanism and a picture of little dog wrapped up in a blanket.
- **Easy-to-skim structure.** Use bold headlines to sum up sections. Use bullet points to make your conclusions clear. Add images to break a longer post up into sections, especially if you are reviewing different products
- **Links within the blog post.** When explaining concepts, link to previous posts that give additional explanation to provide value for a reader who does not have significant background knowledge. Posts that simply define "insider" terminology within your industry can be effective.
- **A length that's short but thorough.** Write enough to give satisfactory answers and detail for a particular topic. Err on the side of brevity, but don't skimp on the details. Not many readers have the patience for a 2,000-word post. And nothing frustrates readers more than a 200-word post that barely covers the topic they're interested in. Analyze your blog's best performing posts to find your sweet spot for word count.




Figure 8: Essential layout components for compounding posts

July 22, 2015 // 8:00 AM

## Quality vs. Quantity: A 6-Month Analysis of the Age-Old Blogging Debate

Written by [Ginny Soskey](#) | @gsosk



The marketing industry has always been obsessed with the quality vs. quantity debate.

**Should you create more content of a lower quality or less content of a higher quality?**

In an ideal world, the answer would always be less content of a higher quality. You'd spend lots of time researching and writing every post, then when you published it, the whole internet would notice. Thanks to this unrivaled quality, every post would generate massive amounts of traffic and leads.

But that's not how blogging works in real life. To grow a blog, you need to consistently publish content that your readers enjoy reading. Yet exactly how often to publish and what those posts should look like can vary tremendously by blog.

Last year, we ran several tests on HubSpot's Marketing Blog and determined that our sweet spot hovered around four posts a day (the articles themselves varied in terms of comprehensiveness).

### Some Background: Our Former Publishing Strategy

Before we dive into the experiment details, let's begin with a little background on our previous editorial strategy.

#### Our Metrics

The Marketing Blog is measured on views, net new leads, and subscribers -- so those are the numbers we wanted to test. Here's how each of those are defined:

- **Views:** A view is counted every time a blog post with the HubSpot software tracking token is loaded.
- **Net New Leads:** When someone who's never filled out a lead gen form on a landing page ([example](#)) actually fills out that form, they become a lead.
- **Subscribers:** These are people who opt in to receive instant, daily, or weekly notifications from the Marketing Blog.

To reach goals for these metrics, the Marketing Blog has typically published 3-5 blog posts each week day and 1 blog post each weekend day, totaling about 20-25 posts in a given week.

But publishing new posts isn't the only driver of our blog's success: **92% of our leads and 75% of our traffic in a given month are from posts published prior to that month.** So for the purposes of this experiment, we are only looking at the effects of new posts.

Images

Answers the readers' questions

Bolded headlines

Bullet points

Links to other information

Thorough but not overly long

# 04 /

## STRATEGIES TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF PUBLISHING A COMPOUNDING POST

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The key to creating compounding posts is to create a library of useful content that boosts your search position, driving traffic to the blog. For any individual post, regardless of how hard you try, you can't count on creating a compounding post. Instead, you must follow a blogging strategy that is most likely to generate compounding posts over time. Concentrate on two things: your blogging schedule and your keyword strategy.

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### ENSURE EDITORIAL CALENDARS INCLUDE COMPOUNDING POSTS

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Business blogs need a baseline of content to be ranked by Google and appear in search results. To attain this sort of ranking, publish content regularly.<sup>5</sup> For a new blog to become a high performer, you must publish quality posts consistently.

Google treats posts as high quality if they include vital, useful, or relevant content. Your posts need to be comprehensive enough for a reader to walk away with the answers. Write for a target customer, not for a search engine. Don't rehash popular posts that already exist; you'll lose out on search.<sup>6</sup>

After you have established a baseline of content with a collection of useful posts, turn your attention to balancing your editorial calendar. Aim to publish 10% compounding posts, like the top performers in our sample. It's better to take the time to build quality content rather than stuffing the blog with many "filler" posts.

Marketing leaders need to allocate additional time and resource to craft compounding posts. They require more effort to write, but will return six times the traffic you'd receive from a single decaying post. The tradeoff for that effort is a higher number of compounding posts — and the more compounding posts you have, the more sustained traffic you'll generate. Every compounding post will help your organization attract new traffic, which in turn increases your ranking for keywords, which makes your blog and website more discoverable in organic search.

## THINK BROADLY ABOUT YOUR SPECIFIC KEYWORDS

The top business blogs featured in this research ranked high for multiple keywords that were relevant to their business. These include many long tail keywords and a few broader, more general “head terms” (see Figure 9). Long tail keywords are valuable because they're less competitive than head terms. Long tail keywords also comprise 70% of search traffic. Visitors to your site who searched on a long tail keyword already have a good idea of what they're looking for.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, ranking highly for a long tail keyword means your content is more likely to appear as a search result in the first page for that term. Placement in the first search page has a huge impact on how likely someone will click into your website.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 9: High performing posts have 6 to 13 words in their title

Keyword definition	Examples
<p><b>Head term</b> A generic search term one or two words in length</p>	<p>“marketing automation”</p>
<p><b>Long-tail</b> A long tail keyword is a very targeted search phrase that contains 3 or more words. It often contains a head term.</p>	<p>“information on marketing automation” “marketing automation information” “marketing automation system” “marketing software applications” “converting leads to customers”</p>

To get started, compile a list of phrases your target customers search for. Incorporate these into your keyword strategy. Then use your keyword or SEO tool to find related search terms (see Figure 10). Add these related terms to your list of keywords.

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*Figure 10: Related search terms supplement and improve keyword strategies*

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## Searches related to marketing automation

**marketing automation software**

**marketing automation companies**

**marketing automation vendors**

**marketing automation for small business**

**marketing automation comparison**

**marketing automation examples**

**marketing automation definition**

**marketing automation salesforce**

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Once you've established your keyword list, use your keyword tool to find out how often these terms are searched against, how difficult they are to rank for, and if your key competitors are ranking against those terms.

Finally, pick the top performing keywords and write broad tactical blog posts around them. For example, if you found that the long tail keyword "best camping gear" gets a lot of search traffic, write posts with titles like "8 Brands That Sell the Best Camping Gear" or "The Best Camping Gear For Your Next Summer Adventure".

Over time, monitor your keywords to see how competitive the phrases are and how often they are searched. If new terms crop up and old terms fall off, adjust your keyword list and strategy accordingly.

# 04 /

## CONCLUSION

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We're often asked "how can we write blockbuster posts that generate tens of thousands of visits when they get published?" But optimizing for short-term traffic is far less valuable than embracing a "complete picture" understanding of a blog's value. Blog posts that pull in visitors day over day, month over month will attract more visitors over time than will a post that enjoys a big "day one spike". These compounding posts are workhorses that provide a much better return on your investment.

Invest your marketing team's time and effort to prioritize creating compounding posts. As they attract traffic, marketing can cultivate visits and eventually capture names, generate subscriptions, and convert leads.

More importantly, if you follow these instructions and create compounding posts, you shift from being one of many suppliers of content in your industry to an authority. Compounding posts indicate that you have created something that your target audience believes in. Being seen as an authority gives your organization opportunities to generate even more influence on all the other topics in your field. Compounding posts allow marketers to a step beyond short terms gains and into creating a position of thought leadership for your brand. structure the post.

# ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> In May and June 2015, HubSpot Research reviewed customer traffic data across HubSpot's customer base.

<sup>2</sup> Based on traffic analysis, we identified 20 blogs with the highest overall visits and/or the highest average number of visits per post. We categorized them as high performers and reviewed their blog posts for further in depth analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Across 19,519 blog posts, we found that 1 in 10 posts are compounding 12 months after being published. Compounding blog posts contribute to 38% of overall traffic. If 1 compounding post = 38/100 total visits, and 9 decay posts = 62/100 visits, approximately 6 decay posts would equal the traffic of 1 single compounding post.

<sup>4</sup> Scott, D. M. (2010). Newsjacking: How to inject your ideas into a breaking news story and generate tons of media coverage. Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons.

<sup>5</sup> Soskey, G. (2015, July 22). Quality vs. Quantity: A 6-Month Analysis of the Age-Old Blogging Debate. HubSpot Marketing Blog. [Http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/blog-strategy-quality-quantity](http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/blog-strategy-quality-quantity)

<sup>6</sup> Faeth, B. (2013, September 5). What Exactly Does Google Consider High Quality Marketing Content? HubSpot Marketing Blog. [Http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/google-guidelines-high-quality-content-var](http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/google-guidelines-high-quality-content-var)

<sup>7</sup> Wainwright (née Eridon), C. (2011, November 17). The Ultimate Guide for Mastering Long Tail Search. HubSpot Marketing Blog. [Http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/28912/The-Ultimate-Guide-for-Mastering-Long-Tail-Search.aspx](http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/28912/The-Ultimate-Guide-for-Mastering-Long-Tail-Search.aspx)

<sup>8</sup> Petrescu, P. (2014, October 1). Google Organic Click-Through Rates in 2014. Moz Blogs. [Https://moz.com/blog/google-organic-click-through-rates-in-2014](https://moz.com/blog/google-organic-click-through-rates-in-2014)

<sup>9</sup> See: Sprung, R. (2015, February 27). How to Do Keyword Research for SEO: A Beginner's Guide. HubSpot Marketing Blog. [Http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-do-keyword-research-ht](http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-do-keyword-research-ht) and Wainwright (née Eridon), C. (2012, March 22). 7 Keyword Research Mistakes That Stifle Your SEO Strategy. HubSpot Marketing Blog. [Http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/31977/7-Keyword-Research-Mistakes-That-Stifle-Your-SEO-Strategy.aspx](http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/31977/7-Keyword-Research-Mistakes-That-Stifle-Your-SEO-Strategy.aspx)