

How to Create a Catholic Blog



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Author - A Catholic Life Blog

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And, above all, I thank our blessed Lord who, in His mercy, has accepted me as an instrument of spreading the One True Faith through the world of blogging. May our Lord Jesus Christ, be praised, adored, and loved with thoughtful devotion, at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even unto the end of the ages. Amen.

Disclaimer

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Endorsements

“Love it or hate it, the internet is a powerful tool which, in the right hands, can be employed for the glory of God. I cannot but help think that having just launched myself into the blogosphere, the fact that a copy of ‘How to Create a Catholic Blog’ landed in my inbox was nothing but providential. This is a clearly written and highly informative ‘beginner’s guide’ to everything one needs to know, not just about creating a blog but how to make a successful and engaging blog. Matthew provides a wealth of information on maintaining it, marketing it, and even on how to make money on it. In 50 pages, he takes us by the hand and leads us through the desperately daunting digital world of the blog, makes sense of it and turns us into experts. The author patiently explains the meaning of such mysterious terms as *RSS* and *Atom*, which it seems, are not names of space shuttles, but two different types of web feeds. Matthew is both extremely knowledgeable and generous in the information which he has shared with us. This, I think, will be an invaluable source to anyone who has aspirations to join the fast growing network of Catholic bloggers.”

Dr. Bella D’Abrera, Catholic Author and Historian

“Mr. Plese walks us through very practical tips to successful blogging and creating a blog "from the ground up". The content is shared in a won't-make-you-fall-asleep format and with plenty of personality. Perhaps one of my favorite aspects of the book is the fact I know Matthew to be an avid blogger with multiple sites to his credit. Therefore, the tips that he shares all come from personal experiences and not from third party research. This ebook was a great help to me in helping me understand what it takes to create a successful blog and all of the behind the scenes work involved in blogging. I love that it is geared for the Catholic Blogger, so he gives you all of the tools and tips for blogging in general as well as creating a Catholic atmosphere to your blog. If you are thinking about blogging or have a blog that might need tweaking, this is the book for you!”

Erika Drain, President - Catholic Bloggers Network

“From the first page Matthew informs and encourages potential bloggers...I highly recommend this book for evangelizing, and even as a possible mechanism for adding a bit of income where it might be needed. ‘Creating a Catholic Blog’ will be an interesting and effective book for anyone who wishes to blog or wants to improve their blogging skills.”

John Bowden, Administrator – St. Blog’s Directory

Prologue

You can be a missionary. Close your eyes. What image comes to mind when you read those words? Do you picture a Dominican or a Jesuit spreading the Faith on a distant beach among pagan tribes? Do you picture a priest teaching catechism in an inner city in Germany to a largely protestant or anti-Christian people? Do you picture the Missionaries of Charity baptizing babies in rural India? What if you could be a missionary and serve the Kingdom of God from your own computer screen. Do you *actually* want to make a difference in life? Do you believe it is your vocation to help spread the Faith while remaining in your state of life? Rest assured, you can. And blogging might be the way you are called to do so. Read on.

After being born in September 1988 in the far southern Chicago suburbs, I lived most of my childhood unaware of the active presence of religion in the world. During my elementary years, I attended a form of Christian service often no more frequently than once every three years. And all my early experiences with religion were in protestant circles (e.g. Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans, et cetera), which left me ignorant of religion. It was not until 2002 that I began to seek out the Roman Catholic Church after undergoing a particularly trying time in my life. It is in the Catholic Church that I found the peace and mystery, which I eagerly sought.

Since my father had grown up Catholic before becoming alienated with the Church in the latter part of the 1970s, I had heard of Catholicism, but was ignorant of even the most basic truths of the faith – ignorant even of the meaning of the “Holy Trinity”. This period of my early life was a time of immense learning. My mind truly was a sponge eager to hear everything and anything about the Faith that I so earnestly desired to join. Every Mass, I sat in my pew as the Faithful approached the Altar to receive our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist. In retrospect, how truly blessed were those days of preparation as I prepared my mind and soul to commune with our Blessed Savior.

After attending Mass for several months starting in 2002, I enrolled in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) sponsored by my parish. Each Wednesday evening, my mother and I attended an RCIA class as each of us prepared for our Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. My mother received Baptism in November 2003. I received the Holy Sacrament along with my sister – who was born in April 1994 – as both she and I entered CCD at this time. From the fall of 2003 until the Easter Vigil in April 2004, I was a catechumen, intent upon not only learning the teachings of the Church but also devouring its teachings. If I was going to spend the rest of my life as a member of an institution which still formally processes to be the one Church, outside of which salvation is impossible¹, I knew that I had to do more than simply understand the teachings of the Church – I had to live its teachings completely and encourage others to also follow the teachings of the Church.

Even as a catechumen, I witnessed the laity haphazardly genuflecting, making the Sign of the Cross without reflection, and receiving our Lord in the Eucharist in the hand as if they were receiving a piece of sliced bread. People would genuflect not to our Lord in the Eucharist but sideways while looking at the pew – a routine habit to them devoid of its proper meaning of

¹ Writings of St. Cyprian of Carthage (3rd century), Fourth Lateran Council (1215), *Unam sanctam* (1302), etc.

humbling ourselves before our King who is present before us. Was a piece of wood worth adoring?

Even the Sign of our Salvation – the Cross – was made whimsically by people during Mass, sometimes wrongly with the left hand. And, while it may seem unimportant, each action in the Liturgy has a true and living purpose. Why do we genuflect on the right knee and not the left? Because genuflecting on the right knee is reserved only for our Lord and for the Supreme Pontiff, who rules as the Vicar of Jesus Christ². Genuflection on the left knee is reserved toward bishops other than the Bishop of Rome.

So, even as a catechumen, I noticed a lack of both understanding and piety. During this time, I embarked upon my journey into the Internet which would one day propel me to start my own Catholic blog for the glorification of our Lord and for the instruction of the people of God. My first sojourn on this journey was in the world of online forums.

Forums are online message boards usually presented in a bulletin-style list for the purpose of discussions between any number of participants. Forums are composed of different categories each with their own boards. Boards are composed of threads, which are series of individual entries (*posts*) based around the topic of the thread.

Most forums allow members to not only create posts in existing threads but also to create new threads as well. However, all posts and threads are subject to the overview of the moderators and administrators of the website, who are supposed to ensure that all written material is in conformity with the site's created policies and applicable laws.

In our digital world, I knew that through the anonymous barrier of the Internet, I could spread the Faith. So, I joined About.com and entered the forums on both Christianity and Catholicism at this time. During this period, I met countless numbers of hardened atheists, who were angry and hateful at religion altogether. I joined the About.com forums during my time in RCIA, but I remained a highly active member until June 2005. I do not know if I ever converted anyone through my presence on the forums, but after thousands of posts, I realized that one-on-one arguing was not the answer.

Forums allowed me to see the power of the Internet in evangelization, and I am thankful that through forums I met an anonymous Catholic who had created a weblog. I had never heard of a blog beforehand, so I followed the link in the signature of his post. I was directed to a rather plain looking site, but nonetheless, a site dedicated to writing on Catholicism. My journey progressed.

Then, at last, in June 2005, I signed up and created a blog for the first time. Even though we have undergone four major template revisions between June 2005 and June 2012, A Catholic Life (<http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com>) remains dedicated to eradicating ignorance and furthering the Gospel.

I have received numerous emails from people, thanking me for my blogging presence. In one example from 2012, a long-time reader of A Catholic Life converted on Pentecost Sunday. Not only did he leave the Reformed Church, but he traveled from his homeland in Albania to an

² Used since Pope Gelasius I (c. 492 – 496 AD)

Italian retreat where he converted despite strong resistance from his family. Complicating matters, he previously worked as a translator for the Calvinists, meaning that because of his conversion he would have to lose his job. I am thankful that during his time of questioning and journeying, I was able to help him along the way to conversion and repentance. God be praised!

What a Blog Is

A weblog (*blog*) is a digital medium which allows a writer (*blogger*) to write individual articles (*posts*) and publish them in a time and date-stamped format. Think of a blog as a journal. Each article is posted at a specific date and time, and posts can include not only written words and commentary, but also other forms of media including advertisements, videos, html links to other websites, photographs, and countless other items. A user is able to add a wide variety of content through the easy-to-use toolbars of blogging programs. However, bloggers can also edit their posts using hypertext markup language (HTML), which is the technical means by which text-based information is structured and formatted in documents. This allows bloggers to create blogs and transform them from the generic, basic templates to graphically-advanced websites. With knowledge of basic computer programming, the structure of the entire site, the sidebar's contents, and the posts themselves, as well as many other things, are all editable and can be customizable!

Around 2004 I took a basic web design class in high school, which consisted nearly entirely of learning html programming tags. And, even though the information in that class consisted entirely of learning basic tags – e.g. `<a href>`, ``, `<p>`, etc. – I used this knowledge and was able to create my blog in 2005 without any monetary costs for programming.

Simply put, a blog is one of the cheapest ways to create a customizable website, with the ability to reach a wide audience. For example, in my experience, A Catholic Life regularly receives a little over 1,000 page views every day³. From its foundation through the end of 2009, A *Catholic Life* received approximately 1.2 million page views with 700,000 unique visitors. Blogs truly allow content to reach mass numbers of viewers without the upfront expenses and time commitments of publishing a manuscript. Through a blog, an average Catholic is able to not only share his/her daily faith journey, but also in a more powerful way, be a witness to the countless numbers of souls seeking God, who happen to stumble upon his/her website.

In terms of usability, weblogs can be incredibly simple to operate and update in their most basic form. While knowledge of HTML, XML, etc is undoubtedly useful and extremely helpful for customization purposes, standard blogging software continues to evolve to allow personalization and customization without having computer programming skills. For example, when I formed A *Catholic Life* in June 2005, Blogger's software did not allow images as headers without the usage of complex HTML. Nowadays, Blogger's interface allows writers seamlessly and effortlessly to include a header image that can include text and words while providing efficient, clickable access to the homepage of the blog.

As such, do not allow a lack of computer knowledge to prevent you from operating a blog as an online faithful journal that can be of the utmost value in evangelization. In fact, even the United

³ Based on statistics provided by W3counter in early 2012

States Catholic Bishops have commended the role of bloggers in spreading the Faith: “The Catholic Church in America is blessed with an immense number of writers, producers, artists, publishers, filmmakers, and bloggers employing all the means of communications—both old and new media—to expound and teach the faith.”⁴

Anyone can be a successful blogger. Period.

Now is an important time to ask yourself why you want to become a blogger. Spend some time in prayer and reflection on this point. As a reference, please read Shameless Popery’s post on “Ten Tips for Successful Catholic Blogging” (<http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2012/01/ten-tips-for-successful-catholic.html>) before continuing.

Starting the Blog

Starting a Blog in Blogger

In June 2005, when I founded *A Catholic Life*, blogging software was singlehandedly dominated by Blogger. Blogger was originally launched back on August 23, 1999, at which time it was one of the earliest blog-publishing tools. The original creator of Blogger – Pyra Labs – was acquired by Google in February 2003, at which time many of the features previously available on a paid basis became freely available. In 2004, through the Google purchase of Picasa – a software application allowing the organization of digital photos – Blogger began to integrate the ability to post photos in blog posts. On May 9, 2004, the last major change before the formation of *A Catholic Life* took place as Blogger introduced their web standards-compliant templates, individual archive pages for posts, and posting via email options. During the ensuing years since my first usage of Blogger, the software has changed with a major launch of a beta version. Currently, Blogger is owned by Google LLC.

My following step-by-step guide is meant as a guide for those individuals using the free services of blogger. In the appendix to this document is a list of other free software commonly used, as well as links to companies willing to produce customized blogging software for an hourly fee.

Step 1: Open an Internet Browser (e.g. Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, and Safari) and type in <http://www.blogger.com>.

Step 2: From the main page, you will notice a sizable action button on the screen, which in the site’s current design states “CREATE A BLOG.” Click that link to continue.

Step 3: From the subsequent screen either log-in to your Google Account (i.e. if you have gmail then you already have a Google Account) or create an account using the straight-forward requests on the screen. After the data is entered, advance to the next screen by clicking “continue”.

⁴ Crane, Patrick B. "US Bishops: Bloggers play ‘critical role’ in defending the Church.”. LifeSiteNews.com, 12 04 2012. Web. 16 Apr 2012. <<http://www.lifesitenews.com/blog/us-bishops-bloggers-play-critical-role-in-defending-the-church>>.

Step 4: From the next screen, you will be able to create a name for your blog and create the unique location on the Internet by which people may access it. I would highly suggest brainstorming several possible locations and names. You will of course want a unique name and Internet location that exhibits as many of the following characteristics⁵

- Easy to remember
- Easy to spell
- Appropriate for a Catholic blog
- Unique

To elaborate on the importance of uniqueness, let us consider an example. Naming your blog “My Catholic Journal” would lack the originality needed for a current blog. A quick Internet check reveals that <http://mycatholicjournal.blogspot.com/> already exists. The blog appears to have been created by someone in January 2005 who has, since that time, abandoned the blog. Once a blog has been created, it will remain on the Internet unless it is deleted by its creator. With the proliferation of blogs in recent years, uniqueness and interesting content is essential to create a well-known Catholic blog.

Similarly, the name must be appropriate for a Catholic blog. Let us consider two appropriate names that are unique. How do we choose if one is better than the other? Well, we must consider the reader of the blog and determine if one of the names is easier to remember and easier to spell. In our example, assume that a Catholic man would like to create a blog called “Introibo ad altare Dei,” which are the first words the priest said at the Traditional Latin Mass. Secondly, assume that a young Catholic woman would like to create a blog entitled “Thoughts and Opinions of a Young, Pro-life Catholic from Southern Mississippi.”

Despite one being written in Latin and one in English, the first option would be a “better” blog title in terms of the end reader remembering the name. However, the second option would be easier to spell for most readers. The conclusion – there is not only one proper way to name a blog. Just remember to keep the four above criteria in mind and evaluate your options in light of them.

In a more straightforward situation, the winner of “Mysterium Fidei” and “Suscipe, sancte Pater, omnipotens æterne Deus” is evident. While both expressions are of unique and clear importance in the Liturgy, one is not only easier to spell but also shorter, and therefore easier to remember. Again, there is no “right” and no “wrong” way to name a blog, but some names are much better than others if you are intending to create a well-visited blog.

Step 5: At this point, you are ready to select your template, which will set the colors, fonts, and overall styling of the blog. I recommend using a standard template to start. You can – and should – customize the template later using the Blogger “Dashboard”. The *Dashboard* is the screen to which all users are directed after they log in to blogger.com. Through the Dashboard, you will have access to write your posts, edit prior posts, edit the template, monetize your blog, and update your blogging profile information. The purpose of these categories is rather straightforward and needs no further exploration. In my personal blogging experience, I have found that

⁵ Following these characteristics will optimize the possibility of a reader actually returning to your blog.

browsing through these categories and exploring the options contained therein yields successful results.

Congratulations! At this point, you will have created your first weblog. Remember, the steps described above are meant to guide you through the creation of a blog through Blogger, although the concepts and theories contained in the aforementioned steps are similarly important for WordPress and other blogging software.

WordPress

While I have more limited experience using WordPress, I will admit that WordPress does provide a high quality blogging platform. While many of their free templates are acceptable (but by no means stellar or Catholic in design), there are many paid WordPress templates that are appropriate and very eye catching!

If you are interested in using WordPress, spend some time browsing the themes available and see which ones have meaning for you (<https://wordpress.org/themes>). Using a pre-set theme will cut down significantly on the time involved in modifying code to customize your blog.

Maintaining the Blog

Creating the blog is without a doubt the most important part of the process of forming a truly “successful” Catholic blog. The long-run success of your blog will depend on two specific characteristics

- Providing interesting and well-formatted content
- Effective Publicity

Providing Well-Formatted content

As with any website, blogs similarly require the publisher to have some semblance of knowledge of the overall principles of successful web design. What is “well-formatted content”? First of all, it is easier to identify what “well-formatted” content is not. It is not putting red text on a black background. It is not having an image block part of your paragraph’s sentence. It also is not having a welcome page with a lot of pictures and music that requires the user to click “enter site”; after all, would a user ever want to just see the welcome (i.e. landing) page and not intend to enter the main segment of the website? Of course not – unless of course you offend them by the poorly formatted landing page.

The purpose of this text is not to provide you with the principles of web design. We seek to provide you with the broad knowledge and resources to create a successful Catholic blog. And to that end, I will enumerate the principles of web design that you must keep in mind as you design your blog.

It is also important to note that while the overall principles remain constant, their application continuously changes as the Internet endlessly undergoes a transformative process of technological enhancements. We have witnessed computers change from industrial mainframes to personal computers to laptops; even now, we see a rise in smart phones (e.g. iPhones, Droids, etc), netbooks, Ipads, and other personal computing devices. Some of our calculators nowadays have more power than large, complex machines had only two decades ago.

Can we truly expect that as the hardware of computers change that the software and display properties will remain ever constant? Of course not. But, we can expect the overall guiding principles to remain relevant.

While technology professionals will argue over the details of web design principles and – more likely – their application to unique programs and systems, a Catholic blogger can do well to learn the overall principles of effective web design. Below I repeat the principles of effective website design from the article “10 Principles of Effective Web Design” published in 2008 in Smashing Pumpkins Magazine. These same principles that are used to create the websites of multinational, global companies can simultaneously apply to the creation of an online Catholic weblog.

1. Don't make users think
2. Don't squander users' patience
3. Manage to focus users' attention
4. Strive for feature exposure
5. Make use of effective writing
6. Don't be afraid of the white space
7. Strive for simplicity
8. Communicate effectively with a “visible language”
9. Conventions are our friends
10. Test early, test often

By reading the full article, you will not only better understand the aforementioned principles but also see screenshots of websites as examples.

Above all, remember that you are now a blogger and even a blogger must pay careful attention to providing well-formatted content.

Providing Regularly Published Content

Now that you have read through the above referenced material and have an adequate grasp on the principles of web design, you can now change your template/layout of your blog. Speaking exclusively of Blogger, customization that utilizes these principles can and should be done at this time. To begin, navigate to the Blogger Dashboard and click on “Layout”. From there, you will be able to make your blog a uniquely designed, online website. Remember, there is no one *correct* way to design a blog; though, if you fail to understand the ten principles of web design, there are many ways in which your site could be *incorrectly* designed.

But a beautifully designed website without content is nothing more than a hollow experience. The exterior – despite its beauty – is nothing more than façade, since within the core of the blog there is no content. No one will become a regular visitor of a website that has no new and interesting content – no matter how beautiful. Similarly, no matter how insightful and eloquent your previous post, if you do not regularly post new content then you will lose your readers. Just as a book without an audience is unremembered, a blog without readers is highly ineffective and unprofitable. While it may be true that using a blog as your personal online journal can be therapeutic – after all, writing our thoughts has been shown to serve a therapeutic purpose and relieve stress – the blog can never and will never become successful and well-read if new content is not regularly created.

Now you are probably asking “how often is *regular*”? Well that really depends on your schedule. Many of the universally esteemed Catholic blogs post articles not only daily but usually several times a day. Now you are probably saying “I can never write a few articles a day” or “I don’t want to become a professional blogger. I just want this to be a hobby.” And that is perfectly fine as well. Just keep in mind that to become a truly successful blogger you should post at least once every other day – though once a day is undoubtedly better.

Additionally, having your post made earlier in the day is generally better. Unless you are blogging with real-time (i.e. minute-to-minute) updates about an event taking place in the day (e.g. writing posts about World Youth Day as you are watching them unfold live on television), you should post your daily article early in the morning. This will allow readers who subscribe via email updates – the process is described later in the Feeds section – to have your post emailed to them. This will allow your readers to receive notification of your post the same day that it was created as opposed to the following day.

To achieve this effectiveness, I recommend writing your post the night before it is scheduled to publish. Blogger and the other blogging software allow you to write a post and then schedule it to publish automatically at a specified later date and time. This allows you to publish your post at 2 AM even though you wrote it six or more hours earlier. And a post published at 2 AM will be included in the email sent to your readers by Feedburner later that day. Feedburner allows you to set the window of time when emails will be sent out to subscribers so be sure that the daily email includes the relevant new posts from that day.

If you have not already done so, write a post on your blog! After you have written an introductions post for your first post, spend some time writing additional posts and scheduling them for later dates. While this will be more useful when you have a reader base, it is important to habituate yourself to write posts and have at least one new post published daily.

Providing Interesting Content

At this point, you might be saying to yourself “I can’t think of a new topic each day to write on.” This is an appropriate time to familiarize yourself with a Catholic concept highly prompted by Opus Dei – the sanctification of the everyday. Because we, through divine filiation, have a share in the sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ, our everyday actions when offered in prayer to Our Lord

and united to His supreme Sacrifice can take on a redeeming quality. As explained by Dr. Scott Hahn in *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace: My Spiritual Journey in Opus Dei*:

"This seems paradoxical: the finite contains the infinite. But it is God Himself who made this possible, by assuming human flesh in Jesus Christ. In doing so, He humanized His divinity, but He also divinized humanity, and thus sanctified - made holy - everything that fills up a human life: friendship, meals, family, travel, study, and work" (17).

You do not need to share a Nobel Prize worthy piece of writing in each post that you compose. While it is helpful to have some posts that are longer and more scholarly, I have found that writing reflections on my day not only obtains comments from visitors, but also allows me to create an online journal of my actions. It does not matter if you feel that your life as a blogging mother or young student is not interesting. What is important is that you share your Faith in your life and that, in and of itself, is a true testament to the Church and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I encourage everyone to include with your writings pictures of your life and in an important way, your experiences with the Church. In my blog, I regularly post images from Traditional Latin Masses said around the world, since I find in these images peace and mystery.

I also realize that many times readers of websites do not actually *read* the content. Instead, they will *skim* the content. Having an understanding of effective web design will allow you to place images throughout the body of your text to break up the content. This makes it more likely for readers to actually *read* more of your paragraphs instead of just *skimming* over them. You should rarely write a post that does not include at least one image.

And as a final recommendation, interact with your readers! If someone comments on a blog post, thank them with a comment of your own. If someone posts a question, then be sure to answer it thoughtfully and appropriately. No one will become a long-time commenter of yours if you consistently fail in recognizing and interacting with them.

Providing Unique Content

While you may wish to share pictures of your children and faith reflections based on the Mass readings, realize that hundreds of others are doing so. You can certainly do so if your intention is to write these reflections and share them with your family, friends, and online followers through social media; that is a possible way to evangelize and be a digital missionary. But that won't make you an Internet success.

Try to ask yourself – what niche or topics can you write about that few people write on? For example, I write on less known customs such as Blessed Salt, the meaning why prayer candles are lit, or the unique prayers said for a Pope's Requiem Mass.

Google Trends (<http://trends.google.com>) is a good tool you can use to see how various trends are progressing. If you search for items without a lot of search results now, that might be a good way for you to begin creating your own unique niche.

Reciprocal Links

From my own personal blogging experience, I have found that reciprocal linking arrangements are by far the most helpful for a blogger (especially a new blogger). I suggest that you start by contacting your favorite bloggers with an individual email. If you do not know their email address, look for the contact information on their blogs or on their profiles. In the event that someone's email address is not readily available – and you have carefully looked for it on their blog – then leave your request as a comment on one of their recent posts.

After you have visited your favorite blogs and contacted the authors, search the Internet and attempt to find other bloggers who have a specialized niche. For example, if you are a Catholic mother, there are many other Catholic mothers who blog that are willing to post a link to your website in their sidebar in return for you posting a link to their blog on yours.

The success of reciprocally linking is due to the mutually beneficial nature of the idea. Not only do you benefit from other bloggers linking to you and/or writing a post about your new blog, but also the experienced blogger can increase your publicity.

Follow these steps and you too can become highly successful at having your blog listed on other blogs

1. First and foremost, write at least 7 days worth of posts before you attempt to contact other blogs. No one is going to link to a blog that has one post. Far too many blogs post once and then never again. Don't allow yourself to be grouped in this category. In fact, try to hold off for at least a month's worth of posts, if possible.
2. Start by writing a friendly email to your favorite bloggers. As with all communication, use the time-tested and enduring advice of Dale Carnegie (*How to Win Friends and Influence People*) and write your letter with the other person's interests in mind. Don't spend your time talking about yourself. This email should tell the other person that you love his/her blog and that you want to help them gain readers by placing a link on your blog. In return, you write, "Would you be willing to link back to my blog? I feel that I can learn a lot from you and your successful blogging tactics."
3. Search the Internet for other listings of blogs that write on similar issues and contact the bloggers that you find. Similarly, phrase an email that is polite and sincere but also written with the other person's interests in mind.
4. Link your blog with the Catholic Bloggers Network Community by using their online form (<http://catholicbloggersnetwork.com/link-up-to-new-catholic-bloggers/>).

It is also important to remember that this process is an on-going process. Even after years of blogging, I still send out emails to other bloggers asking for their prayers and support while at the same time asking for a reciprocal linking arrangement.

I have never had a blogger write me back and say *no*...

Catholic Directories

Not long after you create your website you must – notice that I write *must* and not *should* – include your blog in various directories. Directories are highly popular ways to search for a blog and failure to take the necessary amount of time to list your blog – usually around five minutes – could cause you to lose an inestimable number of followers. Don't allow sloth to stop you from sharing your faith and life stories with others. Take just a few minutes and visit some of the Catholic website directories listed in the appendix of this guide. By no means is this meant to serve as a comprehensive list, but it is meant as a useful place for you to begin.

Physical Merchandise (e.g. coffee mugs, pencils, stickers, etc.)

When I first began blogging in 2005, I did research at that time on the most effective means by which to promote my blog. I distinctively recall posting a question on a message board on the popular forums at about.com, and one of the responses came from a Catholic man operating a now-defunct blog.

His recommendation to me was twofold. Firstly, he recommended that I initiate a reciprocal link campaign – which to my amazement worked wonderfully. Secondly, he suggested that I manufacture pencils, coffee mugs, t-shirts, and other merchandise with a custom-made logo and address.

Needless to say, I did not order anything because I knew that for me blogging was going to be a hobby – albeit a successful one – but not a full-time job. I did not intend to have custom logos made. And I had no intention to attend enough conferences and trade shows to distribute my merchandise.

Throughout my five years of blogging, I never ordered any customizable products except for a handful of business cards, which I didn't even order until my third year of blogging success. The individual who recommended that I order the items has long since failed at establishing a blog; and through the process, I learned that he lost a respectable sum of money.

So take my advice, do not market your blog using customizable objects that require physical distribution. You will only lose money unless you are one of the very few Catholic blogs that receive thousands of daily visitors. And trust me, it takes a lot of time to get there.

Virtual Assistants

Despite my advice, some of you may still be concerned about providing content for your blog. Naturally, you do not want to reinvent the wheel (i.e. we all get tired of seeing new blogs post about how to pray the Rosary or other topics that have been written on hundreds of thousands of times). But, even if you do have new or at least insightful content, are you confident in your grammar and style?

Have no fear – virtual assistants are here! While I have never used them for my blog, I have used virtual assistants to assist with proofreading, editing, web development, web design, advertising, and other functions for non-blog Catholic websites.

I have found two particular websites that not only are legitimate but also more importantly have a wide number of skilled and highly competent individuals. Both organizations allow assistants to work on either an hourly rate basis or on a fixed-sum basis. So, you can, for example, hire an assistant to work for \$4.00 an hour or \$50 for 25 posts. These are just examples. You have the ability to post your open positions and interview candidates electronically via messaging or through Skype (<http://www.skype.com>) and conduct a virtual interview.

Contractors will apply to your jobs as they wish, but you can also invite individuals specifically to interview. Now some of you may be concerned that these websites only hire non-US citizens. While there are many non-US citizens that legitimately work on these websites, there are people from nearly every country in the world including the United States. Let's say that you want to translate your Catholic blog into Albanian. There are contractors able to do just that – and I happen to know one personally that I could recommend.

The era of virtual assistants has made it easier than ever to find qualified people who will help you turn your blog into a success. I would encourage you to take some time to explore these websites now in the appendix and set up a profile. If you use either of these websites consistently, it could save you hundreds of hours of writing a year and drastically improve the quality of your blog.

Interactive Content – Adding Videos

If you have started writing your blog and publishing articles, then you obviously know how to add text and images to posts. Now I would like to share with you how to add non-text content. Do you know how to add a You-tube video to your post or even a Catholic video from Gloria.tv? How do you add a PDF or Word Document for your readers to print and distribute? Is there a way to advertise your nicely formatted flyer for your parish's upcoming retreat? And sure enough, there is.

Posting video from sources including You-Tube, Google Videos, or Gloria.tv is a straight forward and simple process. Let's take You-Tube for example. After you find a video that you would like to share on your blog, simply click on the "share" button underneath the You-Tube video. Next, you will see various options for sharing the video including Facebook, Twitter, email, and embedding. Click on "embed." Now just copy and paste the html into blogger. The code will look like this:

```
<iframe width="560" height="315" src="http://www.youtube.com/embed/kS3IKtpN-  
RU" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>
```

You can also easily change the height and width by replacing the values with alternative values. Keep in mind that these values are in pixels – not millimeters, inches, or other conventional measurement units.

Also, keep in mind that you want height and width to be proportional so that the video looks natural. Effective size dimensions include 560 x 315, 640 x 360, or 853 x 480. Keep in mind,

though, that your blog's width will determine the maximum size that you can use – no one wants to watch a video that stretches across the body of a post into the sidebar.

Most importantly, you will need to add the html code into the html editor for a new blog post – not into the standard editor. When you create a new post in Blogger, you will notice that you typically always work in the “compose” mode. You can see this in the top right corner of the editor. To its left is the “html” tab. Click on “html” and paste your code into this screen. If you switch back to the “compose” tab, you will likely see a black box. You will not be able to see the video streaming (i.e. playing) in the compose tab. Do not fear though – your video will be fine when it is published.

This same strategy will allow you to upload your own videos or music to You-tube and embed them in your blogs for others to view. So do you have a video of a First Communion Mass or a conference given by a priest that you would like to share? Just follow You-tube's easy-to-understand interface (<https://www.youtube.com/upload>) to upload and share your own content. Then you can follow the same above steps to share it on your blog! Readers love personal content. Share what is comfortable for you, but at the same time is interesting, engaging, and edifying.

Interactive Content – Adding Files (e.g. PDF, Word, JPEG)

Another important step in transitioning from a novice Catholic blogger into a successful one is knowing how to add files to your blog. A quick browsing through my PDF library in my saved documents indicates a large number of non-copyrighted PDFs that I may want to share online with my readers.

I have a copy of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, Fr. Clerissac's text on Liturgical prayer, and *De Rubricis Ad Simpliciores Formas Redigendis*. The latter text is a document summarizing the changes to the Roman Breviary following Pope Pius XII's modifications in the 1950s. Since this document is referenced by some traditional Catholics that prefer to pray the pre-1962 Breviary, I would like to share this on my blog. But, how could I share a PDF file on my blog?

There are actually several options, but the one that is easiest and preferred is to use Scribd (<http://www.scribd.com>). Succinctly put, “Scribd is a document-sharing website that allows users to post documents of various formats, and embed them into a web page using its iPaper format.”⁶

I recommend Scribd for two reasons. Firstly, it is user-friendly from the perspective of both blogger and reader. Secondly, it handles all major document types including Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, PDFs, OpenDocument documents, OpenOffice.org XML documents, and PostScript files.

⁶ "Scribd." Wikipedia, 31 03 2012. Web. 14 Apr 2012. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scribd>>.

To start, simply visit Scribd's website and spend a few minutes browsing. Then, fill out the simple steps to set up your own account. It should be very straightforward and needs no further explanation.

When the time comes to upload your document, just visit <http://www.scribd.com/upload-document> or simply click on the "Upload" icon near the top of the screen. Follow these easy steps and you will have your document uploaded, converted, and ready to share!

Remember that document *De Rubricis Ad Simpliciolem Formam Redigendis*? Well, to show Scribd in action, I have uploaded and added the file to my blog. Take a moment and visit my post (<http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2012/03/1956-changes-to-roman-breviary-and.html>) that includes the file. You will see that the Scribd interfaces allow readers to also easily share, download, or view the document in full screen mode.

Your document will also be searchable on Scribd by anyone. This is an alternative way to drive traffic to your blog. Or, you can sell advertising to organizations by offering to post their flyers on your blog using Scribd. Just keep in mind that to do this, you will need to have established a significant online presence.

Want to know how many people have read your uploaded file? Scribd statistics are clearly visible when you log into your Scribd account. Wasn't that easy?

Annual Catholic Blog Devotions

One of the hallmarks of a successful Catholic blog is generating buzz and anticipation amongst others. The best way to do this – besides frequently publishing new and engaging content – is to make your annual mark on the Catholic blogging community.

Let's take my blog *A Catholic Life* for instance. Each year I have traditionally championed two distinct and memorable blogging devotions. Firstly, in 2006 I began a partnership with a woman named Marianne. Together we brought to the blogging community the annual Saint for the Year Devotion.

The Saint for the Year Devotion in the early years involved Marianne choosing for all participants a saint's name from a jar. Altogether, there were hundreds of names in the jar each on separate pieces of paper. After someone contacted me through a blog comment or an email, I would forward the request to Marianne. After praying and invoking the Holy Ghost, she would draw the name. Then, I would send the result to the participant and post it online on a results page.

The devotion took place in December through the end of January every year since then, except 2009 when seminary life prohibited me from blogging. In 2011, Marianne and I separated from our partnership and she began to provide the devotion on a new blog which she had created. I continued the devotion on my blog, and as such, I began to draw the saints as well. So, each evening after praying Vespers, I would chant the Litany of Saints while drawing the names for all participants.

In 2012, 268 people participated in the devotion. While it is down from the 475 that requested in 2006, I am nonetheless still recognized as a champion of this devotion. Each year I receive emails and visits from people around New Year's Eve, who ask me if I could again coordinate the devotion.

In my years, I have received several saints including St. Joachim, St. Julius, and St. Apollonius. And what is most rewarding is seeing and hearing the connections between participants and their saints. Truly powerful coincidences have consistently occurred.

Secondly, I had in my early years pioneered the *Proudly Entered the Catholic Church Devotion*. From 2006 through 2009, I had a special image created for new Catholics who happened to own blogs or websites. In each of the years, I sought out designers who were willing to design an uplifting 125 x 125 image to support new Catholics.

I managed to find several designers who over those years designed the images without any cost. At the time of the Easter Vigil, I would write up a post welcoming new Catholics and I would display the logo for them to save on their machines and then upload. Over the years, I even browsed the listings of new Catholic blogs and personally invited converts to use the images.

The posts are still online (<http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/search/label/New%20Catholics>) and while I have not participated in the devotion since 2009, this devotion not only helped me increase my blog's exposure but provide a true service to the Catholic blogging community.

Engaging Email Signatures

As a blogger – even before you become successful – you will undoubtedly receive emails from readers. Few things bother me more than when the same bloggers who properly format their posts, take little or no effort to format their emails. Just like your blog, your email signature and email etiquette is an expression of you. So the next time you write an email with typos, lack of a proper salutation or closing, or a properly formatted email signature, you are setting a bad image of yourself.

Take a lesson from professional organizations and properly format your email signature. The program that I highly recommend is WiseStamp (<http://tinyurl.com/wisestampemails>). WiseStamp will allow you to create both a personal and a business email signature that works in virtually any program (e.g. Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail, et cetera).

Most importantly, you can properly format your signature and include links to the various social media platforms on which you are present. This increases your brand awareness and leads to larger followings. In my particular email signature (pictured below), I link to my profile on thirteen different social media sites and even include an RSS feed (See: Part IV: Feeds Section) that displays the last post from my blog.

Matthew
 Blog Administrator
 Email: acatholiclife@gmail.com



<http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com>
<http://holyvocations.blogspot.com>
<http://www.catechismclass.com>



Latest Post on A Catholic Life: [Our Lady of Good Counsel \(Mass in Some Places\) Propers](#)

For a paid subscription, you are eligible for enhanced features including setting certain signatures with certain emails, using a separate signature when replying or forwarding instead of the one sent with new messages, etc. For only \$36 a year, I highly recommend the purchase and setting all of your signatures (e.g. blogging, personal, business, family, et cetera) to WiseStamp. But don't take my word for it, [please click here and download a version of WiseStamp now](#).

Ref Tagger

RefTagger is a free tool for bloggers that replicates Logos' rollover and reference features. With RefTagger enabled on your blog, when you hover your cursor over the passage, a box appears revealing the beginning of the excerpt. Click "more" to open the reading on Biblia.com. All you have to do is type the reference (e.g. Matthew 8:12) into a blog post and the tool takes care of the rest!

RefTagger works well with Blogger, WordPress, Movable Type, Drupal, Joomla! and other sites, and incorporating it into your blog is an unbelievably simple process (even for the least tech-savvy among us). Simply select your "online Bible version" (I recommend "Douay Rheims") and any other settings you want in their online form, then copy and paste the JavaScript that's automatically provided. Not sure where to paste the JavaScript? RefTagger can help with that, too.

Hosting & Domains

As a final consideration, some of you may be interested in creating a blog that does not contain "BlogSpot" or "WordPress" in the actual url. In order to achieve this, you will need to pay for both the hosting and the domain name. Purchasing a domain is purchasing a specific url.

Domain names are relatively inexpensive. While some companies, which I will not name, advertise their domain services while using scantily clad women, others are more in line with Catholic teachings. For example, I have used NameBoy (<http://tinyurl.com/NameBoyDomains>) to purchase domain names in the past. I highly recommend them for their value – relatively low

cost and strong customer support. Plus, they have never used immodestly dressed women to advertise their services.

But a domain name is not a blog. It is a specific url to which you have the rights. You still need to purchase hosting so that you can display your blog on your domain. My recommendation is GlowHost (<http://tinyurl.com/GlowHostHosting>). I have used them several times and each time I have had an issue, I was personally contacted by the company's executives who solved my issues within a matter of hours. For less than \$15/month, you can have quality web hosting at a reputable organization.

Take some time to look through these resources and consider if you want your own customized url. If you have any specific questions regarding these, please contact either of the above websites. As I am not an expert in either hosting or domains, and since I am not familiar with your specific situation, it would best to direct your technical questions to them.

Feeds

Having the best content presented on a well-designed page still is not enough if no one knows of your blog. While engaging in publicity as previously described is key, it is not sufficient if readers are not given easy access to automatic updates on your blog.

The *modern consumer* is an individual whose social connections and lifestyle practices are defined by modern media boundaries. The *modern consumer* utilizes technology (e.g. Internet, phones, television) in ever-changing ways to obtain convenient, synthesized information instantaneously. Through technology, consumers are seeking not only to find the lowest cost products but also ones provided with superior service, fast delivery, excellent customer service, and socially-ethical practices. You must leverage these available technologies to improve access to your content.

A web feed (e.g. syndicated feed) is a modern data format that provides users with frequently updated content. This process works through a syndication process. In syndication, the distributor – in our case a blogger – syndicates his/her site's feed, thereby making it possible for users to *subscribe* to the content.

Now what happens after you subscribe to content? Well, the web feeds to which you are subscribed are all easily accessible in one location; such a process is conducted by the aggregator.

When you hear of feeds, you will most likely hear the terms *RSS* and *Atom* used. These are two common families of web syndication formats. The difference between them is technical in origin and beyond the scope of this text. All that you should know is that both are types of feeds.

Now if you are concerned about how to produce a web feed, fret not. The major blogging software makes the process virtually automatic. For users of Blogger, simply navigate to the Dashboard and click on your "settings" tab. You will now be viewing the "basic" settings, but

you should see an option along that row that reads “Site Feed.” Click on that link. Ensure that “Allow Blog Feeds” is marked as “Full”. It is that easy!

But what use are feeds if you do not have statistics to determine how many people are viewing your blog? The next main part of establishing a feed is to establish a custom RSS feed and obtain traffic analysis while at the same time placing advertisements in the feed (See: *Monetize Your Blog*).

This process – while it certainly may appear intimidating for inexperienced bloggers – is relatively painless. Start by navigating to Feedburner (<http://www.feedburner.com>). At this point simply follow the well-articulated step-by-step instructions on the page. Through Feedburner you will have the ability to create a custom RSS feed and at all times gather statistical data on the subscribers.

When you have your full feed URL from Feedburner, be sure to go back to the Blogger Dashboard – those using a different service will have a similar step – and paste the URL in the box immediately to the right of “Post Feed Redirect URL.”

Statistics

Why You Need Statistics

By now, you probably feel like a blogging expert. You’ve created your blog, set up your feed, written and scheduled over a dozen posts, connected and linked with other great blogs, and hired a virtual assistant to help you in your early stages. What else could a blogger ever possibly want?

How about a little return on investment? If you think at this stage you are ready to begin earning extra money while at the same time providing Catholic centered content, you are wrong. How could you ever sell advertising space on your blog without statistics?

Everyone from behemoth corporations to small sole proprietors needs to know if it is worth advertising on your blog. Without concrete statistics, how can you tell potential advertising partners the geographic source of your visitors, your average daily readers, or the average page views per visit? One client of mine asked me how many visitors I received from southern Wisconsin in the first three months of 2012. Without statistics, I would be clueless.

You need statistics even if you are not planning on monetizing your blog. Most of you will likely be familiar with the goal setting strategy of SMART. First coined in the November 1981 issue of *Management Review* by George T. Doran, SMART has become a common mnemonic in goal setting and personal development.

All goals should follow the SMART criteria. They should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. Have you set your blog goals yet, and if so, how do they conform to these

criteria? Having the goal of “developing a large online following” is neither specific nor timely. But, if your goal is to “develop an online reader base of 1,000 regularly returning readers in 12 months” then that is both specific and timely. Is it attainable? That depends on how well you create and distribute interesting and insightful content.

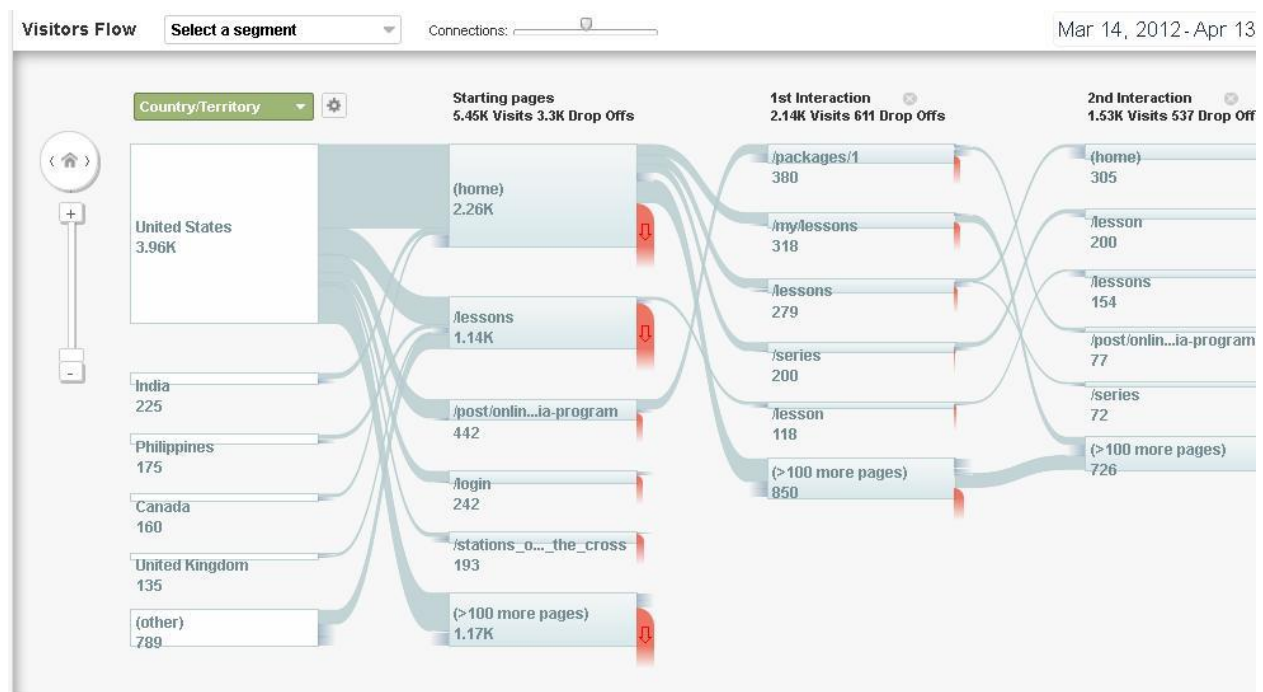
Whether your goals include making a little extra money for the family or just becoming a successful Catholic Internet evangelist, you need goals. And statistics are the time-tested means to measure your goals.

Web Statistics Resources

There are a wide number of web statistic providers out there all offering free services. I have used several that I recommend. Near the top of my list is Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>) which provides far more than a hit counter for you to display in your sidebar. Google Analytics provides specific and dynamic statistics on how your visitors are digesting and interacting with your content. Do you want to know which operating systems your users have or what country they are from? Do you want to know the effectiveness of AdWords or other online marketing campaigns turning into visits? Or do you want to learn which of your pages are the most popular or where your visitors are coming from (e.g. search engine, referring websites, direct visits, etc)? Good news – Analytics does all of that and more.

Analytics is always improving their interface and bloggers can now see a visitor flow chart for their website.

The chart (illustrated below) indicates the basic flow of visitors through my website. I can see that while most visitors from the United States start on the home page, the majority of non-US visitors start on a separate page. And I can see the general flow of all of these visitors.



This is a powerful tool to help increase visit lengths. If you see a bottleneck in the process, you can edit your pages and the links to help direct visitors to the pages that you want them to visit. For example, I see that 193 people visited my page on the Stations of the Cross and then left the site. This is probably because there are no links on that page to other pages on the website. Now in a matter of minutes I can hopefully edit my page to include a link to another page, thus re-directing and keeping most of those 193 visitors on my blog.

Besides Google Analytics, I also use W3 Counter (<http://www.w3counter.com>). While in many respects Analytics is superior, the ease of use of W3 helps new bloggers acclimate themselves to using web statistics. W3 still provides most of the features of Analytics (though not including the aforementioned visitor flow chart), and in my opinion, does a few things superiorly.

Chief among their advantages, W3 Counter makes it easy to see your current visitors. Let's say I want to see at this precise point in time how many visitors are on my blog, what pages they have been looking at while on the blog, and how long they have looked at each page. W3 Counter makes this easy and displays an easy-to-understand list.

After logging into my account and clicking on "Live View" in the top bar, I see that my blog at this precise point in time has several visitors online.

Visitor	Browser	OS	Country	Visit Began
70.60.74.202	Safari 5.0	Mac OS X	United States	<1 min ago
Source: Google Search: mary the mother of god				
A Catholic Life: 90th Anniversary of Fatima				viewed for 14 seconds
A Catholic Life: 90th Anniversary of Fatima				currently viewing
98.163.255.46	Chrome 18.0	Windows 7	United States	6 mins ago
Source: Google Search: kirk kramer catholic				
A Catholic Life: Pray the Repose of the Soul of Monsignor Mejak				currently viewing
99.235.90.135	Internet Explorer 9.0	Windows 7	Canada	15 mins ago
Source: Google Search: meaning of candle/lightin roman catholic fait..				
A Catholic Life: Why do Catholics Light Prayer Candles?				currently viewing
124.6.181.51	Chrome 18.0	Windows 7	Philippines	17 mins ago
Source: Google Search: knights of the blessed sacrament				
A Catholic Life: June 2008				currently viewing
24.25.246.6	Internet Explorer 9.0	Windows 7	United States	17 mins ago
Source: Google Search: 5 types of prayer				
A Catholic Life: The Five Types of Prayer				currently viewing

Spend some time visiting both of these websites. I would recommend joining both and in fact – even other platforms. You do not need to install a separate hit counter for each site on your blog. In fact, if you did so, you would be making a novice blogging mistake. Keep in mind that installing the code to track visits and pasting the hit counter code are typically two distinct steps. So add the code to several websites and one hit counter from the site you like the most.

Take some time over the next few weeks using both and then keep regularly using the one that is best for your needs. You should also look into other programs that may be a good fit.

Monthly Updates

Monthly updates to your statistics are necessary. As mentioned previously, statistics are the primary means to measure your growth for both your personal goals as well as for advertising purposes. While some people check their statistics daily and others check them annually, you need to be somewhere in the middle.

My recommendation is to check on your visitors at least weekly for a brief overview. If you see a major jump in page views, investigate the sources and referring sites. You could have been mentioned in a prominent news story or on another highly popular Catholic blog. Or perhaps you had a day where visits plummeted? If so, investigate and determine if your blog experienced downtime that you were unaware of.

On the first day of every month, I sit down and download all of my web statistics for the past month into an Excel workbook. On the first page of the workbook, I keep a running total of the number of unique visits, new visitors, return visits, and page views for every day since my blog's foundation.

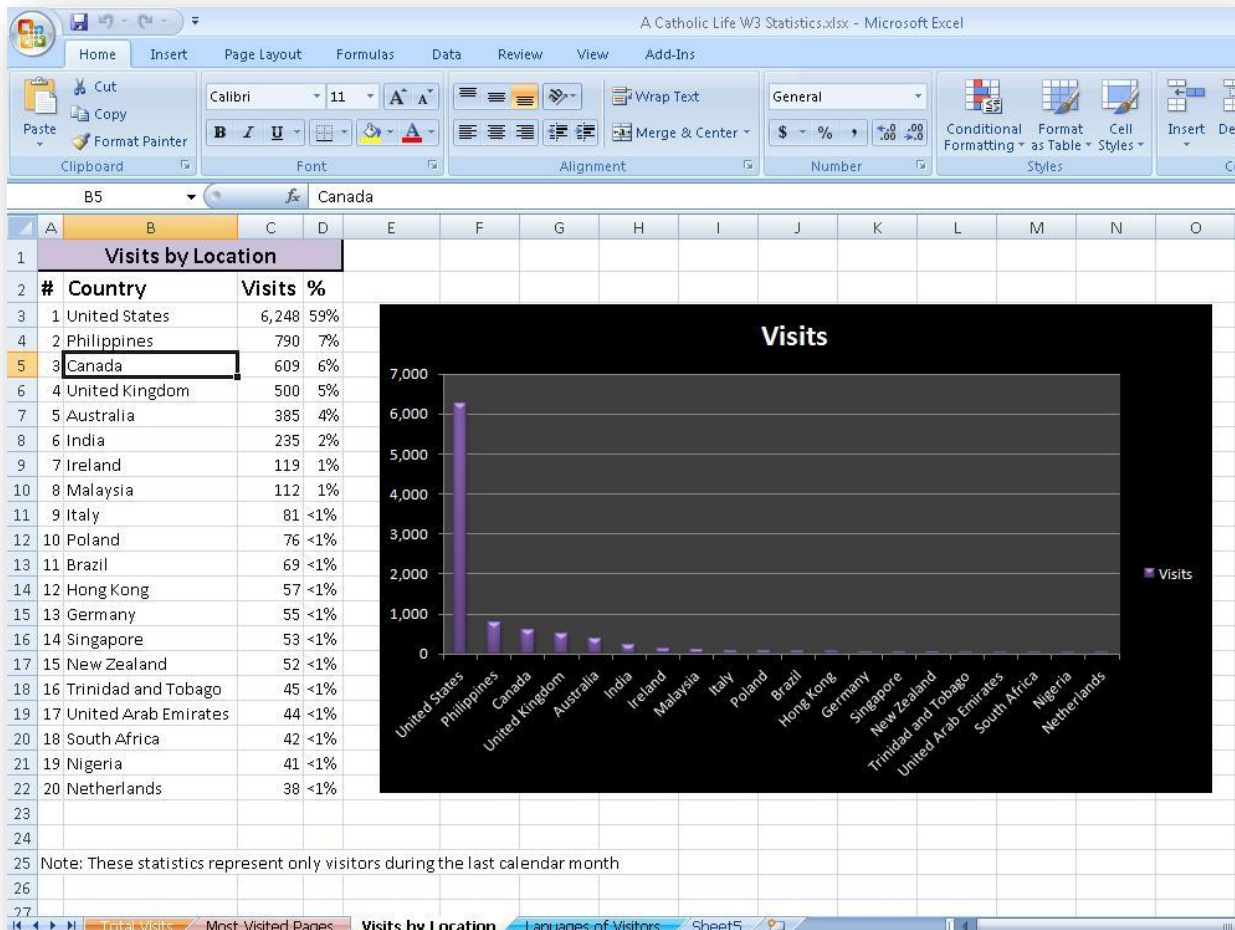
Additionally, I keep separate tabs, each with refreshable query that I created through Excel's data function. In one tab, I have a list of my most popular posts in the last thirty days. In another tab, I have a list and a graphic (both of which update at the same time when the query is refreshed) summarizing the visits by country. And in a final tab, I perform a similar analysis but based on the language of visitors.

Why is this information important? Firstly, I like to know what posts of mine are being most widely read. This allows me to see what my readers are benefiting from so I can write similar posts in the future. I also use this opportunity to learn how phrasing titles helps my exposure. For example, did you realize that readers are more prone to click and read an article when it starts with a title such as "Top 10 Catholic Websites" as opposed to "Catholic Websites to Visit"?⁷

And if you know which of your posts are most popular, you can monetize them by adding appropriate affiliate links in the posts. While I discuss this strategy in more detail later (See: Monetizing Your Blog), I will say that this has led to noticeably higher revenue for me.

⁷ Roach, Kim. "17 Copy-And-Paste Blog Post Templates." Smart Passive Income. Pat Flynn, 15 02 2012. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.smartpassiveincome.com/blog-post-templates/>>.

Secondly, I care about both the language and geographic source of my visitors for a similar reason. If I am drawing a consistent core group of readers from a non-US country – and I am drawing 7% of my readers from the Philippines – then I should start including more Catholic news and stories on special events that concern those readers. Your readers will appreciate it. And, for the other readers, by most accounts, they will not mind the story.



You might be wondering why I am including all of these in an Excel workbook that I am updating every month. Even though it takes me appropriately five minutes to update, you might think it is not worth the time.

While this may become clearer after you read the section on monetizing a blog, advertisers want to know your statistics. Some statistical programs are not accessible for non-account holders to view. So, I made it a point long ago to keep a consistently updated document with all of my statistics. When an advertiser contacts me, I provide them with my advertising proposal document, my rate card, and my statistics file.

The first page in my file is dedicated to the most common data and the advertisers can see statistics for every day since my blog's foundation. Not only does it provide great transparency, but it also shows them my consistent and sustainable growth.

I additionally include the statistics on location, popular posts, and language because these have been frequently requested by advertising partners in the past. Rather than waiting for them to ask, I freely provide all of the information to them. Again, it meets their needs and even if they did not want it, it increases transparency. Always be honest, blunt, and transparent with someone that may become an advertising client of yours.

As a final recommendation, if you are not familiar with Excel, creating and updating your Excel file could take significantly longer than five minutes. Rather than using refreshable queries, novice bloggers make the mistake of copying and pasting data over item by item. This is not helpful and is a huge waste of time. Spend some time searching Excel's help files and learn how to create a refreshable data query using data from the web. Trust me - it is well worth the time.

Building a Brand

Now that you have effectively created and established a Catholic blog, you can begin to build your brand. Catholic blogging – when successfully done – goes far beyond mere blogging. If you are going to succeed, you need to leverage social media and create a true online following. These simple steps are an effective way to spread your influence on the Internet and reach many others.

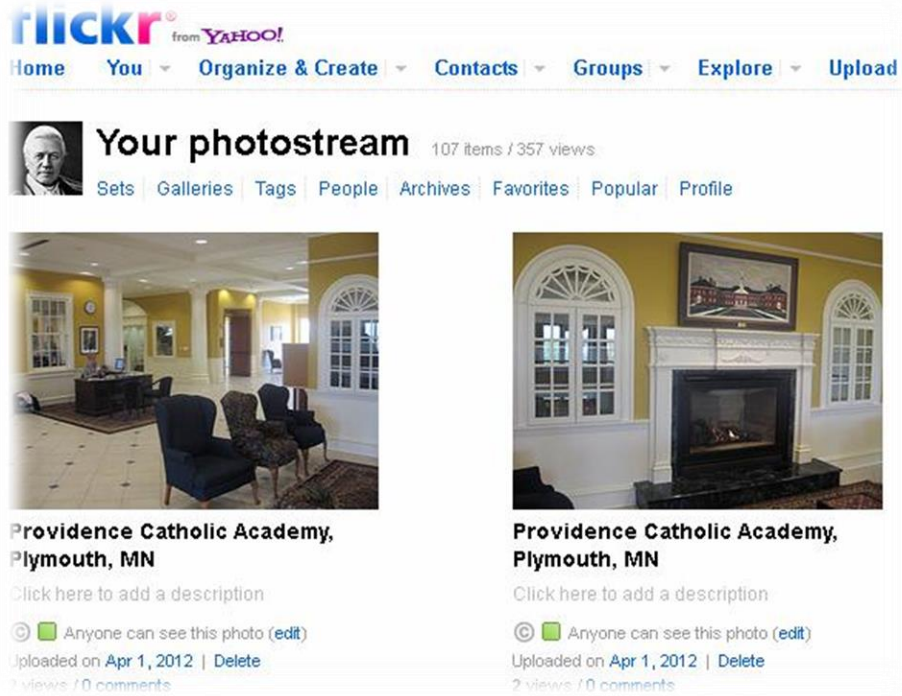
Flickr

Do you have a collection of beautiful photos from a Mass? Or do you have photos of beautiful altars and cathedrals while you toured Europe? It is great to have beautiful photos as memories of your trips, but it is a true service when you share these images for others to experience. It is certainly possible to inspire a fallen away Catholic to return to the Sacramental life of the Church upon seeing an image of a beautiful Liturgy.

And Flickr is the way to do it. Flickr is an image hosting website currently owned by Yahoo. As stated in an online summary: “Yahoo reported in June 2011 that Flickr had a total of 51 million registered members and 80 million unique visitors. In August 2011, the site reported that it was hosting more than 6 billion images and this number continues to grow steadily according to reporting sources.”⁸

Start by visiting Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>) and creating a free account. Be sure to use your blog as the overall theme for your account. For instance, in my Flickr account, I used the name *A Catholic Life Blog* to increase my brand awareness.

⁸ "Flickr." Wikipedia, 14 04 2012. Web. 15 Apr 2012. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr>>.



After creating your account, click the upload button on the top right of the navigation bar. You can explore the other categories later and learn about developing contacts and organizing your photos on Flickr. For instance, of the 107 images that I have uploaded and shared, I organized them into six different albums called “sets.”

Take some time now to set up your Flickr account and upload images. Then, you can use the same techniques already mentioned in this guide to help you in adding them to a blog post. The advantage of using Flickr is the ability to share your photos with a huge audience and thus increase your blog’s readership. For instance, there is nothing wrong with posting in the photo’s description a link to the appropriate post on your blog that features both the photo and the story behind it.

There are also many Catholic groups on Flickr. So spend some time browsing Flickr and join them.

Twitter

Twitter has truly become an interesting Internet phenomenon and a means even for Catholic bloggers to network with each other and promote their blog’s content. Even the Holy Father has a Twitter account, though in all likelihood, it is being managed by someone other than the Vicar of Christ himself. So, what exactly is Twitter and how should a Catholic blogger use it most effectively?

Succinctly stated, “Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, known as “tweets”...The service rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with over 140 million active users

as of 2012, generating over 340 million tweets daily and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day.”⁹

After you create your free account, be sure to mention your blog in your description and use either the same profile photo from your blogger’s profile or your blog logo. When starting out, it is important to remember that no one will follow you if they do not know you exist. Start by finding 100 other bloggers and/or prominent Catholics on Twitter. Follow them and see how many follow you in return. This will lead to some of their followers following you. Without much effort, you have the start of a Twitter following.

A logical next step is to encourage your blog readers to follow you on Twitter. To achieve this, you should not only write a short post mentioning and encouraging bloggers to follow you. You also need to put a permanent “Follow Us on Twitter” link on your blog. While some blogs’ pre-set themes include a Twitter icon, others do not have any social media icons built in. If you are in the latter category, simply add via html code a widget in the sidebar that includes an appropriate Twitter icon with a url directing them to your Twitter page. A simple image search on Google reveals several possible logos and icons for this purpose.

Don’t make the mistake of reinventing the wheel. You do not need to provide extra content to your Twitter crowd that is not already available to your blog’s readers. One of the easiest and most effective ways to engage your Twitter followers is using Feedburner to notify your followers immediately after a new post is made.

To activate this feature, go to your Feedburner account (<http://feedburner.google.com>). Then, click on the “publicize” tab in the top bar – after logging into your account. In the left sidebar of this page, you will notice the word “Socialize.” After clicking it, you will see the option to add your Twitter account to Feedburner.

The image shows a screenshot of the 'Socialize' settings page in Feedburner. It is divided into two main sections: 'Formatting Options' and 'Item Selection'.

Formatting Options:

- Post content:** A dropdown menu set to 'Title only'. Below it are two checked checkboxes: 'Include link' and 'Leave room for retweets'.
- Hash tags:** A dropdown menu set to 'Create hash tags from item categories'. Below it is a checked checkbox: 'Use inline hash tags'.
- Additional text:** A text input field containing 'Add tRcot' and a dropdown menu set to 'at the end of the post'.

Item Selection:

- Item limit:** 'Post up to' followed by a dropdown menu set to '5' and the text 'new items per feed update'.
- Item order:** 'Order items by' followed by a dropdown menu set to 'publish date'.
- Keyword filter:** A text input field with the example text 'e.g. toast, purple cow' below it. Below the input field is the text 'Only post items containing a keyword in' followed by a dropdown menu set to 'a category'.

⁹ "Twitter." Wikipedia, 13 04 2012. Web. 16 Apr 2012. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>>.

The above graphic indicates my recommendation for the advanced options. Specifically calling mind to the hashtag, I am using #tRcot in all of my posts. As a little background, “Users can group posts together by topic or type by use of hashtags – words or phrases prefixed with a “#” sign. Similarly, the “@” sign followed by a username is used for mentioning or replying to other users.”¹⁰

The hashtag #tRcot stands for “True Roman Catholics of Twitter” and is used by prominent Catholic bloggers including Fr. Z, blogger of *WDTPRS.com*. Using a hashtag such as “Catholic” also is not typically useful since it is not widely used by others. Hashtags function best when there are many users of that same tag.

In October 2010, the Catholic blogger at CatholicTechTalk.com recommended that Catholic Twitter users come together and begin using a unified system of tags. His recommendation included using #CathNews for Catholic-related news stories, #CathBlog for Catholic blog posts, and #CathPic for Catholic pictures.

Spend some time now reviewing the list of Catholic hashtags (<http://tinyurl.com/7gcxmp8>) and set up your Feedburner to post new stories automatically to your Twitter followers.

And finally, remember to interact with your followers. If someone favorites, replies to, or retweets one of your tweets, be sure to send them a message of appreciation.

You-Tube

While I have already shared the basic technique for adding You-Tube videos to your posts, I would like to encourage you to create your own You-Tube account. You-Tube, like Blogger, is a Google product, so you can use your Google login information in order to access your You-Tube account after its creation. As I have explained previously, just follow You-tube’s easy-to-understand interface (http://www.youtube.com/my_videos_upload) to upload and share your own content.

Above all, remember that you represent the Church. Do not “like” or “favorite” videos that are inappropriate or unbecoming of a Catholic. I have set my You-Tube activities to appear automatically on my Twitter Feed. So every time I upload, like, or favorite a video, my Twitter followers know about it. And they do appreciate it, since I frequently see my followers retweeting my You-Tube activity statuses. And most importantly, I know not to “like” or “favorite” a video that would be questionable.

To activate this feature, go to your You-Tube settings on sharing and follow the on-screen prompts (http://www.youtube.com/account_sharing).

Here you can easily connect your You-Tube account to Facebook or Twitter. You also have the ability to select which activities to share. You can share every time you comment on a video,

¹⁰ ibid

subscribe to a channel, or favorite a video. I recommend complete transparency – share all of these with your Catholic Twitter followers.

As a second recommendation, keep your brand consistent. One of the easiest ways to do this is to use the same photo as your You-Tube profile image (ideally your blog's logo) that is on your Blogger profile. Like Flickr, and other social media, You-Tube allows you to connect with other Catholics and increase your network. If you do not list your blog's address on You-Tube, reference your blog on your You-Tube profile, or use your blog's logo as a profile picture, you are losing potential readers.

LinkedIn Catholic Groups

For those of you with professional jobs, you are likely already aware of LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>). For those of you unfamiliar, LinkedIn is a professional networking site. Users have the ability to create profiles that list previous education and job experiences, skills, contact details, and other features. As of early 2012, LinkedIn boasts more than 150 million registered users in more than 200 countries and territories.¹¹

While you may feel uncomfortable listing your blog on your LinkedIn profile – since some people use their blogs to express a personal, non-professional side of them – you should at least feel comfortable joining a Catholic group. Joining a Catholic group allows you to interact with other Catholics and increase your network. In so doing, you are likely to recommend your blog to them and drive traffic to it.

In my own experiences with networking on various Catholic LinkedIn groups, I have met several Catholics who I eventually hired to write for CatechismClass.com. I found others who helped refer my products and increase my sales, and I even found customers for my Catholic products through LinkedIn groups.

Spend some time familiarizing yourself with Groups (<http://learn.linkedin.com/groups/>) and then simply type “Catholic” in the search bar on the top right of LinkedIn's main page. Simply change the search from “People” to “Groups” by selecting groups in the drop-down menu. At this time, I am a member of several groups including Catholic Networkers and Catholic Professionals.

Facebook

Facebook is undoubtedly the largest and most common social networking website. This guide will not go into the details of setting up a Facebook profile or using the general features of the website for two reasons. Firstly, Facebook updates their contents, features, and layout all the time so any step-by-step explanation would quickly become defunct. Secondly, because it is widely used, basic Facebook guides would largely be needless.

¹¹ "LinkedIn - About Us." LinkedIn. Web. 17 Apr 2012. <<http://press.linkedin.com/about>>.

Catholic Bloggers with Facebook accounts, however, can without much effort utilize their Facebook connections to increase their blog's readership. I have found Facebook to be extremely effective in bringing new traffic to my blogs. Firstly, you can simply share your new posts with your Facebook connections. Simply copy and paste the url for new posts along with a short description into your status update bar.

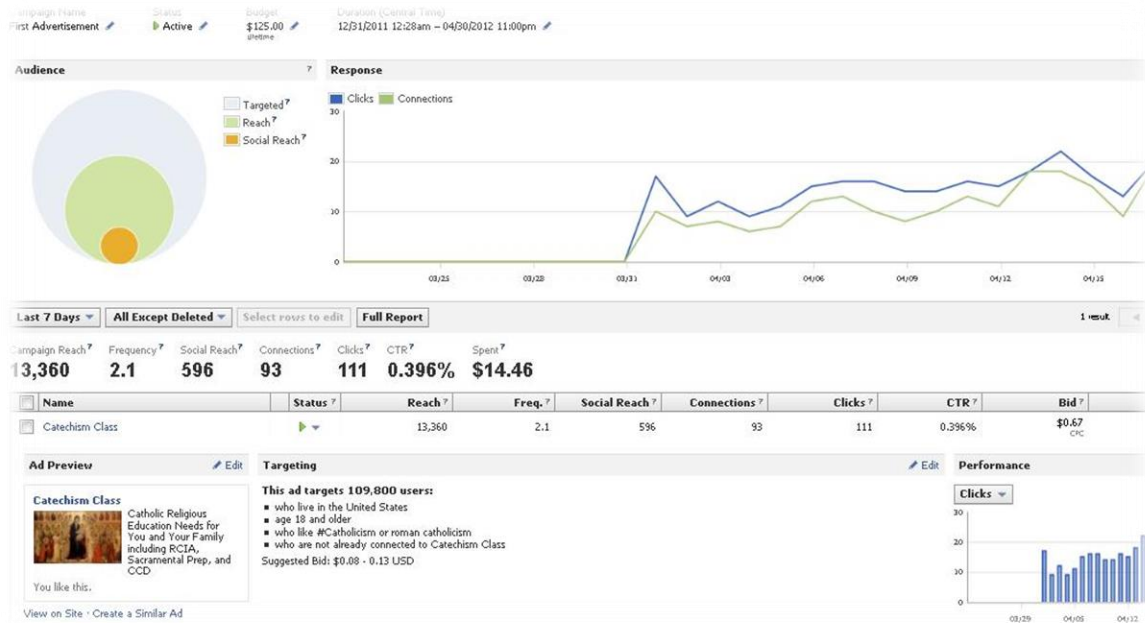
If you prefer for only certain connections to see your post (i.e. only your Catholic connections), then simply change the sharing setting for the update. To achieve this, you can set up a special list on which you include only your friends that would be interested in seeing your blog updates. Navigate to the Facebook list page (<http://www.facebook.com/bookmarks/lists>) and click on "Create List." From that page, you can create a new list called "Blog Readers" and simply add everyone that you would like to include on this list.

When you post your blog updates on Facebook, see in the bottom right to which group it is by default viewable. Click on that – for many of you it will say "Friends" or "Public" – and then click on "See all lists" at the bottom. From there, simply click on the "Blog Readers" list. You are now ready to share this blog status update with your connections.

A second option – though a little more time consuming – for sharing and interacting with Facebook users is the creation of a Facebook Page for your blog. Many of the most prominent Catholic blogs have their own Facebook Page. After displaying a logo and a link to the Facebook group on your blog, readers can easily "like" your page and receive updates on their homepage.

Some of you may think that using a Facebook Page will not bring in new readers but rather simply bring your readers to Facebook. Realize that many of these same people are already on Facebook daily. How many of them remember to check your blog daily? How many times does the average person forget to check their Facebook Page daily?

The answers to these questions should be self-evident. You need a Facebook Page to remind your readers to visit new posts. This also presents you an additional outlet to communicate with and interact with your readers. Do you really want to publish a new post just to ask your readers a basic question? Wouldn't it be easier to publish a short status update asking your fans if they would be interested in a certain topic for a new post before you go through the research and time for writing it?



I experimented by turning my Facebook Ad on and off. The results showed me that having the ads consistently boosted traffic to my website

Facebook is not the only part of building an online brand. In fact, it is only one part of many; however, it is an important part nonetheless. I have even used Facebook Ads to bring in additional traffic. Because of the customization of the ads, I designed an advertisement that specifically targeted Facebook users who lived in the United States, were 18 years of age or older, and who either had one of their listed interests as “Catholicism” or “Roman Catholicism.” My ad targeted 109,800 users.

Over the course of the next few months, I saw my Page “likes” increase from a few dozen to over 700. And since some of these people purchased some of my products, I not only covered the expense of the ads but made a small profit. In fact, Facebook Ads allow you to set either a lifetime or a daily budget. In my case, I set a lifetime budget of \$125. It was money well spent.

To learn more and follow the current Facebook procedure for setting up a Facebook page for your blog, visit their website (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php>). And secondly, spend some time familiarizing yourself with Facebook’s Ad Guidelines (http://www.facebook.com/ad_guidelines.php) and consider setting up an advertisement. A Google search for “Facebook Advertisement coupons” reveals several companies giving credits – some up to \$100 – for new advertisers. If you can find a current opportunity to receive free advertising credit, I would definitely take advantage of the offer.

AddThis Analytics

Over the past few years, I’ve become an advocate for AddThis Analytics (<http://www.addthis.com/>). Using AddThis Analytics is free and easy. I highly recommend them.



A typical AddThis Analytics report as delivered weekly to my email

Have you noticed on popular blogs how each post has a special set of icons and options that allow readers to share the post through Facebook, Twitter, email, or sometime up to 200 other social media outlets? AddThis Analytics not only provides the code for you to add this feature to your blog but also sends weekly email updates describing the results.

Every week I see the most popular shares on my blog, the breakdown in which ways my posts were shared, and how many users actually clicked on the shared link. I have found that the majority of my posts are shared through Facebook. Again, posts written with a title such “Top 20 Lenten Practices” yield higher shares and clicks than other posts.

Homeschooling Bloggers

Are you a Catholic homeschooler thinking of entering the Blogging World?

Before you begin blogging, spend a couple of days (or weeks) in prayer about it. Ask God if this is the right thing for you and your family. Then, follow these steps:

1. Decide why you want to blog: Do you just want to put information out there to help others? Are you promoting something you created? Are you a great writer and hope one day to get a book contract? There are so many reasons to start blogging, just make sure you have a clear understanding of why you want to blog. If you are like me, you just like to share what you learn and also your blog is a great place to document ideas and things you have done in your homeschool for yourself (think of it like an online scrapbook). If you want to create a blog that posts regularly, has a specific niche, and fosters a community, then you need to plan. Pencil in regular writing, editing, and networking times throughout your week.

2. Be patient when it comes to building an audience. If you are blogging just to share with your family, then you have an audience already. If it is for anyone that homeschools, you need to be patient and prepared to help share your blog posts through social media venues. This will help increase the traffic into your blog posts, but be patient since this takes time - and I'm talking months or years of time. Also, make sure you share your accomplishments with friends and family and do not be shy to ask them to share with others. Take some time to visit other Catholic Homeschoolers' blogs and leave comments, and remember to follow their social media links.

3. Make sure to be YOU. Don't try to be someone else whose blog you love - just be yourself. Write like you always do because it's much more fun this way. It will help you with blogging for long term as you will stick with it longer and it will help others enjoy what you are writing. Be true to yourself and your readers.

4. Keep the focus and go with the seasons (especially liturgical ones). There are times in your life where you will have more content to share, and then others less. Enjoy the moments when you have tons to share. Real experiences are what bring others to want to read what you write in your blog. Do not repost someone's entire blog post. This is bad for traffic and it might bother other bloggers, besides violating copyright. So go with the season in life you are in right now: New baby? Moving? New curriculum? Share those real moments.

5. Who is your target audience? Who will your readers be? Keep them in mind when you write, but please be yourself since not every reader will like everything you write about. And that is fine. Write for you and about the things that interest you but also remember to keep the readers of your blog in mind as they are the ones following. Staying focused on the topic of your blog helps immensely with this.

6. Get to know other Catholic or homeschooling bloggers and ask many questions. This is the best way to learn. Make online friends with other bloggers, and if you use social media, make sure you contact those bloggers on there. You will be building a support team of sorts by sharing ideas and experiences as you journey through homeschooling together.

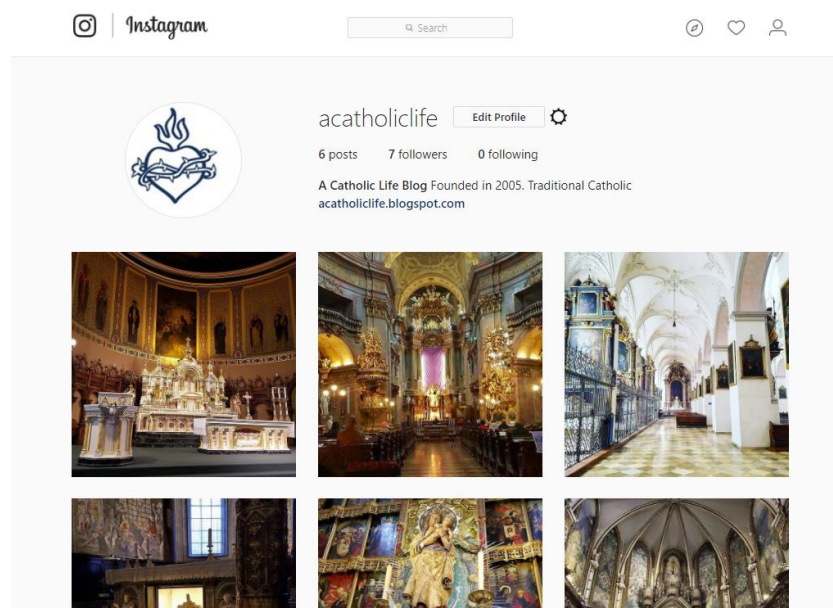
7. God, family and health come first. Make sure you drink plenty of water daily, exercise and sleep! Keep things in proper order and blogging will be fun for you and your husband/wife who will read your posts (which reminds me get him/her to be your #1 reader by sharing). Do not let

your blog be a problem in your homeschool or family life; on the contrary, it should complement it. What good is an excellent blog if your family isn't being properly taken care of? Live first, blog later.

Instagram

In recent years, the popularity of Instagram has increased significantly, like Flickr it is a photo sharing site. But whereas Flickr has gone down in popularity, Instagram has gone up. Instagram is a mobile app where smartphone users can share photos, like photos of others (using the heart symbol) and explore others' photos using the hashtag feature.

Your blog doesn't need to be centered around photography though to use Instagram. Start by taking photos of beautiful Catholic art. I have a collection of photos of beautiful European Churches, and I share those with various hashtags. Spend some time adding them and grow your followers. Include the link to your blog on Instagram and a source in the comments on the photo. It's another good venue to get new visitors. But make sure to name your account so they know who you are like I've done.



Monetize Your Blog

Word of Caution

Finally, we arrive at an appropriate time in the process to discuss monetizing your blog. First, as a word of caution, always remember that you write as a Catholic blogger for the glory of our Lord and His Church, not for the goal of making money. There is nothing wrong with earning some extra money from your work but do not approach blogging with your end goal on the

money rather than on the service to God. Let us not forget, “You cannot serve God and mammon.”¹²

From time to time, I receive offers from various organizations to post a guest post on my blog. They offer to do all of the writing in exchange for being referenced as the author. At other times, I am contacted by various marketing companies asking me to edit some of my past documents to link to some of their clients.

Here is an email that I have received:

We have a client who would like to pay you for the opportunity to sponsor a blog post that you have recently written. We know that blogs can be expensive to run and our client would like the opportunity to support you in that endeavor.

In return, our client is asking for one link that they specify placed into the body of the blog post (no porn or gambling). Feel free to contact me with any concerns or clarifications you may have.

After a brief email exchange, I discovered that I would have needed to add a link in four previous posts of mine. The links were all directed to online degree programs from different institutions. If I were interested only in the money, I would have taken the offer. However, since I was interested in providing truly useful, Catholic content, I could not link to these online degree programs. To do so would not only betray the trust of my readers but possibly send them to online theological programs that were heretical. Above all, remember your proper end is never the money – it is on the service.

That being said, there are legitimate ways to earn extra money from your blog.

How To Make Money Blogging

There are literally hundreds of ways to make money blogging. In fact, just spend a few minutes browsing “101 Ways to Monetize Your Blog Without Irritating Your Readers” by Inside CRM (<http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/insidecrm/101-ways-to-monetize-your-blog-without-irritating-your-readers-53514>). While I do not recommend all of these ideas, I do wish for you to see that there is not only one right way to make money while blogging.

Affiliate Programs

One strategy that I do highly recommend is to use affiliate programs. Affiliate programs are designed to match publishers (e.g. bloggers) with companies selling a product or service. In the affiliate partnership, a blogger will add various links and/or banner images to a blog. In return, every time a customer clicks a link and then buys a product, you will earn a specified commission rate. While it is typical for rates to be in the 5 – 10% range, for some products it is commonplace to earn 50% commissions. Sometimes you will even earn a small amount per click or per lead, though affiliate programs usually only pay per sale.

¹²Douay Rheims Bible, Matthew 6:24

The important factor about affiliate programs for a Catholic blogger is the ability to control the content on your page. Unlike randomly generated advertisements, you have complete control over the products that you will recommend in an affiliate relationship. If a company is a known supporter of Planned Parenthood or sells immodest clothing, then you can simply refuse to recommend any of their products. You control what you recommend to your readers. And your readers will appreciate it.

Among affiliate programs, one that I recommend highly is ShareaSale (<http://tinyurl.com/shareasale7>). Their interface is sleek and easy to use and adding affiliate links or banners to your website sidebar or posts is extremely simple. The only downside is that you receive your earnings only when your account balance hits a specified amount. While you have some control in setting this amount, it cannot be any lower than \$50, which is higher than some alternative programs. The number of organizations that specifically identify themselves as Catholic on the site are also relatively small. Yet, ShareaSale still gets a high rating from me.

One of my favorite affiliate programs is the Amazon Affiliates Program. Keep in mind, though, that with changing tax laws, their program is only open to residents of certain states. In recent years, legislatures have passed laws – commonly referred to as Amazon Laws – that legally declare an affiliate relationship creates a nexus relationship in a state. Nexus is a technical term in state and local income taxation. If an organization has a nexus presence, they need to start charging sales tax on all purchases. So, in early 2011, for instance, Amazon terminated its affiliate program for all residents of Illinois, after the Illinois legislature passed such a bill.

Here is an excerpt from the electronic communication sent by Amazon Affiliates staff to Illinois affiliates in early 2011¹³:

For well over a decade, the Amazon Associates Program has worked with thousands of Illinois residents. Unfortunately, a new state tax law signed by Governor Quinn compels us to terminate this program for Illinois-based participants. It specifically imposes the collection of taxes from consumers on sales by online retailers - including but not limited to those referred by Illinois-based affiliates like you - even if those retailers have no physical presence in the state.

We had opposed this new tax law because it is unconstitutional and counterproductive. It was supported by national retailing chains, most of which are based outside Illinois, that seek to harm the affiliate advertising programs of their competitors. Similar legislation in other states has led to job and income losses, and little, if any, new tax revenue. We deeply regret that its enactment forces this action.

As of April 2012, residents of Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, North Carolina or Rhode Island are not eligible to participate in the Associates program. This is subject to change in the future of course as legislation changes.

¹³ Frommer, Dan. "Amazon Terminates Affiliate Program In Illinois After New Tax Law." *Business Insider*. 11 03 2011: Web. <http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-03-11/tech/30095705_1_illinois-residents-amazon-associates-program-governor-quinn>.

But if you are eligible, you could see significant sales from the Amazon affiliate relationship. Amazon Affiliates also sets its minimum account balance payout to \$10, thus making it easier for smaller affiliates to receive their distributions.

The commission rate per month varies from approximately 6% up to 10%. As you sell more products in a given month, your commission rate increases. It's important to note that the commission rate is based on the number of items sold – not on the dollar amount of sales. Thus, if you want to recommend prayer cards or devotional books that are priced very cheaply, you can still see up to 10% commission rates. In fact, as the following graphic indicates, commission rates vary on each item sold.

1. Select a Report Type

Report Type: Earnings Report For Program: All Programs

2. Choose a Date Range

Pre-selected Period: Month to Date Exact Period: From Apr 1 2012 To Apr 14 2012

Display on page Download Report (TSV) Download Report (XML)

Downloads include expanded ASIN, date, and other information.

Last updated: April 14, 2012

Earnings Report [Glossary](#)

April 1, 2012 to April 14, 2012

Summary

Item Name	Seller	Price	Advertising-Fee Rate	Items Shipped	Revenue	Advertising Fee
Books						
Baltimore Catechism No. 1	Amazon.com	\$4.95	6.06%	1	\$4.95	\$0.30
Baltimore Catechism No. 3	Amazon.com	\$10.95	6.03%	1	\$10.95	\$0.66
Baltimore Catechism No.2	Amazon.com	\$6.95	6.04%	1	\$6.95	\$0.42
Christ, the Life of the Soul	Amazon.com	\$21.32	6.00%	1	\$21.32	\$1.28
Country Furniture	Amazon.com	\$18.95	6.02%	1	\$18.95	\$1.14
Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul	Third Party	\$19.77	6.02%	1	\$19.77	\$1.19

One particular feature that really distinguishes Amazon Affiliates from competing programs is the ability to earn commissions on non-recommended products. You will earn commissions for other purchases customers you refer make while on Amazon.com. Amazon's strong recommendation algorithms help up-sell significantly. For example, in my own experiences, over half of the products I receive credit for are products that I have personally never recommended.

Keep in mind these are just generalizations. For the entire program details, please visit Amazon Affiliates (<https://affiliate-program.amazon.com>) and read their published information. Also, realize that Amazon will only approve your application for an affiliate account if you include a reference to a website or blog that is operational. So, be sure that your blog is set up and somewhat established before you attempt an affiliate application.

Book Reviews

Over my years in blogging, I have been contacted by several authors and publishing companies including Random House Books, who have requested that I review a copy of one of their new releases. They send me a free copy of the book in return for me posting my review online for my readers.

Since I started blogging, I've reviewed several dozen items (including both CDs and books). My review list is available online and updated as changes and additions are made to the list (<http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2005/09/book-reviews.html>). I have also posted my honest reviews online even when they have been negative toward the book. For example, I have written strongly against both *Between Heaven and Mirth* by James Martin and *Transformed by the Trinity* by Sr. Carol Frances Jegen, BVM.

A Catholic reviewer must understand that if he recommends a book to his readers, they will trust him and believe the book is in line with Catholic teaching. I have never – nor will I – give a positive review to a book contrary to the Deposit of Faith. If it means I lose future reviewing opportunities, so be it. A Catholic review can never compromise the Faith by recommending books contrary to the Magisterium.

That being said, I've also reviewed some truly wonderful Catholic books that I have recommended highly. And while I keep some of these copies for myself, many times I sell the copy – since it is an actual copy and not a proof – on Amazon.com for others to buy. I make a little money in the process and someone else gets a truly great book for the benefit of their soul. That is a win-win.

As a final note of caution, keep in mind that transparency is key. On October 5, 2009, the Federal Trade Commission said that “bloggers and other online mavens who get cash or freebies to evaluate goods are essentially endorsers – and should disclose any ‘material connection’ to the seller.”¹⁴ So, let your readers know of your relationships with various publishing houses or organizations. Again, transparency is key.

Advertisement Swaps

I rarely use the word “always” when it comes to monetization, but when it comes to blogging, always be creative in your monetizing. In April 2012, I decided to contact a media consultant at the National Catholic Register (NCR) in regards to an advertising deal. While we had discussed advertising previously, I was nevertheless skeptical about spending money as part of an advertising strategy. In the past around three years before the NCR was acquired by EWTN, my organization purchased advertising that resulted in so-so results. With a minimal advertising budget, I was not comfortable risking the advertising budget on one deal.

Instead of committing to an advertising deal with the organization when I was unsure of results, I suggested an advertisement swap agreement. Since my blog *A Catholic Life* earned nearly 500,000 page views in 2011, I suggested to my contact at the NCR the possibility of advertising their website on mine, and in return, they would freely advertise my organization on theirs.

¹⁴ “Caveat Endorser.” *Business Week*. 19 10 2009: 6. Print.

After only a day, I received a response from the advertising manager for the National Catholic Register who accepted my proposal. In return for giving them 40,000 page impressions a month for two months, they agreed to deliver 300,000 impressions of my advertisement between the end of April and the end of June 2012. There were approximately 2,330,000 page views during that time, so my advertisement was seen roughly once every eight page views.

Consequently, because of some creativity I entered into a mutually beneficial advertising arrangement that allowed the other party increased exposure and the ability to test a new JavaScript code to track impressions and clicks. I received a significant number of visits and sales from the process.

Never be afraid as a blogger to think outside the box.

Catholic Blog Help – Printable List

BLOGGING SOFTWARE

- Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>)
- WordPress (<http://wordpress.com/>)

HOSTING & DOMAIN SERVICES

- NameBoy (<http://tinyurl.com/NameBoyDomains>)
- GlowHost (<http://tinyurl.com/GlowHostHosting>)

INTERACTIVE RESOURCES

- You-Tube Video Uploader (http://www.youtube.com/my_videos_upload)
- Feedburner (<http://www.feedburner.com>)
- Skype (<http://www.skype.com>)
- Scribd (<http://www.scribd.com>)
- Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>)
- W3 Counter (<http://www.w3counter.com/>)
- Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>)
- Instagram (<http://www.instagram.com>)
- Catholic HashTags for Twitter (<http://tinyurl.com/7gcxmp8>)
- WiseStamp Email Signatures (<http://tinyurl.com/wisestampemails>)

CATHOLIC BLOG DIRECTORIES

- CatholicBlogs.com (<http://www.catholicblogs.com/>)
- Catholic Blog Directory (<http://catholicblogs.blogspot.com/>)
- St. Blog's Parish Directory (<https://stblogsparish.com/>)
- Catholic Homeschool Blog Directory (<http://chbd.blogspot.com/>)
- Catholic Bloggers Network (<http://www.catholicbloggersnetwork.com>)

VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS

- Upwork (<https://www.upwork.com>)

MONETIZATION

- ShareaSale (<http://tinyurl.com/shareasale7>)
- Amazon Affiliates (<https://affiliate-program.amazon.com>)