

How To Create A Must-Read Blog For Your Child Care Center: 11 Steps To Success

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Even though you're in the business of providing child care, you're also in the business of marketing and selling – whether you like it or not.

And you probably *don't* like it very much. Born self-promoters and sellers tend to go into, well, sales. Or acting. Or reality TV stardom. They don't tend to go into early childhood education.

But getting the word out about your center is important, and establishing your center's reputation as *the* place for child care in your area is even more important. A blog is one of the best ways to do this. It's also one of the best ways to shoot yourself in the foot if you do it wrong.

The good news is that there are just a few simple guidelines you need to follow to establish an interesting, widely read blog that attracts lots of new business to your center.

Without further ado, here's what you need to know:

1. Call the blog section of your website something descriptive.

"Blog" doesn't really tell prospective readers much, but "Events & Updates" or "News & Updates" does.

If you tend to post a lot of cute photos of the kids at your center (with written parental permission, of course!) you can even call it "Cute Pics" or "Fun Times!" or something similar.

2. Have a dedicated author.

The best, most readable blogs are written in the first person and have a unique perspective – so, if possible, have the official "voice" of your blog be the center's owner or director, and don't be shy about indicating who the posts are coming from.

This helps readers feel they're getting to know an actual person behind the blog and builds trust and rapport – both of which are hugely important for parents when it comes time to select a child care center.

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Note that this does not mean that you, Jane Q. Owner, are stuck producing 100% of the blog content all by your lonesome for the foreseeable future.

Staff can help you out with both idea generation and writing; you can feature them as guest contributors. You might even have someone on your staff (maybe an assistant director) who'd be interested in being a guest columnist on a regular basis.

3. Figure out what you want your blog to accomplish – *before* you start.

If your infant room is always full, but your preschool program is not, then maybe you want your blog to help bring in more of these older kids. In that case, your blog posts should focus more on things like kindergarten readiness than nap schedules for newborns.

Similarly, if you want your blog to act primarily as a retention tool for current families, consider putting it on a secure site (or area of your site) that's password-restricted.

It may seem counterintuitive, but the more narrow your focus, the more readers you'll attract – and the more devoted they'll be – because they'll feel you're writing *just for them*. They'll be interested in what you're writing about, and they'll feel like you really understand both where they're coming from and what they need.

If your center has already been blogging for a while about a wide range of topics, it's by no means too late to start focusing in more narrowly. Just go ahead and start.

Most readers will not go back through your blog, post by post, and analyze how your focus has shifted. They'll probably just start (or keep) reading your new stuff as it's posted.

As you begin to narrow down your scope, you may well find that you lose some established readers. And that's okay. You'll be gaining a whole lot more – and those folks will be a much better fit for the direction in which you want your blog, and business, to go.

4. Always keep your focus on your *readers'* interests – not yours.

Maybe your true passion in life is not children, but Weimaraners – you have three, and you dress them in seasonal costumes, and you find them endlessly fascinating.

That's terrific. But unless your child care center has a direct connection to Weimaraners (and, if not, perhaps you should consider a shift, given their key role in your life), the pups have no place on your business blog.

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This is not to say that you have no leeway whatsoever.

As your readers get to know you through your blog posts, they will necessarily learn a bit more about your interests and life outside work. And they may start asking you, in blog comments or in person, about those things:

“What’s up with that mutt of yours these days?”

“How did your soufflé turn out?”

“Whatever happened with Janie’s ballet recital? Did she hide backstage like you thought?”

You may find that your readers either share some of your passions or, even better, feel so connected to you that they simply want to know more about the other aspects of your life.

If this is the case, you should feel free to start experimenting with an off-topic post every now and then that addresses what your die-hard readers are interested in. But the bulk of your blog should remain well-targeted to the link between your child care business and your readers’ needs in this area.

5. Don’t merely provide information – become an authority in your field.

Anybody with access to Wikipedia can provide information – a lot of information – on nearly any topic under the sun.

But only a real child care expert can:

- Give an informed recommendation of one course of action over another
- Share insights gleaned from working with hundreds (or even thousands) of children over the years
- Intelligently compare and contrast alternatives
- Fully explain the real-world implications of a rule, system, or process
- Provide a list of common newbie parenting mistakes – and how to avoid them
- Regale readers with entertaining and informative “tales from the front”

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- Discuss why a popular “solution” to a problem may actually be more trouble than it’s worth (e.g., binkies that keep getting lost)
- Offer the insider perspective of a knowledgeable child care professional
- Talk in specifics, using real-life examples rather than generalities

Do you see the real value you can offer? It’s a key distinction that can make all the difference in how indispensable your blog becomes to your prospective and current parents.

So many bloggers are afraid to take a firm stance for fear of offending someone, but having a definite opinion on things is a crucial component of being perceived as a knowledgeable expert.

You’re never going to please everyone.

The real danger is in trying to do so and becoming uninteresting – to everyone. So be controversial. Be provocative. Say what you think. Offer advice and solutions to your readers, not just raw information.

6. Find – and maintain – your true voice.

Whether you know it or not, you have a natural writing voice.

It may be formal, or informal, or sarcastic, or funny, or matter-of-fact, or any number of other things. The point is, it’s a) authentically yours and b) something that you are to a large extent stuck with.

You can always improve your writing, of course, but your essential voice on paper (or computer screen) is part of who you are. If you’re a “just the facts, ma’am” kind of writer, a lot of flowery description is probably never going to come naturally to you.

And if you’re one of those naturally funny people who’s cracking up the folks around you all day long, you’ll be stiff and miserable if you try to adopt a “professional” persona on your blog for the sake of seeming professional (and you’re in child care, for Pete’s sake! People expect a little levity when it comes to these wee silly people).

The good news is that, whatever your true voice is, it’s an asset that should be cultivated because it’s a huge part of what makes your blog unique. It’s also a great way to

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attract the families you most want to work with – if they’re drawn to your writing, they’ll probably be drawn to your center and will enjoy having their kids there.

Trying to sound like someone else is bound to backfire.

If you deliberately try to present yourself as “more professional,” or “less casual,” or anything different than who you really are, you’re setting yourself up for trouble. Why? The fake you will start attracting a whole bunch of people who have been misled as to who you really are. It’s bad on blind dates and it’s equally bad in business blogging.

So how do you find your true voice? A lot of it comes down to repetition. The more you write, the more comfortable you’ll get with the process generally. Focus on writing like you talk, and get someone you know well (your spouse, say, or a close friend) to look things over and give you an honest take on whether or not the real you is coming through.

Eventually, sitting down to write your blog posts will feel as natural as sitting down at Starbucks for a chat with a good friend.

7. Create a user-friendly blog experience.

Your blog is essentially your online storefront, so it should be inviting and straightforward.

Just as you wouldn’t make in-person visitors climb over piles of lumber to get to your front door, or fiddle with a series of complicated latches to get in, it’s essential to make sure your blog (and the rest of your website generally) is an inviting, comfortable place to get to and navigate around. Here are some things to keep in mind; share this list with your web person, if you have one:

- All text should be in an easy-to-read, sufficiently large font.
- Site navigation should be straightforward and as simple as possible – buttons and links should be carefully chosen and kept to a minimum.
- Watch out for too many graphics, or animation that’s not there for a seriously good reason – they can be visually distracting and also cause your site to load slowly (and Flash doesn’t work on most mobile devices anyway; you’d be amazed at how many Millennial parents are doing their browsing on tablets and smartphones).

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- Categorize your blog posts in ways that are helpful to your readers. What would they most likely be looking for, and what terms would resonate with them? Remember that you want to use the terms *your parents* would use – they may be different than the ones that you as a child care professional would use.
- Keep the number of categories reasonable. There are different schools of thought on this, but in my opinion, anything more than 8 or so starts to get a little unwieldy.
- Don't make your blog posts too long – around 500 words is a good, readable length.
- Break up your blog posts with short paragraphs, bullets, numbered lists, headings, and sub-headings as appropriate.
- Add relevant photos to your blog posts, when possible – they visually break up blocks of text and draw readers in. Photos of real kids at your center are always great; again, get written parental permission first. You can also find good, free photos in the Creative Commons section of [Flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/) (just be sure to use images that are approved for commercial use – and don't forget to credit the photographer).
- Include your contact information on your blog, and make it easy to find. Encourage readers to submit their comments and questions.

8. Interact with readers and commenters.

It's your choice, of course, whether or not you want to allow comments on your blog.

My advice is to start by allowing them (there's a great, inexpensive service called [Akismet](https://www.akismet.com/) that will eliminate most of the spam before it ever hits your site), and see how it goes.

If you're overwhelmed with managing comments, or if you have a particularly spiteful readership that seems to take pleasure in attacking one another (I don't know when this would come up; maybe in the realm of seriously overtired parents?), you can always shut them down at a later date.

If you allow comments, you should respond to each and every commenter.

It's just good manners, for starters. It also increases the number of comments on your site – doubles them, in fact – because you'll be adding one of your own for every one your

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readers leave. Comments are good for both community-building and SEO (helping drive search traffic to your site, in other words).

Similarly, if you get an email from a reader, answer it promptly – whether or not it’s a prospective parent (this person may know someone who is). Many bloggers worry that they’ll be inundated with emails and questions, but this just doesn’t happen very often. It’s one of those great problems to have, in fact, that you can deal with if and when it ever comes up.

9. Don’t make it too promotional.

While your blog is your online *storefront*, it’s important to remember that it’s not your online *store*.

There are blogs whose whole reason for existence is to sell certain products or services. Your blog isn’t one of them.

The main purpose of *your* blog is to inform and/or entertain both current and prospective parents, and to set yourself apart as a knowledgeable, likeable, trustworthy child care authority.

For this reason, you should resist the temptation to use your blog as a platform to do a lot of selling. This will annoy rather than attract readers, and it will undermine your efforts to build enduring relationships with them.

Remember the 80/20 rule: You can very occasionally (20% of the time or less) mention something you have on offer – such as a limited-time discount, a new class or camp you’re offering, or so on – but these mentions should be conversational and informative rather than truly salesy (your ads and mailings are the best place for that sort of thing).

The other 80% of the time, however, your blog should be there in the service of your readers.

10. Get your list rolling as early as possible.

Your “list” is the list of people who have opted in to receive communications from you directly to their email inboxes. You, for example, opted in to my list when you signed up to receive this report.

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Since your blog is available online 24/7, you may well be wondering why it's important to encourage people to sign up to receive emailed posts.

Here's the thing: People who have affirmatively "raised their hands" and said "Yes! I'm interested in what you do – please go ahead and send me information" have gone a step above and beyond the folks who merely stumble across your blog online. They are actively asking you to keep in touch. They are *inviting you into their inboxes* – a rare thing these days!

As with any relationship, of course, it's important not to abuse this trust, or you'll get a landslide of unsubscribe requests quicker than you can say CAN-SPAM. But, carefully cultivated, your list can quickly become your biggest business asset.

These folks are well on their way to becoming new fans and, quite possibly, new families at your center. You can even send special offers and discounts to your list that aren't available to your casual blog readers.

So it's important to have a way to start gathering these names as soon as possible. Don't worry if you've been blogging for a while now and haven't yet done this – but do get to it ASAP.

The best way to get people to join your list is to offer them something of value in exchange for their email address – free reports are a great way to do this. You're looking for a topic that both establishes you as a child care authority and provides info your prospective parents want to know. Consider topics like the following:

- *8 Myths About Potty Training*
- *9 Reasons Why You Should Read To Your Children; Guidelines for Success*
- *15 Fun Rainy Day Activities For You and Your Preschooler*

11. Establish a publication schedule and *stick to it*.

The great thing about a blog is that you can just post new stuff when you feel like it, right? Wrong. This is actually one of the biggest potential blog pitfalls.

Given the chance to post "whenever," far too many would-be bloggers wind up posting infrequently – and then, before too long, "whenever" turns into "never." Do not, under any circumstances, let this happen to you.

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An abandoned blog lives on in cyberspace forever. Having one floating around out there, poorly reflecting upon you and your business, is far worse than never having attempted one at all.

You don't need to publish every day, or even every week, but you do need to publish often enough that your readers (and subscribers; see #10 above) don't forget about you.

At a bare minimum, shoot for once a month. Twice a month is better, and once a week is even better. You may even get to a point where you publish multiple times a week. But this is one area where it's much better to start slow and ramp up than try to take on too much at once.

A practice I recommend is to build up a stockpile of non-time-sensitive blog posts before you even start blogging. They'll give you some practice as you're getting started, and they'll also come in handy on the days you're due to post but just don't feel like you have it in you. Just pop one in and presto! Your publication streak remains intact.

I hope you've found these tips useful! Please do stay tuned at the website for more ideas and strategies to implement at your child care center. I'd love to hear your ideas and feedback, too.

All best,

Jen Carsen

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About Jennifer Carsen

Jennifer Carsen is a mom, child care communications specialist, writer, and recovering employment law attorney.

At Daycare In Demand, we help child care centers with their communications – both internal (current parents and staff) and external (prospective parents and staff). This can include:

- Helping you get found online through well-targeted **social media** efforts
- Polishing up the writing on your **website**, and in your ads
- Implementing **legally compliant best practices** that keep your center productive and lawsuit-resistant
- Writing **blogs and newsletters** for parents and/or staff
- Drawing up both a **staff handbook** and a **parent handbook**
- Working with you to figure out what makes your center **truly unique and special**, and helping you spread the word
- Enhancing your relationships with current parents and staff to **increase loyalty and retention**
- Developing a **strong referral program** that will consistently bring you all the kiddos you can handle
- Providing **hiring and interviewing strategies** to help you find the very best teachers for your center
- **Troubleshooting common – yet costly – problems** that can decrease enrollments and increase undesirable staff turnover

If you're ready to take your child care center to the next level, I invite you to call (603-340-1854) or email (jennifer@daycareindemand.com). Let's talk about what you need, and I'll help you reach – and retain – more of the great families and teachers that keep your center thriving.

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