

Platformer.

First Things First

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Introduction

I've made a very good living blogging about the things I love. On top of the income, I've been able to travel, meet amazing people, and learn more than I ever thought possible.

You can do the same.

In this short ebook, I'll outline key considerations you'll want to think through before jumping into the world of blogging. My intention is to help you avoid the mistakes common to many bloggers. I do this not to dissuade you from becoming a Platformer, but to inspire you to take the leap with both eyes open!

Choosing a Topic

You may already have a topic chosen for your blog. Or perhaps you're reading this because you love the idea of making a living sharing your passion with the world... even though you're not exactly sure what that passion is.

Whoever you are, this section will help you think through some key considerations before you lock in a topic. Let's dive in!

What do you love?

What do you think about, when you get to choose what you're thinking about? When you get to choose what you do... what do you do?

What are the hobbies and passions that bring joy and light into your life?

We all have them. A few examples:

- Cooking
- Fantasy Sports
- Woodworking
- Gaming
- Hiking
- Painting
- Playing the Banjo

These passions are essential for a healthy life, as they free us from the monotony of the sleep/work/eat cycle while giving us avenues to express our creativity, move our bodies, and interact with others.

Here's the important thing (and it's something you might not believe): many others share your passion. With 5 billion+ people online as of April 2022, there are more people researching topics related to your favorite hobbies than you may realize.

I built my first topical website back in January of 2000. The topic? Learning to play the banjo. Several months after the site launched, it received 300 visits in one day. One day!

I was amazed. And convinced that I had reached every banjo player on the Internet.

Little did I know that a few years later the site would regularly reach 25,000 visitors each day.

Don't make the mistake of thinking your passion is only yours. It's a big world.

Don't make this mistake.

There's an infinite universe of blog topics, but a very small universe of topics that work *for you*.

Internet "gurus" will tell you that the path to blogging success is finding a popular topic, then creating a pile of posts with search engine optimized titles and keyword-stuffed paragraphs. Heck, you can even use an AI tool to do the writing for you, right?

Wrong. Don't buy the lie that you can be successful blogging about a topic simply because the topic is popular.

The web is full of crappy content created by people who were paid to quickly research a topic and write up a post. If you want to succeed, you have to be different. Better. The good news is, you can do it!

Your Superpower

You may not know it yet, but you have a superpower, and it's the key to your blogging success.

That superpower is *passion*. Your passion for a particular hobby/topic has given you a depth of knowledge and experience, and it's from this well that you'll create unique, useful content that adds value to others and dollars to your bank account.

Have you chosen your topic yet? Let's look at it from another angle...

Is there a need?

My most successful business ideas were birthed from needs. I didn't go out looking for a new business, but it came to me in the form of a *problem*:

- I couldn't find an answer to my question.
- I needed a product/service that could accomplish X, but none existed.

When choosing a topic for your blog, it's worth pondering *what need(s) your blog will meet*. What value is it delivering to visitors?

The bigger the need, the better your chance of rapid success.

If you perceive a need, others do too. This is a time-limited opportunity. If you can be the first to meet that need, you'll "corner the market" and quickly create a dedicated audience.

Someone beat me to it.

Here's a common question: what do you do when you have a topic in mind, but there's already lots of content covering that topic?

You have two options: choose another topic, or choose a better angle.

Choosing a better angle means you look at what already exists, and create something *better*. Being first-to-market has its advantages, but being second does as well! When you're first-to-market you are creating something from scratch, and building an audience from the ground floor.

When you're second-to-market (or third, or fourth) you have a full picture of what's already out there. You can see their strengths, their weaknesses, and you can figure out how to build something better.

Example: YouTube has a massive number of videos covering topic X, but there is very little blog content on the topic. What should you do?

Create the blog content. You can even use some of the YouTube videos as the basis for your posts, embedding the videos and writing about what they contain. YouTube will reach a certain audience, but there are plenty of people who would rather read a well-written post than watch a video.

Needs Narrow

You may have started this journey with a broad topic in mind:

1. I love scuba diving
2. I'm an expert guitarist who loves to teach
3. My family is blessed by my cooking, and I want to share that with others

When you begin to think about the needs associated with your topic, you may realize that meeting those needs will require a narrowing of focus or change in approach. This is a good thing. Focused blogs lead to more punchy content that audiences find compelling and relevant.

As an example: what if I took the first broad topic above (“I love scuba diving”) and identified this need: *diving requires a lot of equipment, and beginners don’t know what brands/models to buy.*

This may lead me to focus my Scuba blog on *product reviews and advice*. And I’m not talking about a simple 5-star rating system with a few sentences about the latest Garmin dive computer! I’m talking about in-depth reviews that get into the nitty-gritty of the products, showing their strengths and weaknesses in a way only an experienced scuba diver and actual user of the product can do.

Reality Check

Before you jump in with both feet, let’s discuss what your blogging journey will look like.

I’ll give it to you straight: this is not a get-rich-quick scheme. You probably shouldn’t quit your day job quite yet.

Becoming a successful self-employed blogger requires skill, time, and effort. In a word, it requires *work*. But my dad always told me, “Find a job doing what you love, and you won’t have to work a day in your life.”

The beauty of the Platformer life is that it’s work you’ll enjoy because it revolves around your own passion.

It may not happen in your first month. Heck, it may not happen in your first year! But eventually, if you stick to it and use the principles I’m sharing here, you can earn a very good living creating writing about what you love.

How much time do you really have?

We hear it every day: “I don’t have time for that.” But the truth is, *we have time for what’s important to us*. If we find ourselves feeling too busy to do important things, we should blame our lack of *focus*, not our lack of time.

Just how focused are we? Sadly, many of us waste huge chunks of our days staring at our phones or TV screens. Sure, we all need a break... but did you know [the average user spends 2.5 hours per day on social media](#)?

Building your platform will take time. Whether you’re trying to publish multiple posts daily or just one per week, you’ll need to carve out time to make it happen.

How much time can you actually make for this new enterprise? Think about it for a moment, and get a number of hours (minutes?) per day in your head.

Now let me ask you this: what if you knew you could make \$100k per year from your blog, but that income wouldn't start until 12 months after you began the project? Would that change how much time you have available for your new blog? If so, what's the new number?

The reality is, your immediately available time is probably somewhere between the two numbers you came up with above. And trust me, once your blog starts making real money, you'll magically find a lot more time to devote to it. Many successful bloggers have the same story: they start the project as a side hustle, then as income grows they transition out of their day job and into their dream job.

You can do that, too. But it takes time.

This is not a sprint.

If you're looking for a way to get rich quick, blogging is *not* the answer. The path to success as a blogger is a marathon, not a sprint.

To be sure, you can make wise decisions and devote more resources so success arrives sooner. (You can also make poor decisions and work so lazily that success never comes!)

The truth is, every Platformer makes mistakes, every Platformer has limited resources, and every Platformer wants their blog to take off quicker than it does. That's just how it works.

If you're a self-funded lone operator taking the commonly-seen "keep my day job and devote 1-3 hours per day to my blog" approach, don't expect significant revenue from your blog in the first year. What you *will* gain is a lot of experience in those first 12 months as you become a WordPress wiz, streamline your workflows, and make industry contacts. Those gains will serve you well as your blog builds momentum into its second year.

It's in your second year that things may start to feel "real." You've devoted a year of effort to this project, after all. It's starting to draw real traffic. Your affiliate links are making you a bit of money. And maybe, just maybe, a potential sponsor has reached out.

In your second and third years, key monetization decisions will be made. Is the site showing ads, and how am I serving those up? Am I selling merch, or memberships? Do I bring on sponsors? Do I have the traffic to bring in significant income from affiliate links?

As income begins flowing in, you can start making bigger decisions about your workday. Is it time to devote more hours to the blog? Do you have the cashflow and desire to hire someone to help produce content?

It's often somewhere around the 2-3 year mark that people decide to go full-time with their blogging, and that newfound dedication often reaps unforeseen rewards. When I finally decided to quit my job and blog full time, my blogging income doubled in the next year!

But I didn't get there overnight. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

The Blog Snowball

It's important to understand that being a Platformer is nothing like working a typical 9-5 day job. And that's a good thing.

In a typical job, you get paid an hourly wage or an annual salary. Sure, you may also receive bonuses or pay raises, but basically, you're getting paid a flat fee for each hour of labor.

This really isn't how blogging works at all. For a Platformer, each and every post is another brick added to the wall of their strong tower. You may only post once a week in your first year, but that's 50 posts on a website you own, spidered by search engines, drawing traffic from around the world.

To be sure, some posts may "age out" and become less relevant over time. But other posts may remain your most popular page years after they're published! In a very real sense, we Platformers are *investors*. We're investing our time in creating content that has the potential to earn ongoing incoming far into the future.

The hardest part of being a Platformer is usually the first year, because you simply haven't had the time to create enough content to draw in a large audience.

But like a snowball rolling down a hill, your blog will gain size and momentum as you keep it rolling. It may start as a snowball the size of your fist, but as long as it keeps rolling it will grow to the size of a basketball, then a car, then a house!

Let's look at a hypothetical blog's income development over 5 years using very realistic numbers. These numbers make a few assumptions, none of which are extraordinary:

- Each year you increase your number of posts per week (2 per week in year 1, 3 in year 2, etc until you're posting 5 posts each week in years 4 and 5)
- Income from your posts is based solely on ads displayed on your posts. Other forms of site monetization are not included in these figures.
- Your income per post increases each year as your site traffic/audience grows.
- Posts from previous years are calculated to bring in just half the per-post income they brought in the year they were published.

Year	# of New Posts	Income per post	Income from New Posts	Income from Past Years' Posts	Total Income
1	100	\$25.00	\$2,500.00	\$0.00	\$2,500.00
2	150	\$50.00	\$7,500.00	\$1,250.00	\$8,750.00
3	200	\$100.00	\$20,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$25,000.00

4	250	\$200.00	\$50,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$65,000.00
5	250	\$300.00	\$75,000.00	\$40,000.00	\$115,000.00

You can easily see how the archive of posts you've published continues paying you, and this residual income grows each year. (You can also see how just a single "twist of the dial" - increasing your new post count or increasing how much ad income you get per post - can make a massive difference in your bottom line. It's like starting with a bigger snowball, or a steeper hill!)

Real Numbers: Traffic to Dollars

Let's get down to business. What sort of traffic numbers do you need in order to make a living as a Platformer?

There's no precise answer, because every blog is monetized differently, every audience is unique, and your definition of "make a living" may not match mine.

But I can tell you it's somewhere around 1,000 daily visits that your site will start to grab your attention because it's making real money.

Around 5,000 and you've got a solid part-time job.

10,000 and you can quit your day job. Probably.

Let's look at just one form of blog income: on-page ads. This isn't your only form of income, but it's a foundational income stream for most bloggers, and it's tied very directly to your traffic levels.

Here's a table showing on-page ad incomes based on conservative estimates:

- Daily Visits: the number of daily visit sessions on your site
- Pageviews/Visit: the number of pages visited in an average session. 2 is sort of the industry standard. 2 pageviews per visit with 1000 daily visits would equate to 2000 pageviews per day.
- eCPM = your ad income per thousand pageviews. This can vary wildly depending on your industry, seasonality, and ad placements, but \$1 is a realistic figure.

Daily Visits	Pageviews/Visit	eCPM	Ad Income
1000	2	\$1.00	\$2,000.00
10000	2	\$1.00	\$20,000.00

25000	2	\$1.00	\$50,000.00
50000	2	\$1.00	\$100,000.00

Again, I want to be clear that the table above is only calculating income from standard display ads shown on your blog pages. While this is a key income stream for many blogs, it's far from the only income stream! Astute Platformers can leverage affiliate links, merch sales, memberships, sponsorships, and other methods to double, quadruple, or even 10x their display ad income. (We'll talk about this more in the chapter on Monetizing Your Blog.)

Example: in 2021 [my Zwift Insider blog's](#) total income was 5x its ad income amount thanks to sponsorships, merch sales, and a pile of affiliate commissions.

Key Principles

After 25 years building websites for myself and others, I've learned important principles which guide my everyday decision-making. Some were learned the hard way early on, while others came on board several years into the journey.

Today I'm sharing them with you, so you can benefit from my experience and avoid pitfalls.

Content is King

It's been over 25 years since Bill Gates wrote his ["Content is King" essay](#), but the phrase still rings true. As a key Platformer principle, "Content is King" refers to your focus and priorities.

As a solo Platformer, you'll be forced to wear a lot of hats. Writer, designer, WordPress tech, accountant, social media maven, etc. Each of those roles is important in its own way, but don't let yourself get stuck in the weeds.

As a Platformer, always remember that Content is King. *Your business is built on the blog posts you create.* Your audience visits because of the quality of your writing, not the flashiness of your website layout or your Instagram follower count.

Create amazing content and people will come.

Build bridges, don't burn them.

The Internet is a very big place, but it's not so big that you can go around burning bridges without consequence. This is especially true when you're a Platformer, because networking plays a vital role in the growth of your business.

Business Contacts

The merchant who you publicly raked over the coals was probably a potential site sponsor, or perhaps your audience would have appreciated affiliate links to their website's products or services. If you burn that bridge, you're putting a potentially profitable relationship at risk. Be careful what you post about the merchants who are making you profitable, or may do so in the future.

Focus on building bridges. You'll probably have to take the initiative. Merchants and manufacturers may have no idea who you are, especially if you're in the early days of launching your blog. And even if your blog is popular in your space, businesses are notorious for their tunnel vision as they focus on core business metrics and neglect to build relationships with people like you who could help them market effectively.

So reach out. Let them know what makes you special, and why you'd love to form a relationship with them. Show them how a relationship with you can help them, then watch as this new partnership bears fruit in various ways.

It may not always work, but I would guess at least half of the blog-related business relationships I form turn into mutually-beneficial situations.

Site Visitors

Avoid burning bridges with your daily site visitors as well. Sure, you get some bad apples who post ugly comments or spam... block them and move on. But what about the visitor who is frustrated with the way your site works, and posts about it in the comments? Can you take the high road and post a reasonable, kind reply?

Treat your visitors with dignity and respect. It sets a good tone for your site, and encourages them to return.

Stay Positive

What sort of tone do you use when communicating with others in your day-to-day conversations? Are you infectiously positive, depressingly negative, or somewhere in between?

As you write blog posts, keep your tone in mind. Keeping a consistent voice will help your audience connect comfortably and return for more, knowing what to expect from your content.

But take it one step further than simply writing with a consistent tone. Write with a consistently *positive* tone.

Keeping all your writing positive has a lot of upsides, and zero downsides. Benefits include:

- Making your site a place where sponsors/advertisers want to appear

- Subconsciously setting the tone for blog comments from site visitors
- Attracting return visitors because they're able to read your content with a smile
- Helping you maintain a positive outlook day to day
- Sleeping well knowing you've made the Internet a brighter place

Remember, you're a Platformer because you identified a need and believed you could meet it. Staying positive and optimistic, even when writing about challenging topics, ensures your visitors don't leave your site with more needs than when they arrived.

Look for the Win-Win

This principle is closely related to "Build bridges, don't burn them." As your blog grows in popularity and influence, you'll encounter situations where you can step on someone else's hand in order to get a leg up.

Resist the urge for a quick buck at someone else's expense. Look for the win-win, because when you do that, you earn valuable partners. You build a bridge.

Example: on my [Zwift Insider blog](#), I've had many opportunities to expose bugs or other issues with Zwift, the cycling simulator on which the blog is focused. While an article about the latest bug would generate a lot of traffic, informing Zwift about the bug and working with them to inform the community responsibly keeps me in good standing with Zwift so I can continue to get "insider" information from internal contacts.

Investing yourself in win-win situations is a long-term strategy for life that pays off in big ways. Win-lose situations, on the other hand, are shortsighted and constantly burn bridges.

You're in this for the long haul, so do it right.

Key Attributes

What does it take to be a successful Platformer? It's more than just being a good writer. The everyday Platformer life revolves around tech and requires ongoing learning, steady discipline, and a certain brand of obsessiveness that you bring to the topic you've chosen.

Writer/Reader

Let's get this one out of the way first, although we'll revisit it soon in more detail. If you want to blog for a living, you're signing up to be a professional writer. An author. You may never pen the great American novel, but you'll compose enough text to fill a book. That text needs to be well-written for three reasons:

1. **It sets you apart.** In a world of AI bots and blog content farms, pristine prose from the pen of a skilled writer pops on the screen like a fresh spring sunrise. Be better than the bots.
2. **It keeps people coming back.** Good readers appreciate good writers. When you write well, your audience will linger on your posts and happily return to read more of your writing. If your writing is weak, readers will scan the page to get what they want and then walk out the door as quickly as possible.
3. **It increases impact.** Remember, you're trying to meet your audience's needs. Well-written content communicates clearly and concisely, leaving your reader well-informed and subconsciously pleased because they didn't have to work hard to find what they needed.

Good writers are typically good readers, just as talented musicians love listening to other artists.

An acceptable level of reading comprehension will probably be required as you research topics for your posts, although the amount of written material included in your research will vary from topic to topic.

But reading should also provide you with inspiration and ideas. Find other bloggers who write well on topics that grab you. Some or all of these topics should be completely unrelated to your blog topic. Read them regularly.

Read real books, too. Especially the good ones. Blog content is often written quickly, and whittled down for on-screen consumption. Reading longer-form text in a book that underwent many drafts before passing through a skilled editor will recalibrate your mind, reminding you just how good writing can be.

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, they are felt with the heart." Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Learner

You became a Platformer because you possess knowledge on a particular subject. But you've still got a lot of learning to do if you want to succeed in this venture.

Some of your learning will be on topics outside of your blog's focus, because Platformers by necessity must possess working knowledge of topics like WordPress, search engine optimization, and ad networks. You're working on the World Wide Web, and it's constantly expanding and changing.

But you'll also find yourself on Google researching *the very topics in which others consider you a subject matter expert*. And that's OK! It's your ability to keep learning, to stay ahead of the pack, that makes you the right person for this job.

So get comfortable with Google. Learn how to learn, and never stop growing.

Tech-Savvy

While you're not required to be a tech wiz to start blogging, it definitely helps.

If you're not tech-savvy, hopefully you're a good learner who can raise yourself up to a level of comfort with the various bits of tech that make up the everyday life of the Platformer. This will vary from person to person, but here's a typical Platformer's basic "tech stack":

- Web Browser (Chrome, etc)
- WordPress
- Web/Email Hosting
- FTP Client
- Email Software
- Google Analytics
- Design Tools (Photoshop, etc)
- Accounting Software or Services (Quickbooks, etc)
- Social Networks

If you're not yet tech-savvy this may seem like a lot. But if you enjoy learning new things and are able to ask the right questions of Google, you can become quite competent using all these tools in your first few months as a Platformer.

Self-Disciplined

If you've never worked for yourself, moving to the Platformer life may require some adjustment. Successful bloggers often have several posts in the works, with a calendar of planned publishing dates going out several days to several weeks. Does that sound like a system where you would thrive? Or does it sound overwhelming and make you want to hide under a rock?

Platformers don't have the accountability of a boss or a manager, and that's a good thing... for some. If you're not used to being internally motivated, you may need to do some work on yourself in order to stay productive enough to succeed.

You will need a system of organizing your To Dos so you can work efficiently and effectively each day, *especially* in those early days when you aren't seeing big returns on your blogging labor. Plan your work, then work your plan.

This may sound like a lot of work, but take heart: it will pay off in big ways! Not just on your blog, but in your life as a whole. Self-control is, after all, [the single greatest determiner of success in life](#).

Obsessive

Since we're all friends here, we can be honest: Platformers are a bit crazy, right?

We're obsessive on some level, and crazy enough to think we can make a living sharing that obsession with the world.

But maybe that's not crazy at all. Maybe, just maybe, it's our obsessions that destine us to be great Platformers. Because the non-obsessives simply won't invest the time or treasure to dig into a topic at level we do.

- It's our obsession that compels us to buy the latest widget, then try to break it in various ways so we can accurately review its features and performance.
- It's our obsession that keeps us in the kitchen testing a recipe until it's perfect.
- It's our obsession that drives us to closely follow the development of a particular video game, so we can remain experts even years after we first began playing.

Bonus: an Eye for Design

Successful blogs are visually appealing, and this doesn't happen by accident. It takes work to set up and dial in a sitewide WordPress template, and there's also some design involved each time you compose a post.

You can outsource your overall site design, but the day-to-day post composition is something you'll probably want to manage yourself, so you're not waiting on a designer to do their magic before you can click "Publish".

Having a good eye for design, and the ability to learn the basics of tools like WordPress' theme customizer and Photoshop will allow you to quickly tweak the look of your posts and overall site whenever you please.

Concluding Thoughts

Hopefully this has given you plenty of food for thought as you begin your blogging journey.

Ready to get started? I'll be releasing a full online course within just a few weeks covering everything you need to know to get blogging and grow your Platform into a profitable business.

You can do it. Let's go!

[Visit platformer.pro](http://platformer.pro) to learn more about the full blogging course.