
Teach Me How!

Take your blog from boring to badass.

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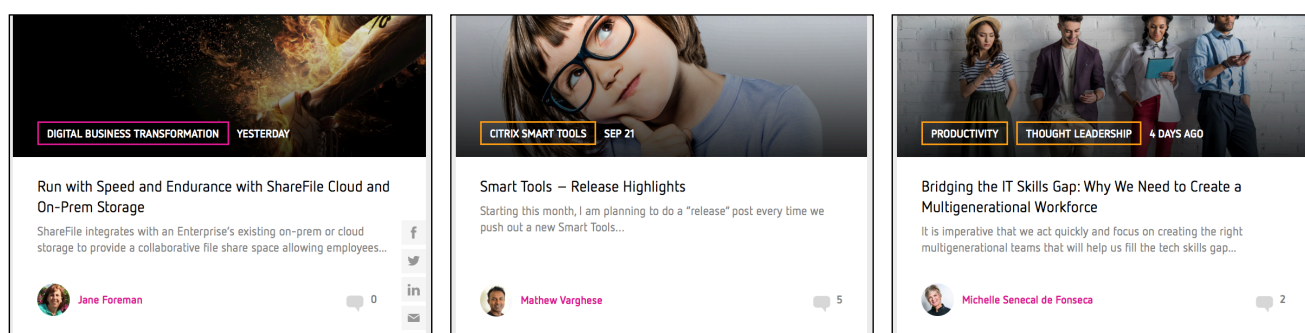


*This guy is really, REALLY
excited about his blog.*

Blogging is Not Dead

In 2014, we noticed something: the Citrix Blog was, well, sad. Long overdue for an overhaul, we set out to make it the best it could be. With a bold, new design and lots of power under the hood, we were able to create a platform that was more than just blog posts; we created what is now Citrix's biggest driver of traffic, the communications vehicle of choice for our PR & AR departments, as well as for our executives.

Throughout the process — from the design phase through the iteration of the blog that you see today — we have learned a lot about what works, what doesn't, and how to bring more than a little badass to our blog. And so can you.



The platform

An expression you might have heard before is: "Let's start at the very beginning; it's a very good place to start." While you're thinking about the Sound of Music (you're welcome for that), the beginning really is the best place. With blogging, the beginning is to decide which blogging platform to use. Citrix uses WordPress. While there are other options, we chose it because it's far and away the most widely used blogging platform, it's easily customizable, easy to update, and it scales incredibly well.

The design

How do you want your site to look? What are your competitors doing? What are the things that are most important and relevant to your content and customers? We have a fully customized WordPress instance that we chose largely because of its visual appeal (we are image-heavy). If you're an SMB, there are loads of beautifully designed themes that are ready

to go right out of the box — Elegant Themes is a fantastic place to start. Make sure the design/theme is mobile-optimized, consider things like search and social sharing options.

The host

Once you've decided that, decide on a host. Whether that's GoDaddy or DreamHost or anything else — we host our blog on AWS (Amazon Web Services) — choose the host that best meets your needs. Think about the size of your organization, how many users you have at any given time, what the host's average uptime is, do they have dedicated hosting or are the servers shared? There are lots of factors that go into this choice and they will vary depending on your needs.

The feed

Once your bold, new blog is up and running, how will you disseminate its content to the web and its denizens? Oft overlooked, it's important to make sure that you have a feed reader. This isn't fancy or sexy, but RSS — Really Simply Syndication (yes, that's really what it stands for) feeds are dead useful.



Feedblitz (the feed we use) and Feedly are just a couple of examples of feed readers that are out there. They'll tell you how many subscribers you have, whether by email or RSS feed or both, all the analytics on those subscribers, and

lots more. Its main purpose: the feed will help you syndicate your content and make it easier for your readers to keep track of all you're doing.

The plugins

This is where it starts to get fun. Well, this is where the fun starts if you're a dork ... which I am, and so. I digress. If your site is the car, plugins are the fuel that make it go. These are the things that make your blog do all the things your readers want it to do and all the things you need it to do. WordPress has countless numbers of plugins that you can use to make your site do just about anything shy of handing you a pizza. Some plugins to consider:

- Cloudflare — DNS-based malware/hack/bot intercept; prevents malicious traffic from reaching blog

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- Jetpack — Adds Wordpress analytics, avatars, basic image compression, added security
 - AMP Analytics — Provides GA (Google Analytics) data for AMP mobile pages
 - AMP — Helps format blog posts to be shared as Accelerated Mobile Pages on Google (improved search results)
 - All-in-One SEO Pack or Yoast — Optimizes your site for SEO
 - Disqus — Comment system with social integration & support for Twitter, Facebook & The Google
 - Akismet — Checks your comments and contact form submissions to protect you and your site from malicious content

The SEO

What makes great SEO? It's more than loading a page with a bunch of keywords. The point of good SEO is to make it possible for Google to find you. The best content, ultimately, makes the best SEO. If you're publishing great, accessible content that's well-written, on point, and relevant to your audience, your SEO is stronger.

It's more than that, though. SEO is influenced in large part by the people and sites who are linking to your content. If you work for a tech company and TechCrunch or WIRED is linking to your content a lot, your SEO will be stronger than if Joe Schmo on his personal blog is linking to you. Even more, it's the relevance of the content of the people who are linking to you. If their content is good and relevant, so much the better for you. In short, your content is like your child ... and you want to know who your content is hanging out with.

The data

Google Analytics is your friend. Learn it, know it, live it. Take every class that Google offers in it (yes, it's free) because GA holds the keys to the kingdom, my friends. It can take just about any sort of data and use it to tell the story of your site. On the surface, it tracks website traffic. But scratch that surface and it tells you so much more.

It'll tell you how many people visited your site, saw a blog post, shared that blog post, where they shared it, how many times it was open once it was shared there. It can tell you how long a person stayed on site, what they read, and what they went to read once they were done. Google Analytics helps you understand your readers and make smarter marketing decisions.

The images

Image choice is a curious thing. When we launched our new blog, I was determined to make it a visually rich experience. I put tons of thought into the sorts of images I wanted to display (and I choose every one manually, yes, I do). I didn't want images that screamed "technology!!" and, instead, I went for things that matched the content on a more conceptual level. And it's a strategy that's proved effective. Just because you have a blog post about a new piece of software doesn't mean you have to have a photo of a computer; don't go for the obvious choice.

Optimize! One thing to think about — because this will affect the speed with which your site loads — is how big your image files are. The bigger they are, the more cumbersome they are for your servers to manage. If you're familiar with PhotoShop, you can easily optimize your images, so they're not clogging the works. There are lots of web-based tools you can use, too, whose learning curve isn't as high as PS (which is significant, to say the least).

The nut

Know your brand. Think about who your customers are — that includes actual customers and your bloggers, too — who your partners are, who your evangelists are. They are your audience and their experience should weigh heavily in how you present your site.

Feel free to ask me as many questions as you like. I'll be around after the session to answer and you can find me on Twitter @startabuzz or send me an email at melissa.case@citrix.com.

Happy blogging!