



## Continuing Education

### **Blogging is a Conversation with Customers**

Guest Instructor: Lori Stanley Roeleveld

Can blogging help you achieve your vision for your bookstore? I asked several independent booksellers if they had ever considered blogging.

"I've considered it but it just seems like one more thing I'd be adding to my to-do list! I don't even have the time to do what I really want to do," said one, echoing what I'd heard from the others.

When I asked her what she would really want to do, she sighed. "I wish I had time to have a conversation and build a relationship with every single one of my customers. Do you have a way I can do that?"

Actually, I do.

More than any other modern written art form, blogging is exactly that – it's having a conversation with readers. I didn't understand this either, until I started blogging, but when I stumbled on this truth, it was a revelation. I began my blog, like other writers, to develop a platform, find my audience, and grow my numbers so publishers would pay attention. That happened but before it did, there was a more personal and local side effect: conversations with people I already knew.

Often, what gets in the way of an amazing conversation isn't a lack of time, it's the lack of a starting place. When word spread that I was writing a blog, friends, neighbors, and coworkers became followers. Some of them commented on the blog but even more of them sought me out in person. They would talk to me in a way that made me realize our dialog had begun the moment they'd read my latest post. For this introvert, it was like a Fast Pass to deeper spiritual conversations.

Three to five hundred words from a bookseller's heart posted once a week can open doors with customers before they've crossed your threshold. You already know the power of connecting with others over books. Take it to a new level with blogging and the time investment will return the reward of deeper, quality relationships with customers.

#### **Post tips and topics:**

Great blog posts are conversational, personal, and reveal heart. Share your vision for your business. Talk about your love of connecting people with Godly writing. Tell a story about how you've been affected by stories. Write about how you connect with God over the ups and downs of running a business. Tell about meeting your favorite author. Allow customers to connect with you.

Blog posts people read are brief, don't waste words, have a stellar hook, and a solid takeaway for the reader. Start with posts between 300 and 500 words. Create eye-catching titles and first lines. Ask your reader a question at the end or draw a clear takeaway for readers. If you're nervous about your

writing style or ability, reach out to one or two local authors. Ask for help to get started or offer them their own regular post on your site in exchange for helping you write one in your voice once-a-week.

Lighten the writing load but keep content fresh by rotating on a posting schedule such as Mondays – personal post by bookseller, Wednesdays – post by a local author – Fridays – book review by bookstore staff. Or perhaps, you have a hidden gift with words. In that case, consider a schedule such as Mondays – meditation on applying Sunday’s sermon – Wednesdays – the power of using Christian books to reach your neighbor (give a different example every week of how a book in your store could be used to reach or minister to others) and Fridays – share stories from customers about how God used a particular book in their lives.

Through blogging, you can multiply your conversations, deepen relationships with customers, and build community between readers old and new.

What questions do you have about blogging? If you already blog, comment with a post that was popular with customers and why.

Next, we’ll explore ways to engage with the public through other social media avenues. What’s the difference between a blog post, a tweet, a status update, and a photo on Instagram and how can each play a part in building a relationship with readers and helping you achieve your mission for your bookstore.

### **Author Bio:**

Lori Stanley Roeleveld is a disturber of hobbits who enjoys making comfortable Christians late for dinner. She’s authored an unsettling blog since 2009; a pursuit that eventually resulted in her first book, *Running from a Crazy Man (and other adventures traveling with Jesus)*. Lori’s blog has a modest but faithful daily readership and yet, in 2014, one post was viewed over 1.2 million times and another was shared over 275,000 times on Facebook. Lori’s blog was named one of the Top 100 Christian Blogs of 2015 and has been quoted by Ann VosKamp “A Parable of Haiti.” Lori teaches a popular workshop at Christian writing conferences on the theme of blogging beyond platform.