

Topic Selection

Hi, everyone. This is Yaro. We're going to be talking about choosing a niche, or a topic for your blog, and coming up with one that satisfies your needs as a content producer, so it's an area that you will enjoy, and will also be profitable to you. Those two areas pretty much sum up the variables you have to weigh when it comes to choosing a topic for your blog. It has long been a traditional argument from people on both sides of the fence whether you should choose a topic for your passions versus a topic because you can make money from it. Obviously, when those two ideas combine, then you've hit the nail on the head of a topic you can make money from and enjoy. Those are the blogs that really, really succeed, because the people writing them are extremely passionate about their topic, and they also reap nice financial rewards. Good blogs produce great content, and the marketplace really wants that content, which eventually leads to making money. So what we are going for here is to tap into a topic that you're passionate about and enjoy and also be able to create a significant revenue stream from it.

The problem with a lot of existing blogs or new bloggers entering the blogosphere is that they will stay on only one side of that fence. You might be really passionate about your topic, but then try to monetize it and absolutely fail. You are not making any money. There's no audience that actually spends money, or there's no effective way to monetize the traffic you do attract. Or, even worse, there isn't any traffic in the first place. You love your topic, but you are one of 10 people in the entire world who does; hence, you don't have an audience. So if you don't mind blogging for the purpose of expressing yourself, that's fine, but we're here to make money from our blogs. Therefore, we have to find niches that we not only enjoy, but from which we can also make money.

Then, of course, there's the other side, where you find topics that are clearly money-making topics that you know will make money if you get great content out there about them, but you don't personally have the interest, experience, or the motivation to produce the content that satisfies that audience. That is probably a greater problem, I think, than the other one, with the lack of ability to make money from the audience. I generally believe as long as you have traffic, and you obtain it by providing great content, then you can monetize it in some ways. There will always be some content that monetizes a lot better than other content. Some markets just have more valuable customers than other markets, such as insurance, real estate, and cars. All those areas have really high-value clients, so you have advertisers willing to spend big dollars to attract attention to get those clients. As the distributor of information, if you are attracting those types of people, you can really get high value per visitor or per the amount of traffic you get to your blog. Then, of course, there will be topics that they don't monetize as

well, so the lead value isn't as high, but you can always make some money from it. It depends what your goals are with profits.

Obviously, the topic areas that have a lot of high-value clients are also the most competitive. All those subject areas I just listed are very likely going to be saturated already. There will be some very, very high-quality and very, very high-trafficked websites already in that niche, so you can't go into them anyway. The tech area is a fantastic example. There are a lot of sites out there that talk about technology, computers, mp3 players, and all these sort of gadgets. They have some very well-established blogs that already cater to that marketplace. They have some very high traffic and, consequently, some very high money they make from advertisers willing to access those readers. So we can't go into markets that already have established players that have very, very popular players.

Like I've talked about many times before, you can find established markets and then subdivide them into yet smaller niches to find topic areas you can dominate. You will never have as much traffic as the big, leading players, but you might get a nice slice of that traffic with the people who are just interested in that topic area. For example, you can just focus on computer monitors instead of the whole computer industry and be the blogger covering every single new computer monitor release and all the latest news going on in the computer monitor industry. That's probably a blog that may already exist. If not, it could be a niche topic area that has potential just because you know there are people who love computers and are interested in computer monitors. If you can keep putting out lots of news and pictures about computer monitors, potentially you have an audience. Of course, the monetization method there would be selling monitors through affiliate programs. Certainly, Google Ad Sense would work reasonably well then, because no doubt there are plenty of companies currently selling monitors using the Google Ad Sense system. The Chitika system would also be another good advertising broker because I'm pretty sure they have a lot of technical sponsors who would have things like monitors and computer parts that this type of audience would be interested in and likely click ads, thereby making you money.

So we need to define the two different areas of research you have to do: One's more about personal reflection, and the other one is a much more analytical process, where you actually assess what the marketplace is like.

I want to start with the personal side of the fence. That's the area I find more valuable, and I think it's more effective to show improvement here. Do some initial self-reflection and self-analysis to determine what topic areas you are capable of writing. This really is a simple process; it's just a matter of determining what you already know or what you really enjoy -- what you are motivated to find out more about, what you don't mind sitting down at your

computer every day and reading or listening to audio and generally studying and immersing yourself in to become at least somewhat knowledgeable in that topic so that you can then take that knowledge and use it to create a really wonderful blog. You just need to assess your own hobbies, your own life experiences, the things that you do on a day-to-day basis, and the things you've done in your life history. All these things could potentially be topics for a blog.

A lot of people in my age group, in the late 20s, are avid travelers. Most people my age, or a good chunk of them anyway, have done more than a bit of traveling. They have a lot to talk about when it comes to traveling, and they really enjoy the topic. Certainly some form of travel blog is a potential topic for that type of person. There are a lot of travel blogs already, but again there's no reason why you couldn't subniche it. It could be a travel blog for a certain country, a certain city, a certain region of the world, or even a certain type of traveling. If you are traveling specifically for architecture; for pubbing, i.e., checking out the local beers, wineries, people who travel on wine tours; or maybe good photography, nature -- all these are little subniches of the travel topic area and come up with a specific blog on that. But remember, you have to like your topic! If you're a photographer who likes to travel, then maybe a travel blog focused on great places for photography is a topic you could cover that probably doesn't have a lot of specific competition. There will be hundreds of bloggers who talk about travel hundreds of blogs that deal with photography, but maybe there aren't that many that specifically focus on particular areas in the world, for example.

Again, it all reflects back on your own personal passions. I can't answer this question for you. This is something you have to determine in your own time and through your own self-reflection. Look back at to the past seven days of your life and find something you've done as a hobby or for pleasure -- you may have enjoyed eating at a particular restaurant, for example, so you might want to talk about some good restaurants available in your home city. Or maybe you partake in a certain sport, like volleyball. Maybe you play beach volleyball in your hometown and you want to cover the beach volleyball scene in your city. Or, maybe you know a lot about the competitive beach volleyball scene. There's a market right there. Perhaps you've been studying a certain topic at university and are really into ancient history. So, you could blog about ancient history and grab all the other people out there who love that topic as well. If your particular interest area is already saturated, you can always just specialize on one chunk of ancient history, such as Roman history or Egyptian history.

These are just topic ideas you can come up with just by reflecting on what you enjoy on a day-to-day basis. If you can't figure out your passions, you need to really get out there and start experiencing more in your life! The only way you can determine what you like is by getting out there and doing things you feel you want to do.

In my case it's been very clear: I've done Internet business for many years now. It's been something I've devoted the majority of my time to. Internet marketing and Internet business are what I do for a living, but it's a bit more than that -- it's not just a job I do; it's something I do for pleasure. The boundary between work and leisure time for me just doesn't exist. I don't have such a thing as "work." This is what I choose to do on a daily basis because it lets me express myself by writing on my blog, interacting with fellow Internet businesses and bloggers who share similar passions. That, in turn, fuels my own passion, which leads me to create content in areas I love and enjoy.

The general blogging area and general Internet business area, i.e., the "make money online" area is really saturated. If I didn't have the Internet businesses I'd started previously or the websites I'd sold and bought, I'd have no experiences or confidence to draw upon from which to create a good blog. But because I did have that, I was able to create *Entrepreneur's Journey*, which was good enough to establish a full-time income for me, based on the quality of my content. And that quality of content came only because of my skills, ability and experience. If I didn't have that, I wouldn't have a blog. It's simple as that.

You have to be careful, though; just because you like something doesn't mean that it's necessarily the right topic for you to write about because you may not have enough experience in that area yet. When you first start a blog, many people say, "I'm going to blog about my journey of learning (something)." Well, define "something." For example, the title of my blog is *Entrepreneur's Journey*. I was using it initially as a chronicle of my process of making money online. It's still covers that, but I'm a little bit unusual in this area in that I blog a great deal. This means I'm always getting great content, real great case studies, and real results to explain to people on my blog. I have value there.

If you can't say the same about your topic area, it's going to be hard for you to have a blog that's not just another "make money online" blog among the thousands of other ones offering the same thing -- and, by the way, all doing an inferior job, not getting much traffic, and certainly not making much money. It's really quite ironic when you hear people talking about making money online, yet they're the ones who aren't really making any money online. So, as I said in *The Blog Profits Blueprint*, the make-money-online niche is not one I recommend you go into unless you really are making money online and got a lot of experience, or you are taking a lot of action in that area. So try to avoid that topic area at the outset and look instead for areas where you are strong and that are reasonably unique at the moment.

So that's the "passion" side of the fence. Unfortunately, you may hit upon some topics you love, but after a little bit of browsing online to see what other blogs are out there, you may find several on the same topics. If that's the case, I don't flat-out recommend you just drop that topic. That's harsh. If it's something you really

enjoy, maybe it's worth some careful consideration, despite your competition, before you throw the idea away for good.

There may be a lot of blogs out there on your topic, but the quality of their content may not be that great. Read through their articles and see if you like what they are writing. Read through their archives and see how long they've been doing this. If they've only been doing it for two or three months, then there's no reason why you can't start one, too. Maybe they are very sporadic in the amount of posts they put on their blog, as well. Some people are going to be more dedicated than others. If they are only writing twice a month and you come in with a brand-new blog writing twice or maybe five times a week, as I hope you are doing through this *Blog Mastermind* program, then you are going to be a superior option to the other person's blog. You will very quickly take over. On the strength of your content alone, you can beat the other established blogs in the marketplace, even if you start after them. That is a realistic outcome.

I would advise that you don't enter an already-saturated market based two things: One, there are likely many established bloggers already in that niche or websites that cater to a particular topic area. It has to be the exact topic area you're interested in -- not something just similar, but exact. If you see something similar to your topic area, that's good, because that similar site can be a traffic source for your new blog. They are not exactly the same, so it's quite likely that you can attract two different types of readers and share your audience. I don't recommend you copy *Tech Crunch* or *Gadget* or any of these top gadget blogs in an attempt to do another gadget blog. Maybe don't do another photography blog or another professional blogging blog or another cooking blog, but if you can do something *similar* to those topic areas, enough that the content doesn't replicate itself, but it's supplemental and additional to what other people are writing, then you are adding value, and you'll have the potential to grab some of that traffic.

Remember, this traffic doesn't replace some one else's traffic. That's the beautiful thing about blogging and Internet audience in general. You don't steal someone's audience when they come to your blog; you share it. They then start reading your blog along with the other person's blog, so they'll start reading both blogs. That's a nice thing about blogging, and it's a little different from competition in a business environment, where customers usually only buy one version of a product. If you are selling digital cameras, for example, they'll only buy one camera in most cases. In the same analogy, if you had multiple camera blogs, there is no reason that same customer won't read your blog and two or three other blogs on digital cameras. You have that shared-user experience. When it comes to monetizing, of course they may only end up clicking one of those ads on your blog or on someone else's blog, or maybe multiple ads so you all get money for clicks, but then they'll only buy one camera. But you still have the potential to make money from that audience.

I hope you understand the importance of choosing a topic you love. The other thing you can do, and this is where it's a little bit more analytical and practical in terms of picking a topic, is some keyword and market research regarding what's already out there and what people are currently seeking. There's the competitive environment, which I don't think is quite as important as the actual market situation, which indicates what people currently are looking for online. That's important because that is the reality of the traffic already in place.

To do this, a very basic tool that you can use is called the *Overture Keyword Selector Tool*. If you go to Google and type in "Overture," you'll see a link to the *Keyword Selector Tool*. It's a very simple page where you just type in a word or a phrase, and it will spit out all the search count data for that phrase and similar phrases that use those keywords. This data is taken from the *Overture* network, which is the *Yahoo!* network. It's not indicative of what the entire Internet is searching for, but it's a really good sample size. Obviously, *Yahoo!* is a very large search engine.

It's generally assumed that the numbers you get within the *Overture* search results are about anywhere from 10 to five times. Multiply that number by five to 10 and you can get the Google data for that. It's very rough; it's not an exact science. But if there are 1,000 people searching *Overture* for a certain keyword, you can be pretty confident that there's probably somewhere between 3,000 and 8,000 people on Google searching for the same topic. I just multiply by four the number you get in *Overture*, and you get a safe estimate of the Google plus the *Yahoo!* data, which is a nice sample size of a large chunk of the audience. Since Google has obviously got the market share in the search engine market industry and *Yahoo!* comes second, you are getting number one and number two information by doing that.

There are other tools you can use like this --there's Word Tracker, Keyword Elite, Keyword Essentials -- all kinds of keyword tools you can find. Wordtracker.com is the de facto standard, sort of high-level research tool. *Overture's* Keyword Selector Tool is the free one. I recommend you just spend some time with that if you have never done keyword research, just to get used to the whole process.

So once you've found this research tool, you type in a phrase related to the topic you are considering blogging about. It will then give you a ranking list of all the relevant search phrases that people use when searching the *Overture* network and providing a statistic as well to go along with each phrase on how many searches were done in the previous month, for example. It usually gives you about two to three months' worth of data, so it's not current, but it's reasonably recent. For example, I'm doing some research now. It's just the beginning of June and I'm seeing January-February data in some of these keyword research tools I am using.

Doing this helps you get a feel for what people type into search engines when they are looking for information. It's very interesting to go through this process because you will see that keywords are not necessarily related to what you think they would be. So just because you have this perception of what a word means to you, when you type it into a search engine, it can mean completely something else to other people. You'll be surprised. Also, you have to be very careful when you look through these keyword lists to make sure that you are actually hitting numbers that refer to the market you are trying to tap into.

Here's a classic case: I searched just recently for the data for a certain blog. Obviously, "blogging" means nothing. That could be someone just wondering what a blog is, looking for a software program to blog with, or just looking for other blogs to read. "Church blogging" is a top one, for example; these are likely people just interested in other people writing about church. "Make Money Blogging" – there's one that I like a lot. Seven hundred and seventy-two people searched for that in January 2007. That means there are approximately 7,000 people who searched for that in Google, so that would equal about 8,000 people online who searched for "Make Money Blogging." That's not a bad number. It's not great, but it's a reasonable number. Other terms, such as "video blogging," "blogging for business," "blogging spouse," "blogging software," "free blogging," "blogging money," "bloggingspace.com," and "free blogging site" are other phrases people type into the search engines to get information on blogging. Another one is "blogging for dummies" – that's probably the "Blogging for Dummies" book they're seeking.

This just will give you an indication of what phrases people type into the search engines. You'll know what they're looking for. You can then take that data and determine whether there's a market large enough for you to enter into and write about. Remember, when you do a keyword search like this, you're getting only the data on one keyword. A whole topic area will have thousands of keywords. Don't assume that just because you see a small number in *Overture* for one phrase, that topic doesn't have a potentially large enough audience. There will be maybe 100 or 1,000 times that number in terms of real audience for all the other phrases you could be interested in.

Now's a good time for me to introduce the idea of the long tail. I have an article at my blog, Entrepreneurs-journey.com, about the long tail. If you go to Google and type in "long tail," you can get to Chris Anderson and his page, where he describes what this is. He's not the creator of the long tail, but he's the person who got credit for describing it. He's written a book about it called *The Long Tail* as well, which I recommend you take a look at if you are interested in this sort of market dynamic and how things are changing as the Internet becomes a place of commerce, and more than that, a place where people go on a regular basis.

The long tail refers to the ability of the Internet to flatten. It's termed a long tail because if you graph the interest in a certain subject area, there's something called the head of the tail, which are the most popular items or topics or keywords about a certain niche topic area. A classic example of that is music.

The entire music industry is made up of many artists and many genres of music, but if you look at the breakdown of sales of an album or a single track, right at the head of the tail – at the peak area – there will be a large volume of sales of a very small amount of songs. These will be the artists selling the most music. This is the Britney Spears, Madonna, the Backstreet Boys, all the mainstream artists you hear about on a very regular basis. They get played on the radio more than other artists. When they release an album, they sell hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of copies of that album. Then, as you go further and further along the “tail,” as they call it, the individual units sell less, but there are thousands or even millions of individual songs available. There are definitely millions of albums and songs available in the entire music industry, but some of them might only sell a handful, 10, 20, 50, 100 or 1,000 a year, but there are millions of these albums selling 1,000 copies, and that's called the “tail” of an industry or a marketplace.

The long tail on the Internet is applied to commerce, but it doesn't necessarily only refer to commerce. Amazon.com, which sell books and music, or iTunes, Rhapsody or Napster all sell music and have an inventory of almost unlimited capacity. It is all digital, so they can store songs and let people download songs without replacing inventory. There is no physical distribution -- it's bits and bytes that are being distributed, so you can sell as many as you like as long as there is demand.

If you compare this to a traditional, brick-and-mortar shop, like a CD shop, they of course can only store a certain amount of CDs on their shelves. They only have so much physical capacity, so for them it makes sense to only store the head of the tail, which are the most popular albums and the really big hits. They sell enough of those to make a profit. But when you go online, you have unlimited inventory space. You no longer have to just carry the most popular tracks; you can carry the entire tail, the entire industry's worth of tracks, or at least a very large chunk of it.

What's happening with stores, and Amazon is a classic example of this, is that they are selling a small number of a very large number of different racks. Yes, they are still selling a lot of the top-sellers, the Britney Spears and the Madonnas, but suddenly the obscure track from some Scandinavian pan-pipes band that only sells maybe two or three copies a year is selling that much because you can make it available. There are millions of other very unique albums also being sold from other artists who normally don't have much of a following. There are millions and millions of different albums selling online, and that amount is almost

equal or sometimes beyond the amount sold at the head of the tail. Thanks to the power of Internet distribution, it's made it possible to sell the long tail of information, as well as the head, which has in some industries doubled the potential sales.

Keyword research is all about the long tail. So if we are talking about fashion, though this keyword is not very niche, it will be searched a lot, but not nearly as much as the combined total of the long tail terms.

So if I search "fashion" on *Overture*, I get more than 300,000 websites or blogs. Then, you begin to narrow it down, typing in "fashion design," "fashion bug," "fashion police," "fashion model." Each of these phrases bring 45,000 searches, 41,000, 35,000, etc. These are all head of the tail search terms. If this data went all the way down to every single phrase ever searched regarding the term "fashion," there would be a really, really long tail that makes up a much larger size of the overall search data than just the few words at the head of the tail. Your ability to tap into those long tail searches by writing lots of different articles, each one targeting the unique set of keywords in your industry, is how you can build up significant traffic. This is where the baby steps mentality really makes sense.

There is not a lot of point in competing for a top keyword. If you wrote a blog about fashion, you wouldn't want to get "fashion" as the number one word you want to rank for. You want to rank for all the different fashion labels, all the different types of clothing. Literally, thousands of articles you could potentially write about reviewing every item of clothing ever produced is, for example, obviously beyond an individual. But by doing that, you'd have all these articles closely matching a long tail search phrase. So the whole point is to show you that while doing keyword research can help you find the more popular keywords, just because one phrase doesn't equal a lot of traffic or another phrase has a lot of competition, doesn't mean there is an absolute plethora of long tail phrases that could combine to equal enough traffic to create a popular blog.

People are going to disagree with this. Many will say that you can get some pretty good data to lead with. In my own experience, however, the best way to launch a blog is to throw it against the wall and see if it sticks. So start the blog. You have a passion, you are interested in the topic, so write as much good content as you can, get it out there, and see what sort of traction you get. It's such a low-cost investment to make. There's really no reason you can't have an idea that you really enjoy in a topic area you really like and test it and see what sort of response you get from the market. Doing keyword research and assessing what the competition is like is smart. I'll never deny that. If this is an area that you want to spend a bit of time before you choose a topic, by all means do so. Use the *Overture Keyword Tool*. Consider using *Word Tracker*. Definitely use *Technorati*, which is the search engine for blogs. It's

Technorati.com. Type any phrase keyword, and you will see blog posts that have been written using those keywords. It's a good way to tell if there's already a large sample of very, very good blogs talking about the topic you want to write about. Again, that doesn't necessarily mean you can't enter into that topic area, but just be wary of how directly you compete with really established players or very saturated marketplaces. On the flipside of that, if you come across no competition and notice there are very few keywords in *Overture* or in the search results of Google, that probably means there isn't a market for a blog on your topic area. I wouldn't recommend going into areas where you find no results. That doesn't mean there's no competition; that usually means there's no actual marketplace to satisfy. People are just not searching for that information.

I want to just illustrate a fantastic example of a niche that was just not being used very well by other people and really took off very quickly. If you read the bonus interview with Collis Taed, the blogger behind *Freelance Switch*, he discusses how he managed to really quickly grow his blog. He has more daily readers than my blog does today, and it took him four weeks to do what it took me two and a half years to do. It just goes to show, if you can find an untapped niche and use some powerful marketing techniques to drive traffic to it, you can have a really successful blog in a very short time. I don't know if Collis is making a lot of money from that blog yet, but he's certainly got the foundation there. That's a fantastic case study.

Collis created a blog about freelancing for freelancers. Collis is a freelancer himself; his business partner is a freelancer. He has several staff members, all freelancers, who work with him. His business is essentially about creating content sites and then making money from them by advertising or other ways to monetize. *Freelance Switch* is one of his flagship blogs now. It very quickly became his top blog, so he is investing a lot of time in making it better and better. Through the techniques he used, which he revealed to us in the interview, he managed to attract 4,000 daily readers, I think he has approximately 6,000 as I'm writing this. There clearly was a strong market need for a blog that caters to freelancers. He just hit the nail on the head with everything he did to release this blog. He had a really nice design, which appealed to the freelancer sort of industry, because there are a lot of freelance graphic designers. He's a freelance graphic designer himself, so he was capable of putting together this nice design. He used social media sites like *Stumble Upon*. He used peer relationships with other bloggers and exposure from top blogs to help him. I think he got hit by *Life Hacker* and also *Prologger*, which sent more traffic. All this traffic started to build momentum and really networked around all these other social media sites so he got Dugg and deli.cio.us Popularized. All these media sites helped promote his one or two first core pillar articles. He wrote *101 Tips for Freelancers*-type articles, which were really popular. They just spread organically after that. It's a fantastic case there where he found an untapped niche.

That's the powerful part of this equation. He could have done all the steps he did to generate this massive amount of traffic, but if he did it in a niche that was already saturated, he wouldn't have had the results. I'm almost positive if he had tried to use *Stumble Upon* to grow traffic to it, he would not have quickly grown to 6,000 new readers -- simply because it is a market that is more skeptical, more saturated, and not really an area that responds to articles about making money online.. He rolled with it and enjoyed some success as a result.

So that's a case study of finding a topic area that's just ripe. You sort of stumble into those. He didn't really know that it was going to be as successful. He admits this himself. If you read over his interview, Collis says the way he got his idea was by posting an article about freelancing on his other blog, which managed to pick up a lot of traffic. He thought, "Wow, if one article produced this traffic, what could an entire blog about a topic like freelancing do?" So he ran with the idea and created a whole new blog. And there you go. That's fantastic.

If you are currently writing a blog and are having trouble getting serious traction with traffic, maybe you should go back and look at those articles and consider starting whole new blogs just on those topics. If only one or two articles took off, there must be a market need for that content. That's a really good way to do market research very inexpensively.

If I did the same thing which my blog, I would say, "Okay, I've written two and a half years' worth of content. I've got 700 articles in there. I know there are only about 15 or 20 that really took off. Search engine optimization articles have done really well. Topics I've written about buying and selling websites have done really well. There are two examples. I could probably start a blog specifically devoted to search engine optimization tips, and while that is an area that's reasonably saturated online, because I do have some experience in it, I'm pretty confident I could write on a regular basis, provide value and build a popular blog.

That blog wouldn't be the leader in that marketplace, because there are a lot of search engine optimization experts who know a lot more than I do and cater to that market better than I do, but I could probably build a reasonable blog and start making \$2,000 or \$3,000 from it if I decided to devote time to it.

It's the same with flipping websites, or the buying and selling marketplace for websites. There's not a lot of competition in this area at the moment. I'm sure I could produce a blog on how to buy and sell websites for profit and people would be very interested in that topic. Provided my content was good, I'd have a new blog.

The ideas here are to balance your passions versus the profit you can make. I always recommend you choose a topic you are passionate about first and let it



make money second. The money part of the equation you won't really know until you test it out by doing a little keyword research, by researching the competition and learning what complementary blogs are in place that you could share traffic with. It gives you a little heads up and a little sense of security before you start a topic. You can take this research process as far as you want to. There are really endless amounts of tools you can use online to conduct keyword research and market analysis. How much you do is entirely up to you, but don't spend too much time here. This is about taking action and testing, not doing research before taking action. Research in itself is not action. It's preparing for action. Yes, it does help you move forward, but if you are not putting something out to the world, you are not really taking action.

We are getting almost to the end of the series on mindset. I hope you have a very good, conceptual understanding now of what goes into a blog and that you have the right attitude to make this work for you.