

Interviews with Top Bloggers: - Liz Fulghum -



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1. Would you mind sharing a few things about yourself and your background with our readers?

Sure! I'm in my late 20s and I've been working as a designer/developer/writer for over 10 years. I'm passionate about design, typography, and the web.

Unlike a lot of people, I actually started my career as a freelancer, and then later moved to the 9-5 world. I currently live and work in Nashvegas, TN.

2. When did you get started blogging and why?

I've tried blogging off and on for years. I think I actually tried blogger when it first came out. Usually I would write about my professional interests mixed with some of what was going on in my own life. I think I started 3-4 blogs total, and quickly found that I would run out of things I wanted to talk about and they wound up sitting in the internet graveyard.

Originally, I think my main motivation for blogging was simply to try out a new way to publish, and I thought I had some things to share about web design/development that would be of value to other people. I saw what other early adapters were doing with blogs (some of the sites I followed back then included <http://glassdog.com>, <http://kottke.org>, and <http://textism.com>) and figured it would be an ideal way to network with like-minded people.

But to be honest, I never had any clear goals during these early attempts. It was a shiny new toy, and I wanted to try it out.

When I "got serious" with blogging and decided to start PopCultureTees, I think I finally had a clear picture of what I wanted to accomplish with my site. This is probably part of the reason why this site has been more successful than any of my past attempts.

My main goals were:

- To share my passion for t-shirts with others
- Have a way to generate some passive income via advertising
- Having a web presence that I could use to generate sales leads (both for design clients, and for any online stores I might create for selling t-shirts)
- Connect with other cool people in the industry

3. What's the biggest mistake you made getting started with this?

The biggest mistake I made was under estimating how much work and how much time it takes to maintain and grow a successful blog.

When I started PopCultureTees - <http://www.popculturetees.com> - I figured I would spend a few hours every week putting together posts for the week and then be done with it. I couldn't have been more wrong.



I typically do something with the site almost every day - whether it's a design tweak to incorporate a new plugin, responding to user emails, or just working on new content.

If your blog is about something other than your life, there's generally going to be some serious research involved in coming up with new *useful* content. Generating these larger articles takes up several hours a week for me on top of everything else I'm doing for the site.

If you aren't committed to spending this amount of time, you probably won't be able to generate enough traffic to start making money from your site.

4. How did you come up with the idea of launching your blog?

Ironically, I registered the domain name a long time before I decided to turn it into a blog.

A few years ago I was the lead artist at a screen printing company (<http://www.ndesigns.net>, we designed and printed t-shirts and other apparel). I was pretty much living and breathing t-shirt design. I registered <http://www.popculturetees.com> because I thought it would

be a great name for an online store to sell pop culture/news of the moment type t-shirts.

That idea never quite materialized, and it wasn't until about 6 months after I left my job at the screen printing company that I decided to turn the site into a blog.

It really came down to the fact that even though I had switched industries (I now work at a record label), I still loved well designed t-shirts and had a passion for the industry. I wanted to continue to share that passion with people, and offer aspiring t-shirt designers some of the knowledge I had collected during the 4 years I worked in the industry.

5. How often do you publish and how do you get new content ideas?

I usually publish at least once per day, every weekday. This post is basically a "t-shirt" of the day, which makes it easy to do once a day. I have bigger feature posts that I run every few days/weeks, and sometimes I wind up posting news or interesting sites above and beyond my single daily post.

I've pretty much gotten the practice of getting new content ideas down to a science:

- I use Google Reader to manage the RSS feeds I get by subscribing to delicious tags relating to my niche.
- I use Google Alerts to get news delivered to my inbox daily.
- I follow a few sites which pull news feeds of major sites in my industry
- I read forums on my niche.

The first 3 methods are usually where I find new t-shirts to feature. The last one is generally where I find topics for major articles, based on questions that other people are asking.

6. How do you mainly receive (or generate) traffic to your blog?

Back links from other industry sites are the most valuable (because the people who visit are actually interested in what my site is about), but I also receive a lot of traffic from various CSS galleries that I have submitted the site to, as well as from articles on site design that have featured PopCultureTees.

Having a strong design for a blog definitely gives you a little extra boost, there are some places you can tap into to promote your site that you wouldn't be able to otherwise.

I've experimented a lot with the various social networking/linking sites with varied success. Time and time again, the most hits generally come for StumbleUpon, and usually in response to "top 10" list articles and tutorials.

Right now the entire web seems to have ADD, and doing a Top 10 list per week seems to be an almost guaranteed way to generate a traffic spike.

I've also had good success with contributing articles to other sites as a guest author, even when the topic of the site I'm contributing to doesn't necessarily match the topic of my own. There's (obviously) a large spike immediately after the article is published, but it seems as though some people always stick around - I generally see a lift in my traffic even several weeks afterwards.

One final tip: Set up a network with your friends who blog so you can digg/stumble each others articles as needed. Don't do it for every article and wear out your welcome, but usually people will be more than happy to help out.

7. What is your most closely-guarded secret about blogging for money?

It wouldn't be very closely-guarded if I shared it, now would it?

To be honest, the one thing that I've really learned about making money from my site is that sometimes, the best ways to make money are not from advertising, but from indirect methods.

Until you have HUGE traffic numbers, good Google PR, and a great Alexa rating you can pretty much forget about commanding large sums of cash for ads. And to get all those things, it takes time and a lot of "link-bait" content (by "link-bait" I mean content that people like to re-link. Hot right now: lists, how-to articles, productivity tips and tricks).

But even if you're a smaller blogger, you can still make money indirectly from your site - I've leveraged PopCultureTees to get

generate freelance gigs doing design, wordpress customization, and writing.

I've found that if your blog is well enough done, it's almost all the resume/portfolio you need.

I've also tapped into a few advertising networks that work well for still-growing sites.

<http://BuySellAds.com> is still in semi-closed beta, but if you're accepted as an advertiser they let you choose whatever pricing you'd like, and only charge 25% finders fee for ads placed on your site.

<http://ProjectWonderful.com> is another site I've had success with. These guys allow advertiser to bid on space; the winning bid stays active until their terms runs out or someone out bids them. You can choose what you'd like bidding to start out, and it can be as low as .05 cents and will naturally increase as people try to outbid each other.

8. What differentiate your blog among all the others in your niche field?

First of all, let me just say that PopCultureTees operates inside of a pretty small niche, comparatively speaking. That makes it easier to look at what everyone else is doing, and do it a little bit differently.

The site started without one of the most creative designs out there (in our niche), and added to it a conversational/humorous tone to most of the posts. Most of the sites out there do the same thing we do - link to great looking tees, but I like to think that the bar for design is a little higher for PopCultureTees. What winds up on there is also based on my own aesthetics, and that is, of course, entirely unique.

The other thing that's a little bit different is that I actually worked in the t-shirt industry as a designer. It gives me the opportunity to talk with a little bit of authority about how to design shirts and screen printing in general. So far, that's translated into how-to articles and tutorials for would-be t-shirt designers that you won't find anywhere else.

9. If you had to get a boost in comments from your blog readers, how would you do it?

Post a tutorial, post something controversial, or post a question.

People only post comments if they're mad, disagree with you, have a question, or are fired up.

10. What are the blogs you visit frequently and why?

Just checked google reader and apparently I'm currently subscribed to 81 feeds. Here are some of the highlights:

Productivity:

- <http://lifehacker.com> (links to useful productivity apps and web services)
- <http://lifehack.org> (articles about productivity practice)

Design:

- <http://northtemple.com> (these guys have some great ideas on design)
- <http://coudal.com> (these guys are just cool. I usually wind up finding one t-shirt per week through their feed)
- <http://justcreativedesign.com> , <http://fuelyourcreativity.com> , <http://noupe.com> (all awesome sources for practical articles/tutorials on design/development)

Writing/Blogging:

- <http://copyblogger.com> (the big daddy of all blogging sites, always great info here)
- <http://freelancefolder.com> (more great info for freelancers)

I try to stay away from other t-shirt blogs, just because I don't want to be influenced by what they're doing.

11. Who are your favorite bloggers and why?

I would have to say that my favorite blogs are <http://northtemple.com> and <http://coudal.com>. These two have really strong voices on design practice and theory.

12. Which plugins you can't live without and why?

1. **Lighter Menus** (<http://www.italyisfalling.com/lighter-menus>). The admin side of my blog runs pretty slow, and this does a fantastic job of speeding everything up. The biggest thing: I don't have to wait for a

whole page to load to get to the new post screen.

2. **WP-PageNavi** (<http://lesterchan.net/portfolio/programming/php/>) Puts the nice pagination at the bottom of each page on my site. I can't imagine how I'd handle navigation without it.

3. **Different Posts Per Page** (<http://www.maxblogpress.com/plugins/dppp/>) This one took me a while to find, but it's probably one of the most useful ones in terms of making the layout of the site more usable. Because I have featured articles (which are long) and t-shirt posts (which are short), I wanted to display full t-shirt posts, and excerpts of featured articles in the archives. This plugging let me easily set that up.

13. What is the most important thing you learned about blogging that you could share with your best friend

I think the most important thing I've learned is this: there's two types of blogs... the blog you write for yourself and the blog written for other people. If you're just writing for yourself, then you *can't* worry about hits, or generating advertising. You have to do it just because you enjoy it.

Most blogs start out like this.

But the second you decide you want to blog for other people and that you want to make money off your blog, you *have* to start treating it like a business (even if you're writing about what you had for breakfast every morning). You need schedules, goals and you need to be committed to posting quality content on regular basis.

14. What plans do you have for the future with your blog?

I plan on doing more longer-length articles and top 5 lists of t-shirts, which have proven to be most popular. I may also use the site to spin off a PopCultureTees store.

We wish Liz success in the future and thank you very much for sharing your BLOGGING tips, tricks & secrets with us all! 😊

If you want to get further into blogging, check out these resources:

- **WordPress Profit Maximizer** - The BEST WordPress Plugins sent to you weekly via e-mail:

<http://www.remarkableblogging.com/rb-products/wp-profit-maximizer/>

- **Lazy Blogging dot Com** - "Here's Everything You Wanted to Know About Building a Small Blog That Rakes-In \$300, \$3,000.. and Even \$30,000 Per Month!"

<http://www.LazyBlogging.com>

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