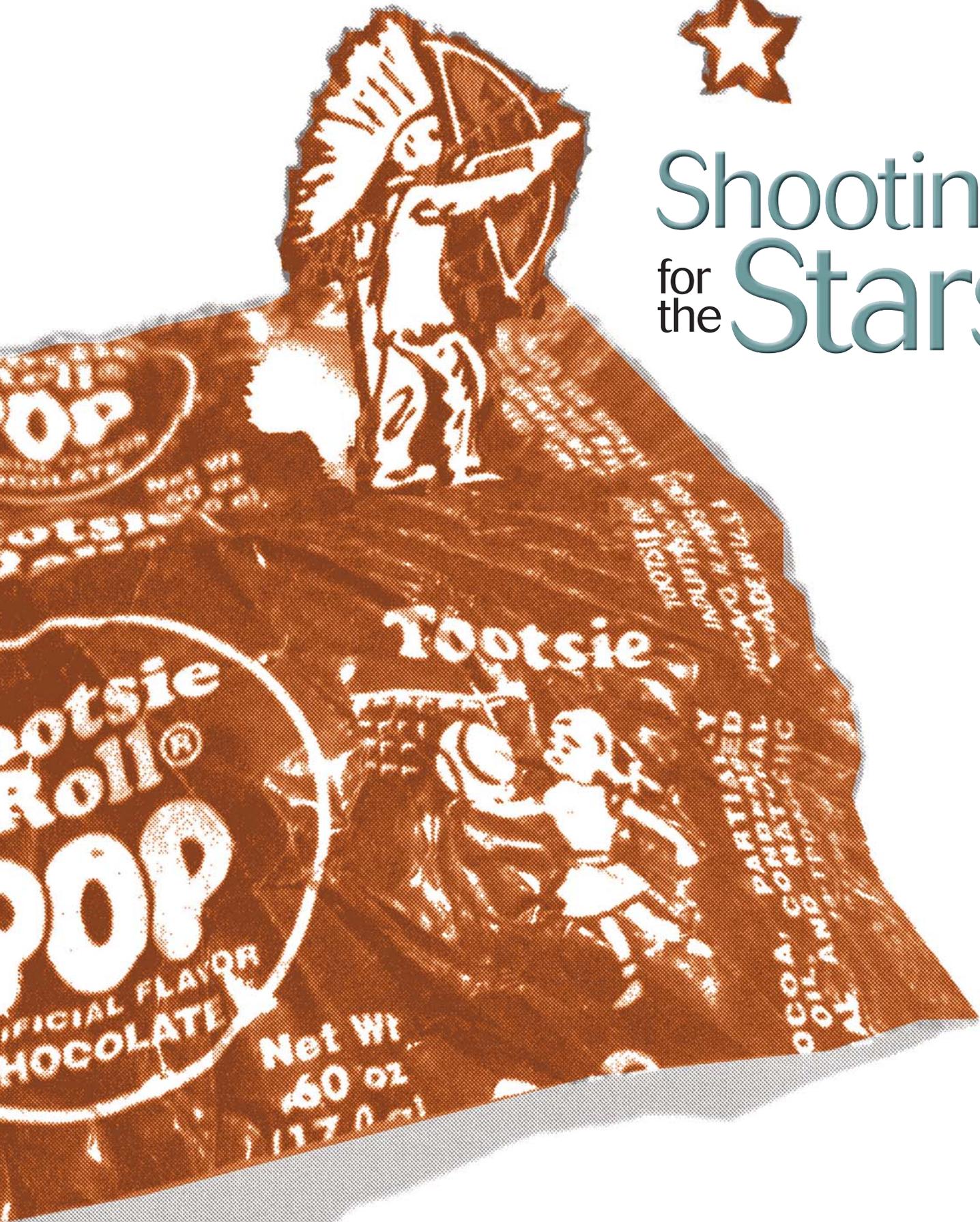




# Shooting for the Stars



# Five Characteristics of a Stellar Blog

story by **JENNIFER CULBERTSON** | illustration by **MATT MASTRUD**

**A** blog should be at the center of your social media marketing efforts. Just like the planets revolve around the sun, your online activities should be centered around your blog. If your blog is fading, your other marketing activities will dim along with it. So, how can you make your blog shine?

Think about the blogs that you read. What makes the great ones stellar? Chances are they have some of the following characteristics: they are informative, easy to read, visually engaging, interactive, and viral. If you're not getting the response you'd like from your blog, or if you just want to take it to the next level, let's explore five areas that can help make your blog shine.

## 1 RELEVANCE

The most engaging blogs are the ones that are current and keep up with relevant content. Posts that focus on product releases and updates, industry trends, and issues that relate to your target audience are going to be the best. Your blog should aim to help and educate its audience, offering something they can take away. Readers appreciate information they can do something with, and they will return to your blog if you consistently offer posts that are not only relevant, but also useful. A great blog is one that can really strike a balance of not being too self-absorbed while also providing solid, useful content to the reader.

## 2 EASY TO READ

Writing great content is only part of the battle. You need to also ensure the way it's presented is readable. Aim for a clean blog template with easy navigation, and make sure you have the ability to tag and categorize your posts so that if readers want to learn more about a topic, they can easily locate other relevant blog posts.

When posting, break up large paragraphs for easy reading. Avoid wordiness and keep the posts to 500 to 750 words. Use bullet points as a succinct way of illustrating your ideas. Create headings for different sections so readers can easily scan the post. Finally – and this should go without saying – proofread your posts for spelling and grammar accuracy. Typos and errors are not acceptable and are significant turn-offs for readers. Remember, to generate response, include a call to action with an offer in your post.

## 3 VISUAL

The old saying is true: a picture is worth a thousand words. Images accompanying your post draw readers' eyes in and give them a visual representation of what they are about to read. Include images within your posts such as graphs, screenshots, embedded videos, slides, etc.

## 4 ENGAGING

It is extremely important to generate as much conversation and discussion as possible in your blog. Great posts should generate discussion, so don't forget to ask for feedback, thoughts, opinions, and comments from your readers. Once the discussion starts, respond promptly to comments and questions. Also, there are many readers who may enjoy your posts but just don't have the time to comment. These readers may be willing to "like" your post or be willing to answer a quick poll.

## 5 GO VIRAL

Now that you've got great, engaging posts, remember to create connections between your blog and other social media outlets. Viral blog sharing is by far one of the most effective ways of gaining a readership and building a community. Encourage readers to subscribe to your RSS feed and email notifications. Include social media buttons (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, reddit, Digg, etc.) with each post to make it easy to share posts. Always promote new posts with an intriguing Tweet, LinkedIn note, and Facebook status update; don't forget to include a link to the blog.

Be sure to use relevant keywords throughout your blog post so that it can gain as much online exposure as possible. Choose which keyword or phrase works best for your blog and incorporate it throughout the post. Be sure to put your main keywords at least once in the first paragraph and once in the last paragraph, and attempt to include them within your blog post titles.

## GETTING STARTED

So, where do you start? Well, new bloggers starting from scratch can set up their blog site and start

compiling a list of blog post topics. You can never have too many topics, so start brainstorming and make a calendar of when to post.

Current bloggers should critically examine their blog to see how they're doing. Are you generating comments? Why or why not? How can you make your blog more conversational and interesting? Are you doing everything you can to cross-promote between other social media sites and your blog?

Making your blogging approach relevant, professional, visual, conversational, and viral will change your blog from mediocre to absolutely stellar! 🌟

*Jennifer Culbertson is owner of Looking Glass Marketing and specializes in working with Microsoft VARs and ISVs to build and execute marketing strategies that drive results. With her 19 years of marketing experience within the channel, coupled with her understanding of Microsoft Partner needs, she can help take your marketing to the next level. For more information, contact Jennifer at [Jennifer@lookingglassmarketing.com](mailto:Jennifer@lookingglassmarketing.com) or call 614-453-5927.*



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