

Building a Better Blog Foundation with Aggregation

Over the past few weeks, Linda has provided explanations about various social networking tools and has provided a list or two of social networking platforms for designers and developers. But, what about your blog? Is it dead in the water, or should you make that blog the foundation of your social media tower? In this article, Linda discusses the answer and some ways to build a better blog for that foundation.

Aggregation Makes the World Go 'Round

If you keep up with social networking news, you may know that [Facebook](#) acquired [Friendfeed](#) this month for about [\\$47.5 million USD](#). This was eBay deal, trust me – the team at Friendfeed knew what they were doing, and they did it well – including grassroots publicity that took on the big dogs. The Friendfeed team knows about 'big dogs' – most of the [team players](#) at that company previously worked for Google.

Facebook is actively pursuing an objective that may make them the largest aggregate social media platform to date. Facebook, first, isn't for kids anymore – they made the playing ground both social- and business-oriented. Then, they made deals with companies such as [Huffington Post](#), [Twitter](#) and [Digg](#) to create [Facebook Connect](#), a way to filter all your comments, actions and interactions to your Facebook profile.

Facebook is serious about the social media aggregation dance, and they've made it clear that they're the band director and the dance leader. While this accumulation of services may remind you of some other tech stars who rose and then fell under pressure from growing too large (I'm a firm believer that a company is never too large to fail), Facebook seems to have taken a page from that history book and learned from it – why grow from within when you can be the tugboat and pull others along behind you or push them into deals that otherwise might lie fallow?

The Tugboat and the Firm Foundation

Facebook is an aggregation of social media tools such as links, comments and images. While that description sounds like a blog, it isn't a blog. [Huffington Post \(HuffPo\)](#), on the other hand, is a blog, because Arianna Huffington makes that site a blog. She writes on a consistent basis, and she's the co-founder and editor-in-chief for that blog, which is disguised as a newspaper and an aggregate news and opinion platform.

BIG NEWS: [Arlen Specter](#) | [Gay Marriage](#) | [Housing Crisis](#) | [Miley Cyrus](#) | [More...](#)

THE HUFFINGTON POST

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Other clues point to HuffPo's blog status, including the fact that it's powered by Movable Type ([Six Apart](#)), it combines text, images, and links to other Internet sites and other media related to its topic, and readers can leave comments. HuffPo requires these options to make the site happen on someone else's platform, whereas Facebook requires its users to make things happen on their platform.

Now that you see the difference between Facebook and HuffPo, I'll throw both sites into a blender, as the main ingredient that ties both sites together is the word, "aggregation." Both sites pull from other sites across the Internet to make their sites appear larger than they are in real life.

Don't get me wrong – Facebook and HuffPo both are huge sites. But, by linking to other sites and platforms, they become portals and they become the 'go to' sites to find information on other sites. In the [Washington Post article](#) I linked to earlier, they say this about HuffPo:

To understand the allure of this kind of aggregator, one only has to look to successful news aggregators. Take the devilishly popular Huffington Post, for example. For better or worse, the site's mash-up of news from disparate sources has struck a cord among its 7 million monthly visitors. Its home page is a mix of links to blog posts from Huffington Post contributors and links to outside stories from the news media. Rather than hunt and peck through all these other sites, people go to the Huffington Post to be delivered a smattering of links. Aggregators work because they do all the hard work for you.

And, they say this about Facebook:

Facebook bought FriendFeed so it could become the Huffington Post of your social life.

So, where does that leave you and your blog?

Aggregation and Your Blog

I'll take a wild guess and state that most of you who are reading this article have a blog and maintain it on a regular basis. Don't let all this talk about social media fool you – blogs are here to stay for a while, so don't listen to the pundits who have said that [blogs are dead](#). I believe some pundits simply want you to disappear into the social media foray so your blog doesn't become competition for their pundit blogs.

Besides, if you drop your blog, where will other aggregates like Facebook and HuffPo find meat for their platforms?

What's the solution? Other writers have delved deeper and come up with some answers – the same answers that were provided by the clues in the Washington Post article: Become an aggregate, just like the big dogs.

For instance, Andrew Keen asked Hermione Way (London based founder of [Newspepper](#) and the presenter of [Techfluff](#)) about the death of blogs, and he responded, "Blogs will become aggregation points," or personal hubs. But, I will add that this will happen only if you have the time and energy to maintain a blog. By "maintain," I mean creating a blog, writing on that blog regularly to keep it updated, updating your blog platform to stay ahead of hackers and using a theme that won't be screwed by those platform updates.

Then, you'll need to spend time searching for material that is similar to your perspective (or not, to be controversial) and adding it to your blog. Then, you'll need to incorporate other bloggers who also want to contribute to your site.

Before long, you'll end up with a staff as large as [Arianna Huffington's team](#). But, do you want that? Is there another solution?

One Solution

You can play it smart and try to build aggregation a bit at a time. This is not a race to become as large as Facebook or HuffPo. The only way you'd get to that point quickly is with a lot of money or with a lot of time on your hands and a very persuasive nature. And, you do not want to scam digital content from other sites and post it, circumventing the need for originality.

Instead, you want to blend both originality and other people's thoughts and works that highlight your perspectives and appeal to readers of like mind. HuffPo, for instance, uses original blogs from various writers and they write prologues to work done by other people on other sites as well as creating lead-ins for stories that exclude prologues. Here are a few examples of the latter:

BIG NEWS: Madonna | Brad Pitt | Michael Jackson | Jon & Kate Plus 8 | More...

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Jane Fonda Targets Husband Number Four

[Quick Read](#) | [Comments](#)

The image above was extracted from HuffPo's Entertainment section on Sunday, 16 August 2009:

- The story on the left about Madonna is a link that leads to a story about Madonna written by the [Associated Press on Yahoo! News](#).
- The story in the middle leads to a page on Huffington Post that is a [poll with video images](#), linked also to Facebook.
- The last news item about Jane Fonda links to [Daily News' gossip section](#).

In all cases, comments about each story are "in-house." In other words, comments about each story are held and maintained at HuffPo. And, plenty of in-house blogs also exist, along with blog entries by Arianna Huffington at least twice per week.

Another example of a HuffPo story – and one that stirs my sense of what is great aggregation is all about – is the story that provides a lead-in before it takes you to another site or that uses material from other sites. You can find many of this type of example in HuffPo's political section. One example includes [the article](#), "Obama Weekly Address Accuses Special Interests, Lobbyists Of Engaging In Fear To Stop Health Care Reform (VIDEO)," where a lead in precedes a video embedded from YouTube.

Don't allow HuffPo's site overwhelm you – take one page at a time, take notes and you may begin to see a method behind this aggregating madness. If you begin to employ one aggregating trick at a time into your blog, you may begin to realize how the links to other sites may increase your traffic, especially if you begin to Tweet your new entries or allow them to be added incrementally to your [Facebook Page](#).

Conclusion

The Web is just what [Tim Berners-Lee](#) wanted it to be at the moment - a powerful force for social change and individual creativity. Commercialization of the Web has led to working for the holy grail – traffic. If you provide information that is valuable to others and if you present it in a pleasing, usable and accessible format, and if you ride the new wave of aggregation...you might have the best of both worlds.

In other words, if you have a blog, consider it your foundation for a social media tower, much like a radio or cell phone tower or a Tower of Babel if you want to go all mythical on me. This is just a visual concept, though – visualizing your blog as a rock-solid foundation for the tools you can lay on top of it. Any tool, such as linking to more information, aligning yourself with Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites, and providing great content, will work as those building blogs.

Hang tight – in the next article, I'll bring you many more links that can help you streamline your aggregate process without stomping on copyright or ethical rights and that may take you head and shoulders above your competition.