

A wonderful “Medium” for medical writers

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Abstract

With the advent of social media platforms and the increasing availability and access of information on the internet, we are not limited by information sources on any subject. Medium.com, since its inception in 2012, has become a very good blogging platform to find information on various topics of interest. In this article, I share my ideas on how to start blogging on Medium, the best practices for content generation, and whether Medium is one of the best options out there for medical writers/consultancies/agencies for advertising their writing skills.

Blogging has been a popular style of writing for the past 10-12 years. Most of us started our writing careers as bloggers (amateur or professional) and it goes without saying that the popular choices were WordPress, Blogger, etc., which are still decent. Some of us also write on LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. However, all these media rely on our existing customers/followers/friends as the audiences for our writing. Medium (www.medium.com) has been a trendsetter and a pathbreaker in terms of how we write blogs and has revolutionised blogging.

Medium is a “cool”, online place to write, blog, and share stories (articles or blogs are referred to as stories on Medium) on various topics that might interest us. Medium was started by Evan Williams, the co-founder of Twitter, in 2012 as an alternative to Twitter to write bigger ideas or stories.

We may sign up and start writing – it is as simple as that. With a free account, we have



Credit: Creative Commons

access to read five articles / month (no limits on writing, though). With a paid subscription, we can read an unlimited number of articles and also take part in the Medium Partner Program (explained later in the article).

One writes individual stories or curates stories of particular topics (called publications on Medium). An individual or even a brand or company can open a Medium account and start blogging!

A blogging Medium for individuals

For someone new to blogging, Medium has a shallow learning curve. The design elements, blogging styles, different headline styles, and various ways to display pictures (as inline images, full-width images or even as background images) are all great features available at a single click for an attractive and professional blog. This is a great platform where there are approximately 86 million new visitors every month! Thus, a well-written and/or featured blog can easily reach thousands of views. Unlike other blogging platforms, Medium does not rely on the

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popularity of the authors to sell content. The content sells itself. Medium also offers strong Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) support.¹

A marketing platform for companies

Many companies have started blogging exclusively on Medium due to its worldwide reach. If the company does not have the bandwidth to have its own website or finds it too cumbersome to maintain a blog on the web page, then publishing on Medium is ideal. It provides an opportunity for the content to be appreciated by people who might not have visited the company's website or followed the company on social media. Furthermore, individuals from these companies may become thought leaders, whose expertise people turn to in their respective specialised areas.²

The ins and outs of writing on Medium

While it is straightforward to start blogging (or rather publishing stories) on Medium, it takes a bit more effort to tap into the large audience

base. Here are some tips for those starting out on Medium.^{3,4}

1. *Catchy title.* A good title goes a long way. It need not be poetic, rather, a more obvious yet catchy one is sure to attract more attention.
2. *Determine your niche.* Although we can write about anything under the sun, if we want to attract a loyal reader base we need to think about the topics on which we want to write – topics that we are passionate about or have an expertise in. Health topics never go out of fashion. Thus, writing about the latest in healthcare, innovations, clinical trials, medical devices, medicine – any of these can be our niche and we can write on these topics or curate stories into publications. Keep your topics targeted to a particular audience, but do not make it too specialised.
3. *Think about the length of the story.* Medium has a unique way of showing the length of the stories to readers – we can find the “x min read” next to the title. This is an excellent feature, especially when one is in a hurry but can fit in few minutes of quality reading (e.g., on local transport, taking a short tea break at work). Medium reports that the ideal length of an article is a 7-minute read, or around 1600 words.
4. *Always add tags.* Adding relevant tags to the stories goes a long way so that the Medium curators can curate the articles. Curation helps reach new audience as the curated stories are highlighted by Medium. Tags also help readers find articles during their search and thus, provide more opportunities of the article being read.
5. *Add images /doodles /cartoons /illustrations.* Always add images or illustrations to enhance the article and make it more interesting. Use images from Creative Commons and credit the images appropriately. Horizontal pictures make for a better experience because scrolling through horizontal pictures on mobile devices is easier.⁵
6. *Add canonical tags/links.* When we republish our website/blog’s content (there is an import

tool and a WordPress plugin), Medium lets us add a canonical tag/link. A canonical tag/link is used when we republish content or publish very similar content and want one of the websites to remain the master website. This can help in redirecting a good amount of traffic to our own website.

7. *Publish regularly.* It goes without saying that the more we publish, the larger the audience we will have. As mentioned before, Medium is author-blind, if we regularly publish good articles (or have a publication with many stories), we will gain followers. One of the ways that Medium works is through claps (similar to the likes on LinkedIn and Facebook), responses (any comments or exchanges that happen), and re-posts of stories. Thus, more engagement with stories could mean longer shelf-life on Medium searches.

Can I earn through Medium?

The short answer is yes! When you join the Medium Partner Program, engagements with our story will earn us money. Depending on how many people read our stories, our engagement with the audience, and how many shares we obtain, our earnings can vary. The top-earning story on Medium ever

brought in more than \$16,000 over time, while the highest-ever monthly earnings of a single author (of multiple stories) totalled almost \$50,000.^{5,6} On average, the numbers are not this high, and most authors do not start earning immediately. Furthermore, the articles that earn money go behind a paywall. Thus, it depends on your purpose for writing these stories. If the idea is to get more readership or more advertisement for your website, it is better to forget about the earnings.

How can medical writers use Medium to their advantage?

Medium is an excellent place to write blogs as a medical writer because of its ever-increasing audience base. As the stories can be curated into publications, it helps to write regularly on certain topics, and for freelance writers it helps to add to their writing portfolio. Thus, writing on topics that one specialises in (clinical trials, medical devices, AI in healthcare, etc) can also help in showcasing your knowledge as well as writing skills to potential clients. It also helps in improving communication skills as the writers get to interact with interested readers. Furthermore, due to the inbuilt SEO, the articles can come up high on Google rankings and thus, in Google searches as well. Even if you are not keen to blog, contributing a few articles as a guest blogger in someone’s curated publications might be helpful too.

All that glitters ...

Not everything can be that simple and flawless, can it?? The blogging purists are unanimous that if we can, we should have our own website. As with any blogging platforms, articles on Medium are not entirely our own and we are at the mercy of the platform. If they shut down the platform, our articles will also vanish. Importantly, we





lose the traffic that is diverted to the website and possible business opportunities. Furthermore, one of the advantages of Medium is also its disadvantage. Since Medium is author-blind, this can lead to poor branding for the authors and the business, so the stories become branding tools for Medium and not the business. Also, sometimes the simplicity of the blogging structure can be a disadvantage.⁷ The blogs on Medium have a very basic structure of texts and pictures and there are not many options for individualisation.

As readers are only allowed five free articles to read per month, this is a limitation for medical writers and medical communication agencies who may use Medium for client access or to divert traffic to their websites.

Medium has some of the best writers that publish their blogs on it (Barack Obama uses it!). Thus, the competition is already pretty high. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Competing against big names is never easy, but if we find a way to make our articles stand out in this amazing pool of writers, then it does feel great.

I have written a few stories on Medium (individual stories as well as publications for a company) and I found the experience quite unique because I did not have to look for an audience for the article. In fact, three of my articles got curated by Medium and ended up getting good views in spite of no advertisements on my part.

If you are starting out and are intimidated by the idea of setting up your own website or

learning the ropes of setting one up, or you have a small consultancy/agency and do not have the time to maintain a blog, you can start by publishing your stories on Medium and who knows where it may take you!

Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and not necessarily shared by her employer or EMWA.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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