

Remember in high school, when someone would throw a party when their parents were out of town? At first, you knew everyone at the party. They were all friends of the host, nervously alternating between drinking Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers, and trying not to break anything.

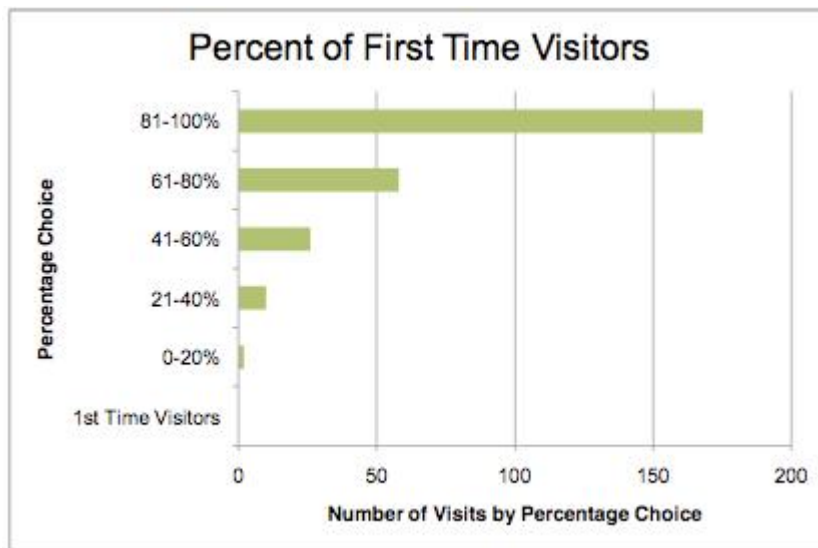
But then, it all changed. The party got bigger. First, people from your school that you didn't really know showed up. And ultimately, those guys arrived. You know them. Definitely NOT in high school. Mustaches (for real, not a few hairs being passed off as a mustache). Leather jackets. Jeans with either paint splashed on them, a knife sheath attached to the belt, or a distinct ring on the back pocket indicating habitual tobacco chewing.

Strangers. Here they were, arriving at your party with nary a prior personal connection, but looking for a good time just like everyone else.

Your blog works exactly the same way.

There's a First Time for Everything

[New research](#) (pdf) by my clients at [Compendium Blogware](#) show that for more than two-thirds of corporate blogs, new visitors comprise more than 80% of total blog traffic. That's right, in most cases, 8 out of every 10 visitors to your blog have never been there previously. (Here on [Convince & Convert](#) the first-time visitor ratio hovers consistently around 65%, meaning that for more than 6 out of 10 of you, this might be the first blog post you've ever read from me - nothing like a little pressure!)



Here are the 5 things you should do to turn blog strangers into friends, and keep them coming back.

1. Orientation for Your Blog

Your first-time blog visitors are unfamiliar with your site design, navigation, structure, and other proclivities. That's why it's so critically important to have clear and consistent way-finding mechanisms throughout your blog.

Remember that in addition to being first-timers, many of your blog visitors don't come in through the front door, either. In fact, just 15% of the visitors to this blog start their journey at [www.convinceandconvert.com](#). The rest of you come in the back door or through the metaphorical window, beginning your session on a specific blog post or other page. Remember that EVERY page on your blog could be the "home" page, so it's imperative that your branding remain consistent, that you use a tagline to explain what your blog is about, and that you use state indicators to cue visitors as to where they are in the site structure.

State Indicator - Turns orange when you're in that section



2. Humanize Your Blog

Remember, it's a blog not a white paper, and a key differentiator is personality. Show your first-time visitors who you are (literally and figuratively).

Include a photo of yourself on every page, and if it's a group written blog, include photos of each author. Make links to your bio easy to find. And infuse your writing with personality and voice. (If your writing sounds like someone could be saying it to you face-to-face, you have a strong sense of "voice" in your posts)

It also doesn't hurt to mix in a video post now and again, or to make a video post available on every page, as I do over there on the right hand side.

3. Add Context to Your Blog

Sure, you'll give first-time visitors an idea of what the blog is about via the title or tagline, but how else can you help them go deeper? Remember that your likelihood of a first-time visitor coming back goes up the more content they consume on that first visit. The "one and done" visitors are probably going to drink your beer and run over your mailbox on the way out, never to return again.

So, make sure first-time visitors can access other content that may be of interest, convincing them that perhaps they should make a return trip. That's why I recommend the "Similar Posts" plug-in below, and why I suggest you list recent posts and popular posts prominently on both the right side and bottom of every page.

Also, don't be afraid to link to other posts or resources from within your posts. Not in an obnoxious way, but if you've written other stuff that expands on the subject at hand, link away. (Incidentally, these internal links are also a SEO positive)

4. Add Calls to Action to Your Blog

Other than hopefully come back again, what do you want your first-time readers to do? You MUST ask and answer this question, and develop appropriate calls to action accordingly.

If your blog is consistent enough that you believe RSS subscription is realistic, make sure visitors can easily subscribe to your RSS feed. (As mentioned in my [post about blog success metrics](#), if you cover a very wide topical area, subscriptions are less likely).



Most blogs aren't visually aggressive enough in the promotion of RSS, and very few do a good job at emphasizing the opportunity to subscribe via email (as 40% of C&C subscribers do).

Also, while I think it's somewhat less likely that a first-time visitor will tweet or Digg or Stumble your work (I'd love to see a study on that), you should make that process as easy as possible as well. I'm a big fan of the "Sexy Bookmarks" plug-in you'll see below, because it makes the sharing buttons large and interactive.

If you have complementary resources like an Ebook, email newsletter, events or otherwise, make sure those are easy for first-time visitors to find as well. [Jacob Morgan](#) does a nice job with this, promoting his book, events, and other resources on the right side of his excellent blog.

Pay attention to your statistics with regard to calls to actions. You should know if first-time visitors are disproportionately likely to visit your Ebook page, for example. One of the data points I track closely is the number of people who visit my speaking page, where they entered the site, and if they were first-time visitors or long-time readers of the blog.

5. Focus Your Blog

Ultimately, first-time visitors come to your blog because someone or something pointed them there. The notion of Web "surfing" is a fallacy for the most part. They arrive on your blog because they have a question in mind, and are hoping that you can answer it.

If you can successfully answer their question, perhaps something like "how do I maximize my blog's effectiveness?" then you have a much better chance that they'll return or sign up for your RSS feed, email newsletter or other call to action.

Consequently, I have two recommendations.

First, never blow off a post. Sure, some posts will be better than others. Not every Van Gogh kicks ass, either, and some episodes of Lost suck outright. But considering that every post you write could be your sole calling card for many new visitors, it's important to keep quality high.

Second, try to make each post about one thing. Remember that first-time visitors are there to get a specific question answered, and if your post meanders hither and yon like a fried food addict at the State Fair, the chances that you'll answer their question neatly and succinctly plummet.

If you think your blog could improve in any of these five areas, would you give it a shot and let us know how it worked out in the comments? That would be a fun discussion, right?

[Comments](#)