



Internet Marketing Consultants

This is one of the 'Best of' articles written by Barry Welford. The current portfolio of these articles is to be found at <http://smmbc.ca/portfolio/>

Comment Cacophony

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Cacophony comes from two Greek words meaning bad sound. That's what you might hear as you pass a group of ravens in a tree or are besieged by a murder of crows. However it is often used more widely to mean any assembly that is creating unpleasant noises. It is also used figuratively to describe situations or images that give you that displeasing sensation of just far too many inputs.



Comments competition

I must admit when I first heard about [The Biggest Internet Cash Contest in the History of Blogging](#) the word cacophony came directly to mind. This competition tries to measure the effectiveness of different blog posts by the number of comments they attract and the number of tweets they receive. With the large cash prizes being offered, it seemed likely that there would be a huge clamor surrounding this event.

That is a scene I would normally avoid, however in this case I took a second look because one of my favorite bloggers was involved. She is of course well known to the Search Engine People community, since she was the founder of the [SEO Scoop blog](#), which is now owned by SEP. Donna Fontenot wrote a thought provoking article entitled, [5 Steps To Impressing A Longtime Jaded Blogger With Your Comments](#). At the time of writing, her post has attracted 263 Comments so she obviously is doing something very right.

Despite her involvement, I was still somewhat skeptical about the nature of this competition. It all boils down to the nature of comments and what encourages others to add comments to a blog.

Comments Are Monologues

I should make it clear from the outset that I am not dealing with blogs where a handful of comments are added. This is still a reasonable amount of reading for most visitors.

The situation changes when a blog already has a hundred or more comments already. Anyone adding a comment knows that few people will read that comment. At this point it becomes almost a numbers game.

This is seen most clearly for political articles often on blogs associated with newspapers. The sheer number of comments that are made can be an indicator of the popular interest in whatever was the subject of the blog post. Adding a comment is really indulging in a monologue. The audience for the content is unknown. It could be that writing out the comment on a piece of paper and putting it in a bottle thrown in the sea might ensure wider readership.

In this light, comments might be thought to be merely creating the equivalent of a Tower of Babel. No one will dig in to the tower to find what may have been written. All that matters is the height of the tower.



What has been written so far is true historically for comments either sent as letters to the editor or added as comments in a blog. Most readers do not expect to engage in a dialogue about the subject of any particular comment. Your role is merely to add another block to the pile. The linear form of the series of comments is not an encouragement to anyone who might wish to discuss the issues. This is particularly true if you feel that all the others merely want to get something off their chests.

As an aside, it may be mentioned that online forums encourage quite different expectations among their visitors. The forums are intended for discussion and even though individual posts follow one after another, it is fully expected that people will engage in dialogue.

Google Has Issues With Comments

Google's effect on the online world through its dominant search position creates some interesting dilemmas and complications. The following list illustrates this complexity with respect to blog comments:

- As a general rule, Google seems to assume that comments are of little value and encourages the use of the nofollow tag in any associated links.
- Google does index the content of comments and they, together with the main post, can create interesting long-tail search possibilities.
- It would seem in the search algorithms that comments possibly rank lower than the content of the blog post to which they are attached.

The net result of these three factors probably mean that comments have only a secondary effect on Google keyword searches.

Comments With CommentLuv

Based on what they have read from Google, many commenters believe that links associated with their blog comments contribute to the PageRank of their own blog posts. Some like Kristi Hines believe there are many [Reasons to Love CommentLuv Blogs](#).

With WordPress plugins such as CommentLuv, links do not carry the nofollow tag and so could have a PageRank contribution effect. Google has not come out clearly on whether such links contribute anything of value in the ranking and visibility of individual blog post web pages. In the absence of such clarification, I would suggest that little time should be spent in drumming up extra comments.

What Should The Blogger Do With Respect To Comments That Are Added

Given this situation, I believe the value of comments is much overrated. If they come, they come: if they do not, do not spend time with beating your brow about this.

How To Make Comments More Useful To Your Readers

How can you help your visitors to find the best of the comments that have been made. You could consider adding buttons to indicate that I like/I dislike This comment. Although few people typically use these buttons, if your blog encourages visitors to use them frequently then this may provide useful input to other visitors.

As the blog owner, you should regard any comments that are added as a potential asset. If you take the time to examine what comments have been made by visitors, there is a possibility that some comments may represent real value. The odds of searching for them and finding them may be similar to someone panning for gold or catching rare butterflies in a net while sweeping up a cloud of insects.

If you do find such a comment that is like a Golden Nugget, then what should you do with it. Little seems to have been done on these. Here is one idea. Hopefully your blog is arranged

with permalinks for each comment so that you can direct readers precisely to that comment. You could for example add an addendum to the blog post giving an index of comments which stand out from the crowd. This would thus provide a tour of the more important comments that have been made.

If a particular comment has outstanding merit then you may even choose to write a follow-up blog post citing this specific comment and developing other ideas around it.

The Future For Comments

Will comments become more frequent or less frequent on blogs? Will such comments bring more value to the topic or bury the more important issues in yet more and more irrelevant texts.

The biggest actor on this stage is Google. If they do not change their policies with respect to comments, or indeed to inlinks, then we are likely to see a continuing volume of spam in comments which devalues the whole concept. In that scenario it is all a numbers game. All that comment volume is of very little value, most of it is spam. As we have said before, it is time for Google to stop the rot.