

# Are Blogging Courses “Predatory”?

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If you follow any growing or aspiring bloggers on Twitter, you’ve probably seen tweets about blogging webinars, online courses or blog planners some time in the past year. It’s all part of one of the fastest growing trends in the blogosphere in which established bloggers offer educational products, leveraging their expertise to help others and increase their own profits in the process.

This can be a win-win, allowing new bloggers to get precious information about the trickier aspects of blogging, while providing established bloggers with new opportunities to pull in revenue. However, new bloggers must also be careful to make sure that any course they pay for is both appropriate for someone at their skill-level and being offered by a blogger who is actually trying to provide a quality service, instead of just looking for a quick payday.

Those are two of the major points of web designer/blogger [Brittany Melton](#)’s recent Twitter thread about blogging courses and online coaching.

“If you have no audience/niche/content, stop worrying about design/lead magnets/conversions/monetization. Stop. You’re wasting valuable time,” Melton tweeted, going on to say that worrying about an “invisi-audience” was “shooting yourself in the foot” and that beginners need to be wary of taking courses that are inappropriate for their skill-level.

“It’s our responsibility as seasoned bloggers to share this information. Unfortunately too many of us are turning to predatory practices,” Melton wrote, explaining that she was tired of the “hustle,” from for-pay courses on Mailchimp and “make \$1000+ in a day” offers. (The [entire thread is worth a read](#).)

In a recent interview, Melton explained that two things made her realize that certain bloggers were becoming predators. The first was a Google Hangout webinar on Pinterest she signed up for one weekend.

“I joined the newsletter and watched the webinar and it was great. Well, a month later I got a newsletter



weekend’...and it was the exact same webinar,” says Melton.

The following month, she received another differently worded email offering a link to the exact same webinar.

“I was like, ‘Wait a minute. Are you really using my information to constantly get me to pay for the program at the end of your webinar? You’re not giving me new information. You don’t even know that I exist. At this point, I’m literally just a number. Is that all you’re using my information for?’”

She thought it might have been a “fluke,” but then she saw more and more people coming out with courses and webinars this year. Although they all seem okay on the surface, Melton noticed a few trends that made her start to question a few people’s motives.

“There have been multiple instances where I’ve been on Twitter, thinking about registering for X, Y and Z webinar and they’re talking about how they’re going to be getting coin with the webinar or how they need to do such and such to get more people on the list because it’s all about those coins,” says Melton.



A week before her self-described rant, she saw a prominent blogger tweet that they didn’t like the look of their brand, but it was what people paid them for—and they were going to do whatever it took to get the money.

“That crushed me. At that point, I was angry, I was upset, and I was like, ‘OK, well, I can’t let this happen,’” says Melton, explaining that she thought about beginners trying to decide between taking a \$97 blogging course versus paying their light bill, for example.

“There’s no way I’m going to let them ‘take a risk and invest in themselves’ for someone that’s a predator—for someone that, at this point in the game, no longer cares about the original purpose for their blog. What they care about is the money,” she says.

After her rant, Melton noticed some bloggers changing the wording of their course advertisements in order to make it seem like a beginner course, even though it was the exact same product.

“At the end of the day, these bloggers are marketers now. They know that you need to get people in the funnel and once they’re in the funnel, you need to romance them for a specific amount of time and then you’re going to ask for an entry-level amount of money. And then, once they’ve sent that money, you’re going to ask for another amount of money. And then, eventually, they’ll pay you \$1500 to mentor them. That’s the marketing funnel,” she says.

“It breaks my heart at this point because it’s gotten to the point where it’s so many really big bloggers that I used to admire that have started being predators, and if some of us don’t step up and say, ‘Hey, you’re doing this wrong and it’s unfair and this isn’t why you started your blog a few years ago,’ then it’s not going to change.”

Being vocal has already helped some of Melton’s followers. After her Twitter rant, she got direct messages from people saying things like, “I was about to register for this class and now I need to sit and think about it.”

“That’s why I use the words that I use,” Melton says. “Something has to change and there’s a lot of bloggers who have the expertise but we’re not really sharing it from a beginner’s standpoint when we should be.”

Melton started offering her own course, [#Flourish30](#), in late February, hoping to offer resources that can help both beginners and bloggers who are switching niches. The month-long program consists of five assignments to help encourage consistency, plus one additional assignment to help each user develop their expertise.

Rather than worrying about design or monetization, Melton suggests that beginners pick a clean blog template and focus on doing three things every day: writing, networking and self-promotion.

“Those are the three building blocks that can make or break how quickly you can monetize and how quickly you can build a large audience and a newsletter and things like that. If you can master those things, then everything comes relatively quickly, thanks to social media.”

When just starting out, Melton advises going on a 30-day “information fast,” rather than join any trendy webinars or master classes. “Focus on creating content without being swayed over what type of content you should be creating.” Instead, she advises using that time to figure out exactly what you want to write about and what works best with your schedule.

“For aspiring bloggers, there seems to be a huge market for professionalization opportunities — from conferences to webinars to online resources,” writes Brooke Erin Duffy, Assistant Professor in the Department of Advertising at Temple University in an email.

Duffy took a few of these programs while doing research for her upcoming book, “Aspirational Labor: Women and Creative Work in an Age of Social Media.”

“...while they can be tremendously beneficial, they also require a considerable investment in bloggers’ time, energy, and money. This leaves the playing field for these aspiring blogging professionals highly uneven,” Duffy writes.

Many aspiring bloggers turn to blogger-led programs because the information isn’t readily available at four-year institutions which can’t keep up with the pace of innovation because changes in curriculum have to first go through an approval process.

“Blogger-taught programs seem to address this gap by bringing in those with expert professional skills. Unfortunately, this means that young people are forced to shoulder the burden of additional educational expenses (in addition to college tuition) by enrolling in these programs,” writes Duffy.

So, what should you look for before committing to taking a paid course? How do you determine what kinds of skills you need to learn at this stage of your blogging career, and how do you make sure that you’re giving your money to someone who is committed to offering a good course not just the money?

Mattie James' blog, Mattieologie, started as a personal style blog, but in the past 12 months, she's been producing a steady stream of content about the business of blogging, including regular **Periscope broadcasts**, **podcast episodes** and **blog posts**. She launched her own program, The Consistency Course in August.

She says she's always been transparent with her followers and was willing to answer business-related questions left in the comments under her Instagram photos or blog posts. Once Periscope launched, she began consistently giving blog tips and noticed that people seemed to be "starving" for this content.

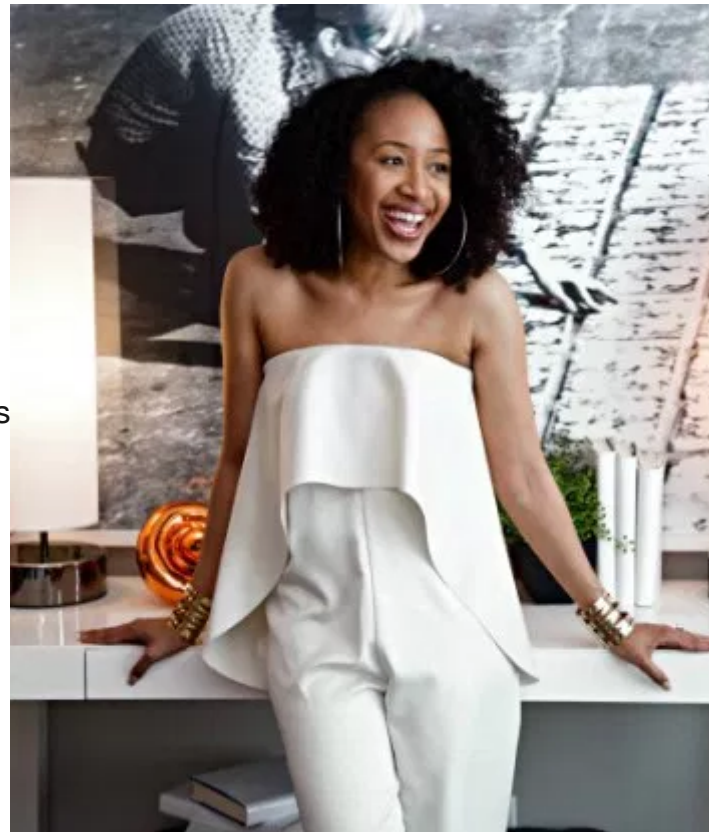
"I liked talking about it because I am passionate about it, so I said, 'Let me make my first course.' I did and it was successful and I've just been doing that ever since with the balance of working with the brand and creating content as an influencer," says James.

James's Consistency Course is designed to teach content creators to "post, profit and promote consistently" because "that's pretty much what the issue is."

"The Consistency Course teaches you the processes you need to be consistent which are: automate, delegate and operate. If you do not do those three things, you cannot be consistent. It's impossible," says James.

She says new bloggers should focus first on what they want to talk about and "share with the world." "We usually consume content that either entertains us or educates us and if it can do both, that's awesome," she says.

When choosing a course, she advises starting with someone's free content first. "I would not pay for something from anybody—an online course, e-book, whatever—if that person has not blown you away on a consistent basis," she says.



She also thinks that people need to pay attention to what someone is teaching you to do versus what they are doing themselves. "What a lot of people also tend to do is take information that they've learned and to regurgitate that into their own content, but you can't teach me what you haven't already done. That's not how this works here," says James.

Melton advises that beginners pay attention to the way a course advertisement is worded as well. "In many cases, anything that involves mailing lists isn't for a beginner. Anything involving making money in one weekend, that's not for a beginner either. You have to have an audience first," she says.