

HARNESSING THE POWER OF THE INTERNET: BLOGGING & SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE MUSICIAN

by Joy Morin

[Note: This content is © Joy Morin of ColorInMyPiano.com. It was originally presented by Joy at MTNA 2015 in Las Vegas for the Young Professionals Track.]

Welcome!

My presentation today is about Harnessing the Power of the Internet. There are two main sections to my presentation today...

1. The Power of the Internet.
2. Harnessing It.

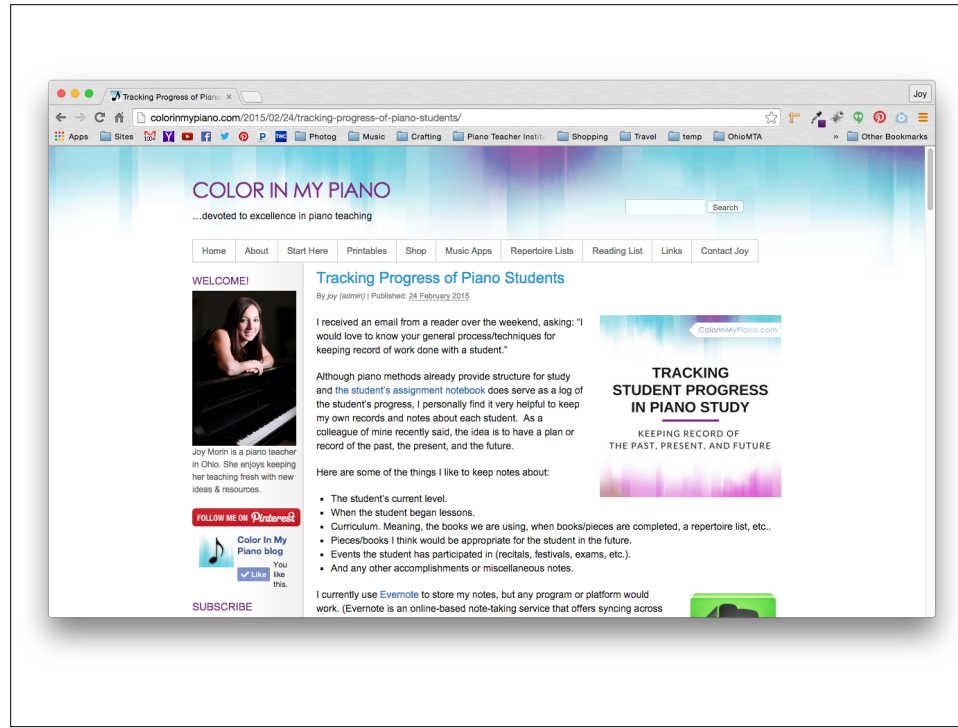
...first, we'll talk about The Power of the Internet — in other words, how the internet has changed and shaped the world around us today — and then we will talk about HOW to harness the power of the internet. In other words, I'd like to share principles and guidelines for using the internet and using it well for your cause or your work/art.

But before we launch into those sections, I want to first tell you a little bit about myself. Now, the reason I tell you my story is just to let you know where I'm coming from and how I used these principles to meet the goals I had in mind, but of course I want you to remember that this is simply what worked for me — and everyone is going to have their own ways to harness these tools for their own goals. But I hope hearing my story might inspire you or give you some ideas for your possibilities as musicians/teachers.

2009

My story today begins in 2009, when my blogging adventure began. In 2009, I was an piano performance major preparing to begin a Master's degree in piano pedagogy. At this point, I had already realized my passion for teaching. I was teaching about 25 private students each week at my parent's house and also teaching group keyboard classes at the YMCA in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I found all kinds of great online resources for my teaching from bloggers such as Natalie Weber (nee Natalie Wickham) [musicmattersblog.com] and Susan Paradis [susanparadis.com]. Eventually, I started creating my own games and worksheets too, to help me teach whatever I needed to teach. I wanted to give back and share, just like those bloggers that I admired. So, I decided to start my own blog.

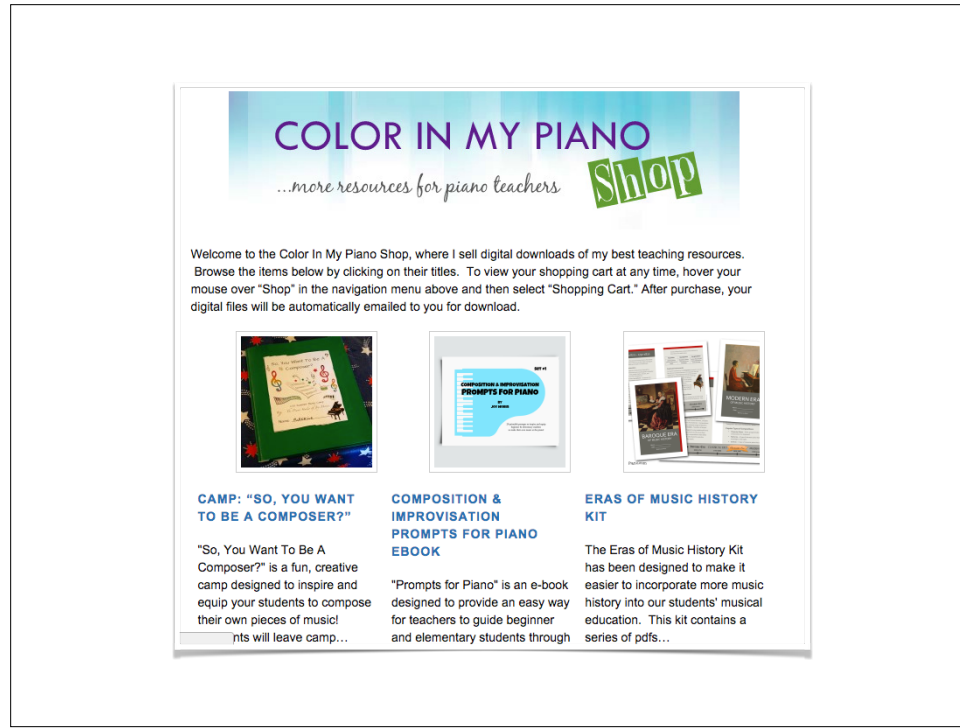
That same year, I wrote a life-view paper, something every senior at Hope College is required to do. For this paper, I was supposed to reflect on my life, look ahead to the future, and summarize my current worldview. Not surprisingly, much my paper focused on my beliefs about music and the role of the piano and teaching in my life. In the course of the essay, I ended up coining this phrase, "color in my piano," which to me, means, I strive to prevent my music-making and teaching from feeling like merely a job or a requirement — and instead strive to keep music colorful and interesting for myself and my students. So, that's how ColorInMyPiano.com was born.



Here's a peek at what my blog looks like. My blog has grown and changed along with me over the past 6 years. I've since finished my Master's in Piano Pedagogy, my husband and I moved to Ohio for him to get another Master's and land a full-time job. Meanwhile, I've been running a full-time piano studio out of our home. I love what I do. I love teaching privately, working from home, and I love the internet for being able to connect with other teachers. I'm always reading to learn more about piano pedagogy and trying to dream up ways to teach more effectively and meaningfully.

So, what do I blog about? I think of my blog as a journal of my piano teaching adventures, so I blog mostly for myself, as selfish that as might sound. I like to write about whatever I'm currently doing with my students: activities during lessons, worksheets I've created, games, group classes, recitals, summer camps, etc.. I blog about whatever I'm thinking about in connection with teaching and piano pedagogy.

I generally update my blog 2-3 times a week. I currently have over 2000 email subscribers and 3000 facebook followers. It's been a blast to blog and it has led to some wonderful connections and friendships with other teachers around the world.



Blogging has led to some interesting endeavors and opportunities.

A couple of years ago, I added an online shop onto my blog, where I sell digital resources. There are a ton of free printable downloads available on my blog, but the Shop is where I sell a few of my bigger projects: summer camp curriculums, music history resources, rhythm cards, an interval game, etc.. This has been fun, and also a nice way to supplement my teaching income.



I've also gradually gotten into public speaking — something I never saw myself doing — but I've discovered that I really like public speaking because it really is just like teaching, which of course I love doing. So I've been giving workshops and presentations for MTNA local chapters in Ohio and Michigan — opportunities that arose due to someone aware of my blog. Most recently, I had the opportunity to speak at the OhioMTA state conference in October. And today, I feel incredibly honored to be able to speak for you here at MTNA. :)



My biggest venture from last year was to start something I call the Piano Teacher Institute with Joy Morin. There is a real need for more ways and easier ways for piano teachers to seek continued education, and the internet provides the perfect opportunity for this. So, I invested a great deal of time to develop an intensive, online course for piano teachers. It runs for 6 weeks, for 10 teachers at a time. For those 6 weeks, we spend time reading, studying, talking, and writing about topics related to piano teaching. It's intended for basically anyone who is interested in studying piano pedagogy and in becoming a better teacher. I've been offering this course three times each year. Registrants so far have been teachers from all around the world. More info is available at institute.joymorin.com.

As I said earlier, I tell you my story only because I want you to see my perspective, and perhaps help you imagine what the possibilities might be for YOU, as young professionals entering the world of freelancing and self-employment or entrepreneurship. The internet has the potential to help you make your dreams and goals possible, and help you with your daily work and your art. So, this is the big question to ask yourself: How can YOU leverage the internet for the causes that you believe in, and the work/art that YOU do? That is precisely what we will be spending the rest of our time today talking about.

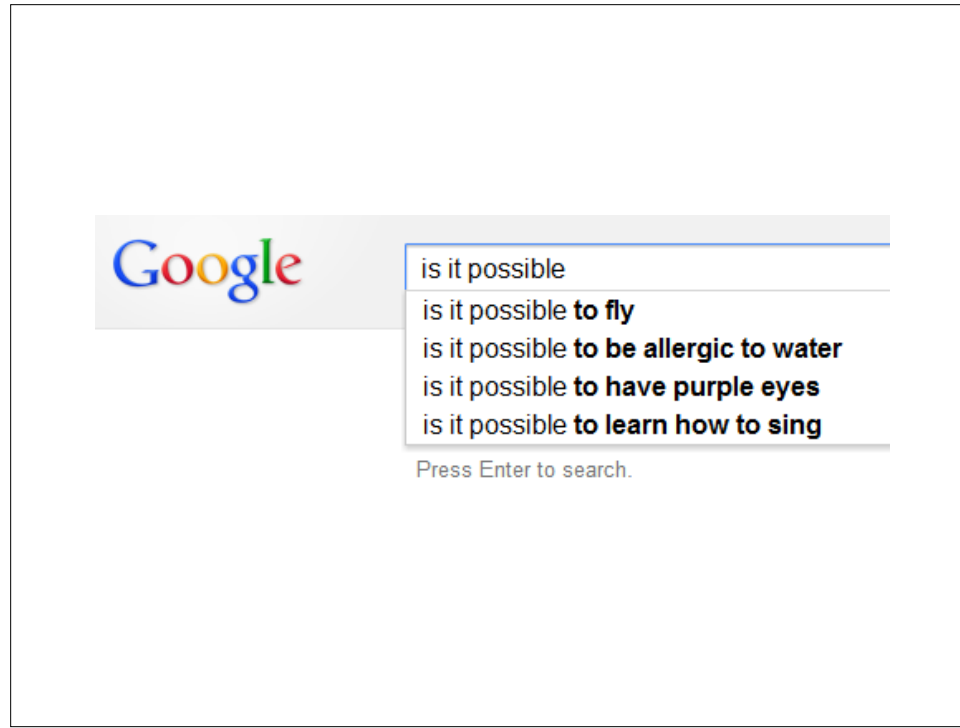
1. **The Power of the Internet.**
2. Harnessing It.

So let's jump in and talk more about the power and potential of the internet, and how the internet has truly changed the world and the way we go about our work, play, connections.

DIY

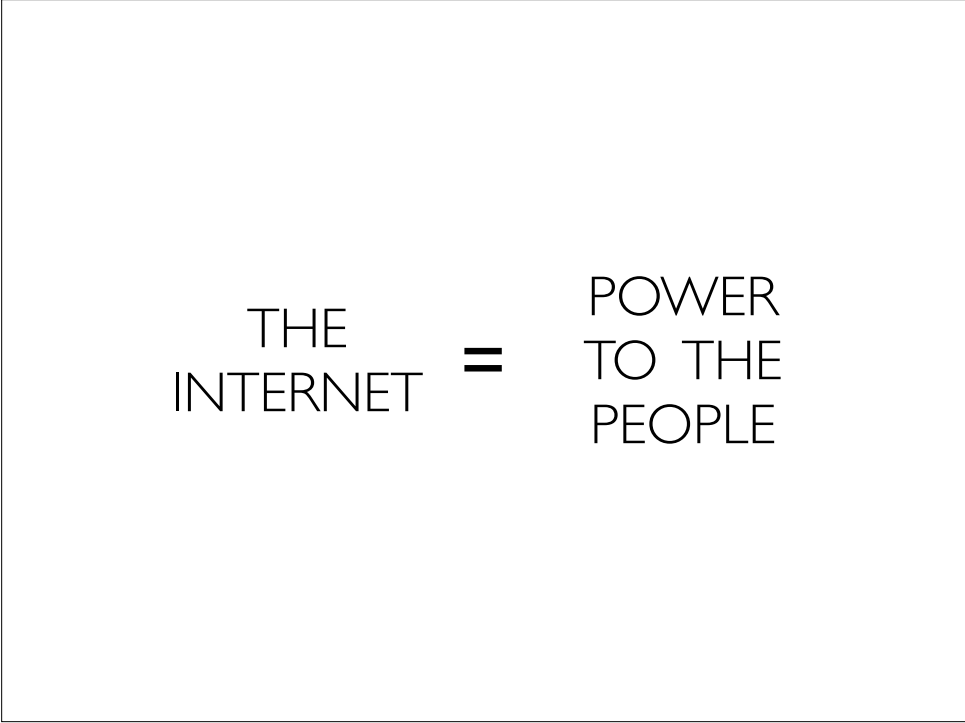
The world we live in...is the age of DIY: Do It Yourself. As you well know, it seems everybody today is a photographer. Everybody is a web designer. And everybody is a crafty-type person thanks to Pinterest. And I'll argue that everyone today is a blogger, if only through Facebook and Twitter.

Thanks to the internet, everyone has a voice. This has helped bring about the Information Age. There is so much information on the Internet, right at our fingertips. Google allows us to research ANY topic that we might think of...



In the information age, there is no shortage of information that's for sure. ;)

This can be good and bad. The overabundance of information means as consumers we must become skilled at sifting through information to find what's relevant and valuable.



THE
INTERNET = POWER
TO THE
PEOPLE

But the point is, the internet means that the power is now with the people. Thanks to the internet, no longer are publishing companies or record labels the only gateway for determining what books or music is available to the masses. The internet allows anyone to distribute a movie, a YouTube channel, a music album, an ebook or print book, or a piece of sheet music. Anyone can become a celebrity, in their own way. Anyone can use crowdsourcing (such as Kickstarter) to launch their business, fund a recording project, an app release, or whatever.

Anyone has a chance, and now the power is with the people to decide what is valuable and what will succeed.

CASE STUDY: Valentina Lisitsa



As a case study example here, let's talk about Ukrainian pianist Valentina Lisitsa. Valentina is probably the first pianist to use social media (in this case, YouTube) to kickstart her career as a pianist.

Six years ago, she was living in North Carolina with her husband, trying to make her career as a pianist work out. She even considered making a career out of professional chess playing for a time. But she began uploading videos of herself playing to YouTube. She started gaining a massive following on YouTube and eventually, was signed to a major record label and soon after gave a London concert debut at the Royal Albert Hall. She has since been traveling / performing, and she released a recording of the complete Rachmaninov piano concertos.

As of now, she has over 170,000 subscribers to her channel. Thanks to the internet, Valentina was successful in getting herself noticed.



There is a reason that the icon for the internet depicts a globe. The world is getting flatter, thanks to the internet. Making connections is easier than ever.

The internet allows people to create communities centered around a shared interest.



9,370

As an example: This represents the number of members in The Art of Piano Pedagogy facebook group as of Friday, March 20, 2015. This number represents a huge amount of diversity among piano teachers: Many different music cultures, teaching philosophies, approaches, goals, etc.

How many of you are members of this Facebook group? [raise your hands] There are quite a few other Facebook groups for piano teachers as well, including: Professional Piano Teachers, Piano Teacher Central, Piano Teacher FunMakers, and others. These are valuable communities to be a part of. We have so much to learn from each other through sharing our knowledge and experiences. I'm a big believer that the better we understand other people around us, the better we understand ourselves.

If I had to identify ONE thing that has impacted the profession of piano teaching the most in the last 10 years, I think it would be the rise of these kinds of forums and Facebook groups. Piano teachers are far more connected than ever before, thanks for the internet. Ideas are traveling faster than ever. This will and is changing the face of piano teaching. It's an exciting time to be a piano teacher.

1. The Power of the Internet.
2. **Harnessing It.**

So now, let's talk a little more in specifics about HOW to harness the power of the internet for your cause and the work/art that you do.

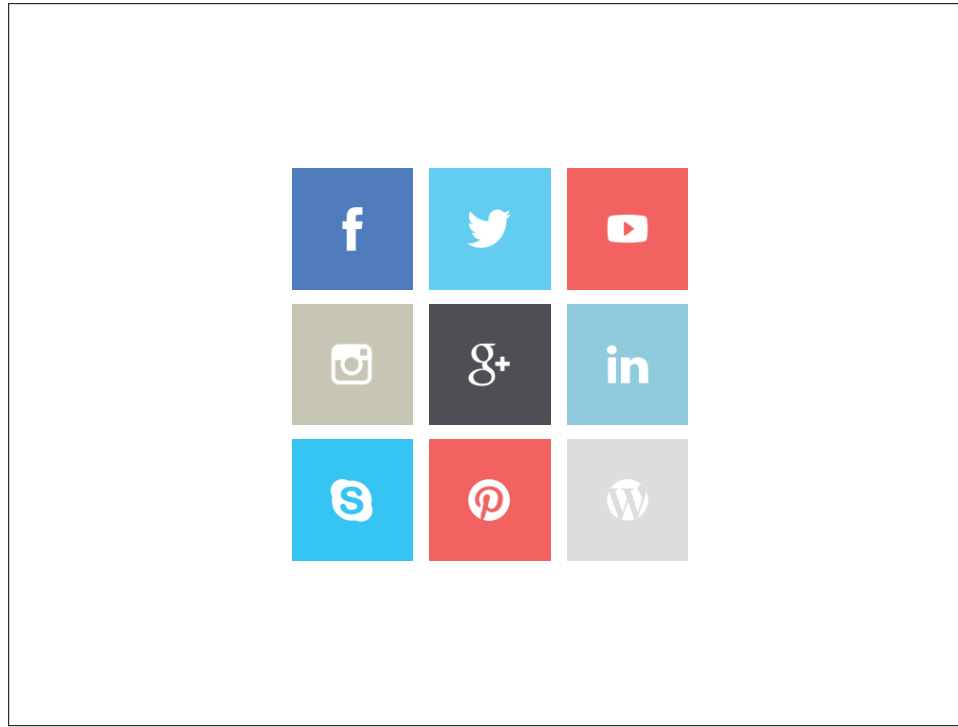
~~Should I blog?~~
HOW do I blog?
^
well

You might have asked yourself, when you read the description for this session today: “Why would I want to learn about blogging? I’m not interested in starting a blog.”

So, let’s get something straight: A blog is a “web log” by definition — meaning, an online journal, something regularly updated.

As I briefly alluded to earlier, everyone is actually a blogger, just through your Facebook statuses, Tweets, Instagram posts, or whatever platform you might choose to use. We’re ALL bloggers.

So the real question is actually NOT “Should I blog?”, but: “HOW do I blog?” and furthermore “How do I blog well?”



Not only are we bloggers, but we are all marketers today. Marketing used to be about large companies using mass marketing to practically dictate our needs and wants. TV ads and direct mail that interrupt our time and unwantedly demand our attention. Mass marketing still exists to some extent (think of the Super Bowl ads), but the internet is completely changing marketing. Now, marketing is about connecting with people, telling stories, forming relationships, and sharing. This is the kind of marketing we as musicians all do in some way or another. The internet is making these things easier for self-employed people and entrepreneurs.

I imagine that many of you are, or will be, managing a Facebook page for your studio or for yourself as a musician, in addition to your personal Facebook page. Or it could be Twitter, YouTube, or any of these social media platforms. Strive to build a community.

I have some advice to share today, learned partly through research — but mostly through lots of experience and trial-and-error. So, what follows now are a series of tips, or “Joy’s Rules for the Internet.” ;)



“Be genuine.”

First of all: “Be genuine” on the internet.

Although yes, we certainly tend to put our best face forward on social media, we need to at the same time be sure to be genuine. It’s so easy to tell when someone is NOT being genuine, whether in person or on the internet, so just don’t do it. People want to connect with genuine people, people who will be real with them. Be vulnerable sometimes, and always down-to-earth.

“Be genuine. Be remarkable. Be worth connecting with.” — Seth Godin

Part of being genuine means blogging primarily for yourself. Blog for yourself #1, for self-enjoyment. Blog because it clarifies your thoughts. Blog to become a better writer. Blog because it allows you to journal and document your growth and your journey through life. If you are blogging for business, blog because you care about connecting and creating a community around your business. Blog for a cause you care about that is bigger than yourself.



“Be worth sharing.”

Joy’s Rule #2: “Be worth sharing.” There are a few things that I mean by this. First of all...

Never post anything you won’t still be proud of 20 years down the road. I’m not just talking about being professional online about your selfies and facebook photos. :) We all know that. This goes much deeper than that: In your work and your art, try to write and create only things that you will be absolutely proud of even decades later. To state it more positively, strive to be so good that you will be impressed by your younger self as you grow older.

“Focus on your followers.”

Although you certainly might be interested in growing your community of followers, be careful about how you do it. The goal is not to create the largest community that you can, filled with anybody and everybody, but the goal is to have a tight community where every member is truly devoted to the cause. Three quotes from Seth Godin:

- “EVERYONE is not your customer.”
- “I made a decision to write for my readers, not to try to find more readers for my writing.”
- “Selling to people who actually want to hear from you is more effective than interrupting strangers who don’t.”

(1) So, when you create something and share it online, don’t ask people to share your stuff for you (please share, please like, etc). I’m sure many will disagree with me on this one, probably even certain marketing books — but it’s one of my own personal rules for the internet. Rather than asking followers to share my work, I personally prefer to focus on creating content that I think will be worth sharing and then trust that followers will share it [if it’s good enough]. “Be undeniably good. No marketing effort or social media buzzword can be a substitute for that.” — Anthony Volodkin

(2) Be careful with self promotion outside of your group of followers. Remember: What kind of message does that send to your followers if you are constantly asking for more followers? Isn’t it better to focus on connecting and connecting well to the followers you already have?



“Be generous.”

"Be generous." When it comes to social media, very often the more we share, the more we gain. We benefit through service. Seth Godin says: “The connection economy thrives on abundance. Connections create more connections. Trust creates more trust. Ideas create more ideas.”

But also be business savvy. I think every self-employed person needs to set a goal for how much they need to earn to make a comfortable living, and then make a plan to make it happen.

Some of you may want to consider employing something called a “Freemium” model of marketing. (Google it!)

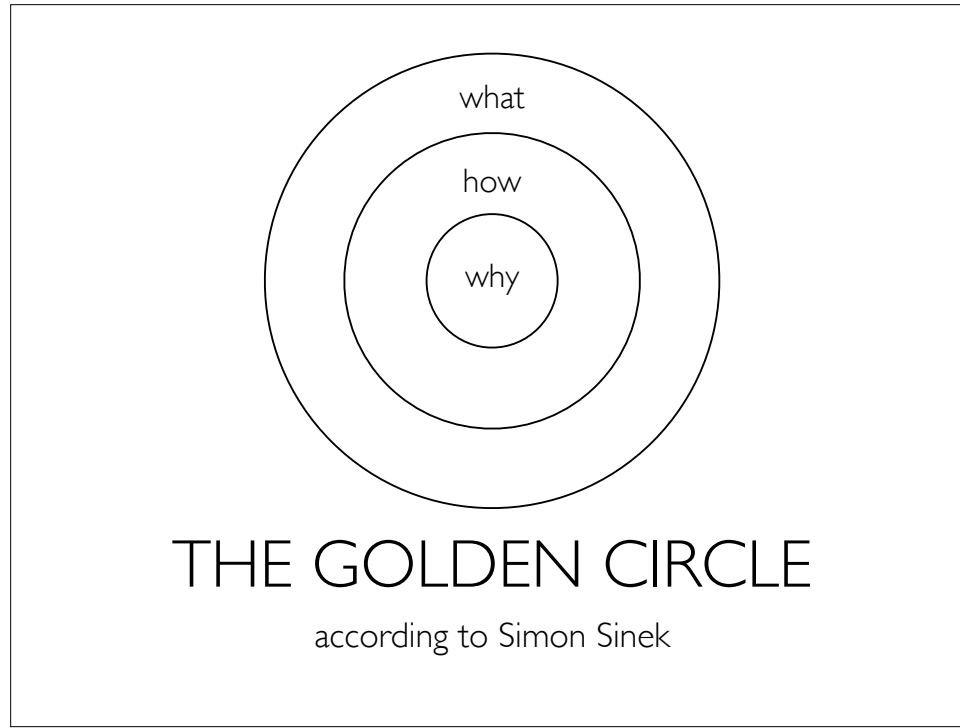
If you are going to give away a worksheet or printable, really give it away. Don't require that they subscribe to your email list first. Allow people the chance to give their email to your subscribers list **FREELY**. It's not about only numbers anyway. The goal is to build a honed-down list of your most devoted followers who love what you create — not to have a huge list of people who signed up only to get a free PDF you dangled in front of them like a carrot. “Marketing is a contest for people's attention.” — Seth Godin



“Tell stories.”

This is a fun tip. When you blog, tell stories. Don't tell us about the latest accomplishment without telling us about how it happened. Don't tell us about the latest worksheet you created without telling us what inspired you to create it, telling us how your student responded to it, or telling us how much it helped your student understand the concept.

Telling your story is about having a consistent message. Or a mission statement or sorts. This is why in pedagogy class we have to write a teaching philosophy. This is why companies have taglines, and so do blogs.



Some months back, I watched a TED talk by Simon Sinek. How many of you are familiar with TED talks? [raise your hands]

In Simon's TED talk, he described something he calls The Golden Circle. He says most companies or self-employed persons know WHAT they do, and they might even know HOW they do it, but they don't really clearly communicate WHY they do it. "Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell." — Seth Godin

Let's talk through some examples. Consider the The Golden Circle for these two companies: Walmart and Apple.

Ask yourself: What is MY tagline/mission? What is my purpose and calling? WHY do I do what I do? What do I believe in? WHY do I work or create my art?

CASE STUDY: H.O.N.Y.

aka, Humans of New York



How many of you have heard of Humans of New York? [raise your hands] HONY is a project started in 2010 by Brandon Stanton. His initial goal was to create a catalogue of NYC's inhabitants, so he set out to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers and plot their photos on a map. Somewhere along the way, HONY began to take on a much different character. He started collecting quotes and short stories from the people he met, and including them alongside the photographs. Taken together, these portraits and captions became the subject of a vibrant blog.

When you think about it, what made HONY become popular isn't just the photography. And not because the humans of NYC are so much more incredible than anywhere else. But because NYC represents all of us, and it represents the whole world. Our struggles, our joys, our laughs, our work, our art, our relationships. We humans are naturally curious and interested in other humans. We like stories. That's essentially what Brandon is: a storyteller.

HONY now has over 12 million followers on social media. People worldwide follow to get daily glimpses into the lives of strangers in New York City.



“Be interested in people.”

"Be interested in people." Networking is about being interested in people. Plain and simple. By being interested in others, you connect with people. As we said earlier, understanding other people helps us understand ourselves. So, with social media or “blogging,” we are interested in people. We are interested in making connections with others and serving others.



“Be consistent.”

"Be consistent." Create a blogging schedule and stick to it. Make it reasonable. Tell readers what they can expect. Be disciplined.

Don't be in love with the IDEA of blogging. You must love the idea of spending your life blogging. (It's the same with being a musician, you know. You can't be in love with the idea of being able to play the piano, you have to actually love playing/practicing the piano.)



“Value meaning.”

"Value meaning." Create and post stuff that you think is meaningful, educational, and engaging. Don't try to just become viral — stay consistent with your message, your mission, your story. People care about the MESSAGE and the CONTENT and the STORY. Think bigger than yourself.



I hope our conversation today has been useful and practical for you, regardless of the way that you use and interact with social media. The final thought today then, is: Take advantage of the tools out there that the internet offers. Go forth, tell your story. Do your work and your art, and tell us WHY you do things. Share, connect others. Dream big.

Let's end today with a quote:

“The competitive advantages the [today's] marketplace demands is someone more human, connected, and mature. Someone with passion and energy, capable of seeing things as they are and negotiating multiple priorities as she makes useful decisions without angst. Flexible in the face of change, resilient in the face of confusion. All of these attributes are choices, not talents, and all of them are available to you.” — Seth Godin