

# Blogging for business (and pleasure)

Being an expat can be an isolating experience, but thanks to the World Wide Web, staying connected, occupied and even employed has gotten a whole lot easier. We've spoken to three women living abroad who are using their blogs to update those back home, find fulfilment – and generate income.

By Chantal Panozzo | When she moved to Paris from the United States so her husband could pursue a job opportunity, Oklahoma-born Toma Haines knew she'd be labelled a 'trailing spouse'. But within a few months of moving to Paris, 'trailing spouse' was replaced with a new label, inspired by Haines' blog, *The Antiques Diva*.

## Antiquing across Europe

A year later, the blog, which focuses on where to go antique shopping in Europe, had 50,000 subscribers. And five years after that, when she followed her husband's job yet again, this time to Amsterdam, readers were begging her to give antique shopping tours of her favourite haunts. From there, an antiques shopping tour business – which quickly spread from Holland to Belgium and France – was born.

Today, Haines' business leads up to 48 tours a year. Each tour is highly personalised, so the variety and number of stores visited during a tour depend on clients' needs and interests as well as their preferred shopping pace. Most tours take place Thursday through Saturday at a cost of 90 Euros for a four-hour private tour, or 45 Euros for a group tour.

"Blogging didn't take me where I expected it to," says Haines. After all, *The Antiques Diva* blog was developed as a pre-cursor to a series of books Haines wanted to write on antique shopping in Europe. She simply created the blog site to generate reader and publisher interest.

Thanks to the weakened U.S. dollar and suffering publishing industry, the timing for a series of travel books didn't pan out. But exclusive, private antique shopping tours, with local guides hand-picked by Haines, did.

## Coming soon, *auf Deutsch*

So now, after yet another move for her husband's career, 35-year-old Haines finds herself sitting in her new Berlin apartment not only contemplating overhead lighting and curtain rods, but also how to extend her blog-turned-shopping tour business to Europe's German-speaking regions by the fall of 2009. Currently, she's using her network to seek a bilingual German guide, as well as researching the area to form relationships with vendors.

But Haines also needs to generate new interest from clients. To expand her clientele, she typically starts with the target market she knows best – fellow expats.



© Jessica Cartwright

In Berlin, she's already joined the American Women's Club and The International Women's Club, and is ready to pursue activities offered by the British Decorative and Fine Arts Society to promote business. In addition, she writes for various publications like *Expatica* and *Chat, Chew and Chocolate*, plus The Hague's newcomer magazine – *Feel at Home in the Hague* – on the topics of antiques or antique shopping. She conducts speaking engagements as well.

Haines also uses non-traditional methods of growing her business. After visiting Brussels, for example, she posted a "Diva News Network" iReport on CNN about flea market finds around the city. It aired worldwide, giving her blog thousands of hits within one day and generating new interest in her shopping tours.

All these efforts help her blog (which is hosted by Blogger and free of cost) receive an average of 150-200 hits a day and 6,000 hits a month. Although Haines can't support herself with this business alone, it provides the funds she needs to "support her habit" of purchasing extravagant antiques.

"It's an excellent way to earn extra income," she says.



Jessica Cartwright of Swisstory Blog, with her husband Jace

Despite now having a business-based blog, Haines still keeps it personal. “After starting the tour business I felt perhaps it wasn’t professional to talk about myself anymore, but I realised quickly that this shift was a mistake. Readers read the blog because they like the tips, but they follow the blog because they feel a connection to me.”

### Reluctant protagonist

Fellow expat blogger Julie Galante, of This non-American Life blog, formerly based in Zurich and now living in Munich, couldn’t agree more with Haines’ assessment of the personal touch.

“As a blogger you are like a character in a story,” says Galante, who blogs about all things expat and travel, and has also worked as a professional blogger for global blog network b5media, *Slate* magazine, and was listed on the *Washington Post*’s blogroll.

Upon arrival in Zurich in 2005 (via Milan and the greater New York City area) though, Galante was resistant to blogging at all.

“I thought it was stupid – why would I put the details of my life on the Internet?” But slowly, she started to tell her story.

Over time it became more personalised as her comfort with being in the spotlight grew.

This non-American Life now has over 15,000 page views a month and Galante keeps the blog as interactive as possible by asking questions of her readers in a number of her posts. For example, in a recent post about the different photography classes offered for men versus those for women, she asked, “Does photography involve a competitive sport I’m not aware of?” Other times, her questions are as simple as “How was your Thanksgiving?” if she’s written about yet another Thanksgiving spent abroad.

Galante has also started an ‘ask the expat’ section of her blog where she answers a reader’s question every week on everything from “What is the cutest place to visit in Switzerland?” to “Are you planning to stay an expat forever?”

Galante uses Blogger (the same free blog hosting site used by Haines) to format her blog and take advantage of all its blogging features. In addition, she pays \$7 a year for her own domain name, zurika.com. Otherwise, her site would feature ‘blogspot’ in the address, clearly showing that the site originates from Blogger as Haines’ does.

### Featured blogger links:

#### The Antiques Diva:

<http://antiquesdiva.blogspot.com>

**This non-American Life:** [www.zurika.com](http://www.zurika.com)

**Swisstory Blog:** [www.swisstoryblog.com](http://www.swisstoryblog.com)

### How to start your own blog:

1. Find a blogging host. Popular hosts requiring no software installation include: Blogger.com, Wordpress.com and LiveJournal.com. (These sites are free, but many allow you to purchase your own domain name for an additional cost. For example, Cartwright purchases swisstoryblog.com from Blogger for \$10 a year, thus avoiding having ‘blogspot’ in her domain name.)

2. Pick a topic you think you can write about endlessly for the foreseeable future. Name your blog accordingly.

3. Write your first post.

4. Tell people about your blog: in person, via email, via Facebook and by commenting on other blogs.

5. Add links to other blogs on your site. Hope writers of the blogs you list will notice, and return the favour.

6. Put ads on your blog, if you hope to make money:

- Amazon ads (<https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/>) pay about four per cent of something purchased by a user who has clicked on an ad and bought directly.
- Google ads ([www.google.com/adsense](http://www.google.com/adsense)) pay per click. Money earned varies according to traffic volume and traffic source.
- BlogHer ads ([www.blogherads.com/user/register](http://www.blogherads.com/user/register)) pay per page viewed – about \$4.50 per 1,000 impressions.

7. Post at least two-three times a week to keep people coming back.

### The Antiques Diva’s guide for building a blog turned business:

1. Post frequently and consistently.

2. Network within your target market and take advantage of free advertising opportunities.

3. Share enough personal details in the blog to keep it interesting.

4. Don’t hard sell to your readers – too much sales talk and not enough content will turn readers off.

5. Don’t post comments on other people’s blogs just to attract attention to your own. Only post thoughtful comments. And if someone leaves a comment on your blog, post one on theirs, thanking them for their visit. Being polite in the blogosphere goes a long way.

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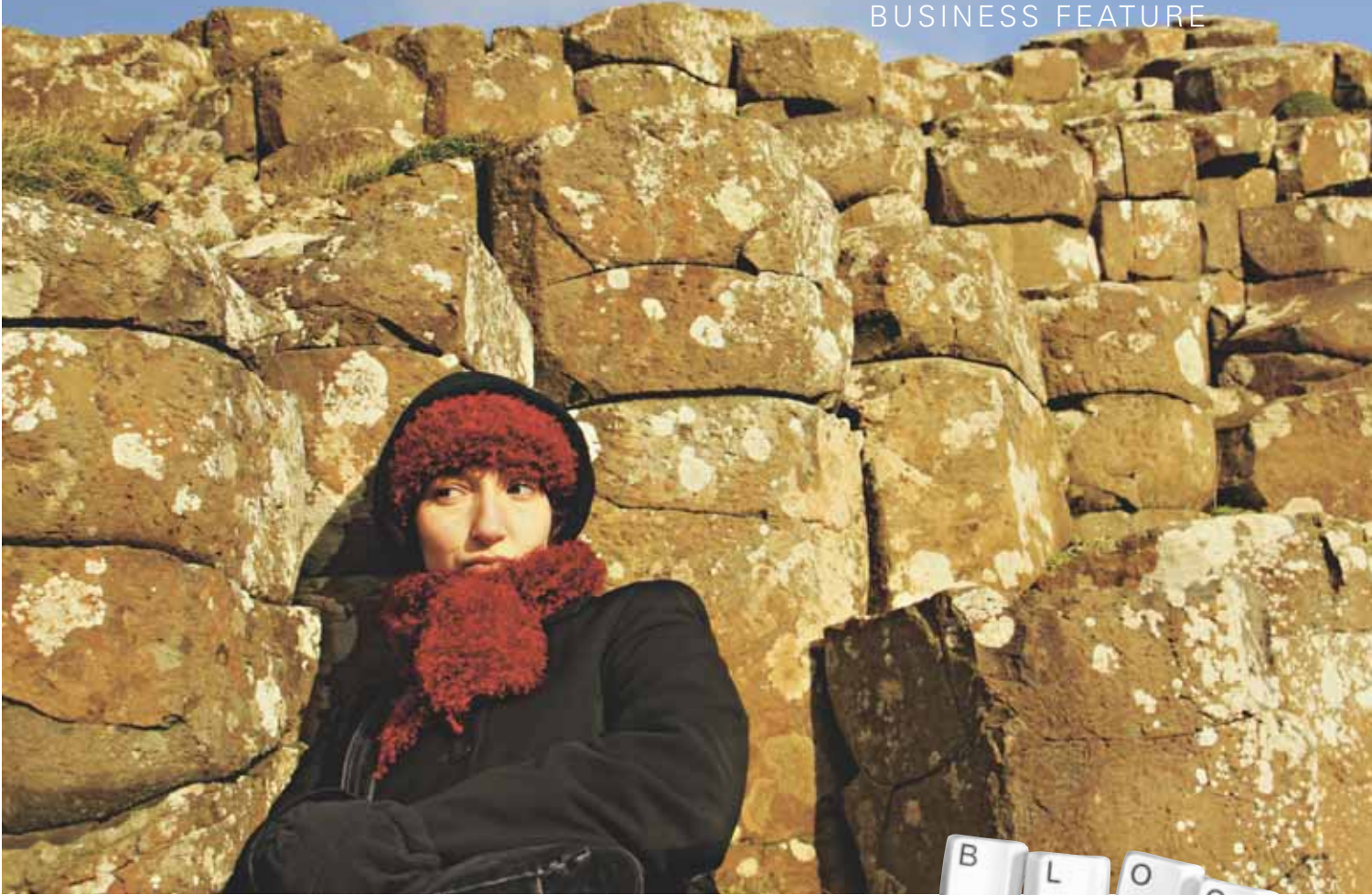
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Julie Galante of This non-American Life



Many readers discover This non-American Life while Googling for information on expats in Germany and Switzerland. Then they just keep coming back for more.

### Groceries, and a whole lot more

“I mainly blog for the enjoyment but the more I blog, the more readers I get, and the more income I receive,” says Galante, who uses three main ad types to generate revenue.

The first, BlogHer ads, are sold by category (Galante’s blog is categorised as a travel blog). BlogHer sells general ads across thousands of blogs. These ads pay per page viewed at a rate of about \$4.50 per 1,000 impressions. BlogHer is the main advertiser on Galante’s site.

Secondly, Galante posts Amazon ads, which pay her four per cent of a sale if someone clicks on the ad and then buys the featured product.

The third type of Galante’s advertising income comes from Google ads, which are pay-per-click and mirror her blog’s

content automatically. Google ads might show up for cheap airfares in Europe from kayak.com, or good deals on Munich hotels from EuropeUpClose.com. The amount per click varies greatly and is difficult to quantify except to say that all three sources of Galante’s advertising income add up to less than \$200 per month. But according to Galante, indirect revenue (sales of her art or writing initiated through her blog) is more lucrative than the advertising revenue.

Currently writing a novel on expats in Europe, Galante has no blogging regrets despite her early apprehension. “I blog mostly because I enjoy it and I think it has potential. Plus it’s grocery money for doing something that I like and since I’m writing a novel, the web presence would certainly help market the book.”

### Career online

Another expat, Jessica Cartwright, of Swisstory Blog, has made a career from the Internet. She’s been a marketing assistant at a web development company, an

online marketing manager for a travel company – where she first learned about blogging – and now is an e-business project manager in Zurich.

While her blog, Swisstory Blog, was born as a journal to connect with friends and family back in her native Ohio, she just couldn’t help herself from trying to increase readership by exploring which articles attracted the most traffic and which ads made her the most money.

Currently, Cartwright finds Amazon ads bring her the most revenue.

“It’s interesting to think that people come and order a hundred dollars worth of Amazon books that I recommend in the ads on my blog,” she says. When they do, that \$100 brings Cartwright about SFr 4.50.

To post Amazon ads on their blogs, both Cartwright and Galante went to Amazon.com and joined the Amazon Affiliate Program, which allows them to advertise Amazon products on their sites and make money when people visiting their blogs follow the links to Amazon



© Toma Haines

The Antiques Diva, Toma Haines

and buy products. Although it is possible to make up to 15 per cent in referrals by advertising Amazon products, most only amount to about four per cent of the total sale.

### Expat magnets

To boost her revenue stream by attracting new readers, Cartwright writes articles that she knows are big draws for people. “I know it works because I’ve got tracking software,” she says.

Cartwright finds some of the most popular searches include ‘expat in Switzerland’, ‘moving to Switzerland’, and ‘that fee you have to pay for television’. So she balances a mix of stories her mom would want to read with those people moving to the country would be interested in.

To write keyword-rich content, Cartwright uses SEO, which stands for search engine optimisation. By using keyword applications like Google’s Adwords tool (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>), she can see what people are searching for and can develop content accordingly.

“It sounds complex, but it isn’t,” says Cartwright. In the end, it really just means using the right combination of words that people are searching for, and letting Google spider the site and find them. The result is Cartwright’s site pops up high in the search rankings for those keywords.

Cartwright also contemplates how personal to make her blog. At the moment, it’s more factual than personal. Cartwright has certain guidelines she follows as to things she will and won’t post.

For instance, she’ll never post a place she’s travelling to in advance, only after the fact. And her husband Jace sometimes edits the photo choices. “Some things are just for us and not for the blog,” he adds, from across the living room.

“If I can keep visitors coming in, I might be able to quit my job and live off the click revenue, you never know,” laughs Cartwright, “but mostly I do it for me so I can record the adventure years of our lives.”

### Selling an international dream

Cartwright’s blog boasts over 4,000 monthly readers from around the globe.

Galante’s readership is just as widespread, but much of it stems from the United States.

“Sometimes I’m surprised that over 50 per cent of my readership is U.S. based,” says Galante.

But maybe such wide-ranging readership for an expat blog does make sense. Because ultimately, these blogs are offering more than antique tours, advice on living abroad or travel stories. The Antiques Diva, This non-American Life and Swis-story Blog have one thing in common – they are selling a dream.

“Expats seemingly live a fairy tale existence and readers love seeing the joys and struggles that come along with living the dream,” says Haines.

### More successful bloggers – in Switzerland and abroad

#### Stephanie Booth – Climb to the Stars

<http://climbtostars.org>

Stephanie Booth lives in Lausanne, and has been blogging in French and English since 2000. Her blog, Climb to the Stars, is one of the most popular in Switzerland and was one of the first French-language blogs. She moved to Switzerland when she was two, and is part British and part Swiss. She is a full-time blogging consultant and over the past three years has given talks on blogging and social media to a wide range of clients.

#### Penelope Trunk – Brazen Careerist

<http://blog.penelopetrunk.com>

Penelope Trunk writes about syncing work life and personal life on her blog turned company, Brazen Careerist, which boasts 30,000 subscribers. The Brazen Careerist website features a community of young professionals voicing their opinions on careers, work and life – and how they are actually one in the same. Trunk is also the author of *Brazen Careerist: The New Rules for Success*, which is based on advice from her life and blog.

#### Catherine Sanderson – Petite Anglaise

[www.petiteanglaise.com](http://www.petiteanglaise.com)

Petite Anglaise, a blog written by Paris-based British expat Catherine Sanderson, is one of the most popular blogs in Europe, boasting over 100,000 hits per month. Sanderson’s book, *Petite Anglaise*, based on the story of her blog, was published in 2008, and tells a true story about the relationships we build through blogging – and how they can affect the ones we have in real life.