

Lorraine Elliott documents her obsession with food through her writing and photography.



We all know people who blog. But how many actually make a living from it? Meet three women who are paid to blog about their passions. By Valerie Khoo.

So you love cooking and sharing recipes. Or you dream of travelling the world and writing about your adventures. Or maybe you have a passion for something else and just love writing about it. There are countless bloggers around the world who faithfully post their

thoughts online. Sometimes their musings may be read by an audience of one – and that's their cat looking over their shoulder as they type – while others can develop a loyal following, rendering them as key influencers in their community.

Indeed, the world is waking up to the reach of some bloggers – with

public relations professionals and marketing departments are courting them to write about their products or services. But before you throw in your job in the hopes that you can stay at home in your trakkies all day, typing random thoughts into your computer while fame and fortune are just waiting to bust

down your door, remember that it takes a hell of a lot of discipline before you'll see any rewards. Not to mention a big dose of commitment, some marketing nous – and hours that often exceed that of a full-time job. We meet three Australian bloggers who are carving a successful niche in online.

BLOGGER PROFILE:

Who: Lorraine Elliott, 37
Lives: Sydney
Blog: Not Quite Nigella
What: A food blog with reviews of restaurants and products, recipes, mouth-watering photography and all things that consume Lorraine's gastronomic obsession.
Where: www.notquitenigella.com

FOOD FANTASIES

Two and a half years ago, Lorraine Elliott was working in advertising as an online media strategy consultant. However, Lorraine says she started feeling frustrated at work, wanting to express herself more creatively. "My husband noticed that and thought blogging would be a great way to help me address this," she says. The result was her foodie blog which she named, with tongue firmly in cheek, Not Quite Nigella, a nod to uber-domestic goddess Nigella Lawson.

However, what started off as a creative outlet for Lorraine has turned into a full-time activity. Lorraine quit her job in January 2009 to concentrate solely on blogging. It's a "job" that not only provides her with an income, mainly through the advertising and sponsorship you find on the site, but also from writing assignments that have resulted from the exposure she's received from her blog.

Magical opportunities

The blog provides Lorraine with a means to live, but she says it's also given her opportunities she never expected. "A lot of my friends think that it's a bit of a strange, semi-fairytale life and, in some ways, it is. There have been some incredible opportunities," she says. "Last year, I was taken on a press trip to Austria and Dubai and that was really magical. I was hosted by the Austria National Tourist Office and Emirates and I was



A lot of my friends think that it's a bit of a strange, semi-fairytale life and, in some ways, it is.

travelling with journalists from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Get Up and Go*.

"I think, to their immense credit, both hosts realise the potential of blogs. Since mine is a food and travel blog – and the trip involved lots of delicious food – it was a good fit. They said to all of us that they wanted us to write what we honestly experienced and that's what my blog is about – my honest experience of an event."

While jet-setting around the world has been part of her blogging experience, there's also a lot of hard work involved in keeping her blog fresh and ensuring that her audience comes back for more of what she's serving up. "It's seven days a week from 9am to midnight," she says. "If I'm not writing, I'm cooking or visiting a restaurant.

I'm also trying to get advertisers. Answering emails and comments takes about three to four hours a day in itself. It's very time intensive on the computer – so cooking is a nice break."

Show me the money

Lorraine first started seeing her blog make money about a year after her first post. This is where her background in online media has helped. "There are always ad networks that are happy to sign bloggers but, because I worked in online advertising, I knew that the offerings were not at the market rate. So I decided to hold out and take advertising directly rather than going through an existing network. This means that the money isn't as consistent but it is higher than what the networks would give me and I have a greater control over the quality of the advertiser."

Although Lorraine's income has yet to match what she used to earn in her previous job – she discloses it's currently a quarter of what was a six-figure salary – she has plans to ramp this up. "I just concentrate on creating good content. The most challenging and frustrating thing is trying to convince advertisers to advertise. The most rewarding thing is the communication with my readers. I've always said my readers are incredible and they really are so loyal."

"I currently have about 100,000 readers a month and over a quarter of a million page views a month. I think a large part is waiting for marketers to catch up to the idea of sponsoring or advertising on a blog. A lot are surprisingly very resistant to the idea. I'd hope and expect this to change over time."

Regardless of the statistics, it's clear that Lorraine feeds off the response of her readers. "I love hearing from readers that my post brightens their day – that's really sweet. Or that the whole office is reading it and that they were discussing the story from that day. That really blows me away." ▶



Blogger Rachel Power with her husband Greg and daughters, Jasmine and Gemma.

Our blog has gained so much popularity we have been approached by companies.

PICTURES GREG POWER



BLOGGER PROFILE:

Who: Rachel Power, 30, **Lives:** Canberra
Blog: Great Aussie Road Trip
What: A journal documenting the four-month road trip taken by Rachel, her husband and two small children around Australia.
Where: www.greataussieroadtrip.com.au

TRAVEL THE COUNTRY

When Rachel Power and her husband Greg decided to pack up their daughters (then aged three and five) and travel around Australia in a campervan, they had to find a way to cover their mortgage, pay their usual bills and fund their trip. When they considered documenting their journey through a blog – written by Rachel with images taken by Greg, a professional photographer – they knew this was a project that had potential to attract sponsorship, in cash and in kind.

Rachel called on the help of a friend with marketing expertise and together they crafted a sponsorship proposal which helped to secure their first sponsor, Canon. “They could see the benefit in working with us and were a joy to work with every step of the way,” says Rachel. “They had decided that we fit their Canon PowerShot brand. About two weeks later into the discussions they realised our surname was actually Power and it was just all too perfect! They took title sponsorship and our project was then known as the PowerShot Great Aussie Road Trip.

“From there it was far easier to sell our project and the benefits to sponsors. With a name like Canon behind us, businesses started thinking outside the square of normal marketing and found we could work together very well.

“We didn’t just want to work with big companies, however, so this is where we decided to take in-kind or product sponsors. This allowed the sponsors to have their products used and reviewed as they would be when on the road – what they are designed for! I used the same proposal to approach these sponsors and, based on the value of their product, we designed a sponsorship package that was suitable to them.”

Paid to travel

The result was \$60,000 worth of sponsorship, comprising \$35,000 in cash and the rest in kind, such as a mobile fridge/

freezer supplied by WAECO. “Our sponsors gained indirect marketing of their product and we benefitted because we didn’t need to purchase the items we needed for the trip!”

The main journey went from June to October 2008 and Rachel says she spent between five to 20 hours per week posting entries and uploading photos. Since then she has been busy with a new addition to the family, a baby boy. While her blog gained popularity during their trip – thanks in part to promotion by her sponsors – it has maintained a steady level of traffic even though it’s more than 12 months since the trip ended. Rachel says this is because many people are looking for information on family-friendly travel.

To this end, Rachel has just relaunched the blog/website. “There is such a thirst for experience-based family travel information in the market. Nothing beats first hand

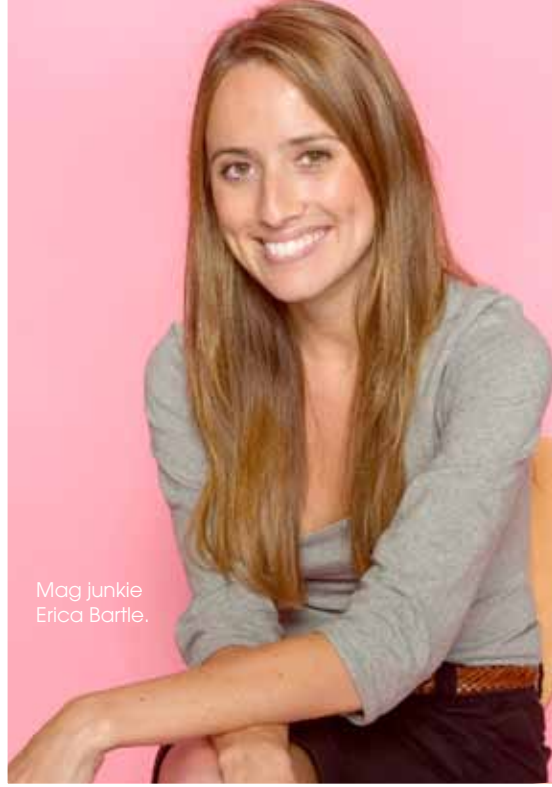
experiences to help you make your decision,” says Rachel, whose new incarnation of the blog will also feature the travelling experiences of other families as guest bloggers. “This will give us the avenue to follow our passion and to inspire so many more families onto our roads experiencing our country for themselves. We plan lots of little trips over the next 12 months or so until our son is a little older and we hope to hit the road in an extended trip possibly in 2012.

Sharing her passion

“While our blog initially focused on our journey, it has now gained so much popularity that we have been approached by companies to review their products – the sales process for me is so much easier! There is a huge gap in the travelling market as people just don’t realise the potential earnings from marketing to families. This blog has not only opened my

eyes to what is actually possible but it has now given us an avenue to continue our passion for photography and for travel and to share that with the rest of the world.”

In her “day job”, Rachel runs a consultancy that helps businesses create positive customer experiences, but fits her travels around her work. It’s an adventure that has landed the family on a segment of Channel Nine’s *Today Show* and regular radio interviews. However, it hasn’t all been a bed of roses. They returned from their main trip to find that the company that designed their initial website/blog had been bought out and Rachel couldn’t find anyone to talk to. “We basically had to write that off as a very expensive lesson! We are now designing our new site and blogs with a fantastic company who not only can’t do enough for us but have such incredibly wonderful ideas it has made me excited about the possibilities of where we are heading.” ▶



Mag junkie Erica Bartle.



BLOGGER PROFILE:

Who: Erica Bartle, 29
Lives: Mount Tambourine, Queensland
Blog: Girl with a Satchel
What: Erica blogs about her passion for glossy magazines and pens reviews that are read and respected by those in the industry – and those who want to be.
Where: www.girlwithasatchel.blogspot.com

A GLOSSY ADDICTION

Erica Bartle started blogging in January 2007 when she was then deputy editor of *Girlfriend* magazine. “I thought of the blog as a creative extension of the journalism I was practising – a way to indulge my muse without the restraints of word counts and subject matter and teen demographic considerations,” she says. “It was also something that could be mine – all mine – as I knew I would one day be leaving the magazine industry...”

Eight months after her first post, Erica left her job to concentrate on blogging and freelancing full-time. She says that’s when she first started to see some income resulting from her blog. These days, Erica says: “The blog provides around 60 to 70 per cent of my income – although some months it’s 100 per cent. My blog is the bread-and-butter, my freelance work is the Vegemite topping.”

The main source of the blog’s income is from banner and sidebar advertising and sponsored posts. Browse her blog and you’ll find advertisements ranging from up-and-coming fashion labels to other online portals.

“In a good month, the blog generates an income of \$2000-\$3000, which is

commensurate with a basic salary in the magazine industry. It should be making more but it helps my husband and I get by. We are passion people, as opposed to money people.”

Blog as a brand

“I probably realised about 12 months into it that I could make a half-decent income from blogging – my background in advertising, public relations and publishing helped me to develop a general overview of my brand, which still has potential to develop beyond the blog. In terms of increasing revenue, first the people must come; then you can justify setting revenue rates in line with the quality and size of your readership.

“I have been blessed in that I’ve never had to chase advertisers – they have found in the blog a brand that resonates with them and have chosen to align themselves with *GWAS* and its readers through ad support. Like most online enterprises, I’m looking at diversifying revenue streams in terms of paid content and also brand extensions and winning campaigns. Only this year have I started seriously thinking about ways to generate income which is more in line with the amount of work and effort I put into the site.”

It takes discipline

That work involves a disciplined approach to blogging. “I spend 8 to 12 hours on the blog each day – that involves generating content, such as writing posts and critiquing magazines, reading magazines, replying to email enquiries, replying to and approving comments, staying in contact with advertisers, scheduling and uploading advertising and sending out media kits. A lot of work goes into my blog, as the magazine reviews are quite detailed and I try to stay on top of industry trends and news.”

Considering the lack of marketing, her blog has already gained Erica a place as

a media commentator and her views on women’s magazines are often quoted in mainstream press. “I generally attract around 30,000 readers per month, which is quite a nice, niche readership: they are loyal and mostly industry people – magazine editors, PR people, marketing types – or interested parties, like students and glossy magazine obsessives,” she says.

Erica says blogging can involve more pressure than a daily newspaper journalist. “A blog is much more intimate, subjective and creative,” she says. “The most rewarding aspect of blogging is getting emails from readers who have connected with it in some way and show their appreciation.”

