

Book III

Blogs, Podcasts, and Vlogs



Chapter 1: Developing Your Strategic Mix

In This Chapter

- ✓ **Getting started with the media of your choice**
- ✓ **Setting goals**
- ✓ **Getting to know the community**
- ✓ **Maintaining your presence**

Many venues are available for marketing yourself or your company on the Internet. On social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook, you're somewhat limited in the type of material you can publish. However, by using any social media, you can leave breadcrumbs to the tailor-made content for your business marketing material, such as a blog, podcast, or video blog (vlog). When you have a blog, podcast, or vlog, you have total control over its content. If you build it and pique the curiosity of potential clients, they will come.

You have many issues to consider when determining the type of multimedia platform to use. In this chapter, we introduce you to blogging, podcasting, and vlogging and help you determine which components to add to your social media marketing mix.

Welcome to the Wild World of Multimedia Social Media

So many options, so little time. As a businessperson, you must make wise time investments. Participating in social media can be a huge time drain. If you don't choose the right components for your social media mix, or if you choose too many, you create high levels of frustration and stress. You're also making a huge time investment with little or no return, and you may end up letting other tasks or projects go by the wayside. Therefore, whatever you choose to do is vital to your success. For many busy professionals, time management is robbing from Peter to pay Paul.

Determining whether you need a blog

A *weblog*, or *blog*, is an ideal format for you to use to get the word out about your company. Think of Speaker's Corner in London: A bunch of people who

want to get something off their chests gather in a corner in Hyde Park and start babbling about whatever topic they want. Some speakers attract a huge audience, and others draw a miniscule but devoted audience. Blogs are a lot like that. They caught everybody's attention when Howard Dean used one to raise funds and keep in touch with his supporters in the 2004 presidential election. Since then, blogs have become mainstream. Many businesses now use blogs to keep customers informed, and performers use blogs to communicate with their fans. Photographers use blogs to show people their latest work, as shown in Figure 1-1.



Figure 1-1: Photographers use blogs to strut their stuff.

This list describes several advantages of blogging:

- ◆ **Search engines love them.** To do right by your blog, you must make the time to update it frequently. For that reason, search engines rank sites with blogs higher than sites without blogs. Every blog post is like a magazine article: It contains current and relevant information. As the needs and interests of your clients or your company change, your new blog posts reflect these changes. Search engines like blogs because the content is fresh and relevant — as long as you update it frequently, of course. The worst thing you can do is let a blog stagnate. Plan to post to your blog several times a week.

- ◆ **Your blog can grow with your business.** Because a blog is an ongoing work in progress, you can change your viewpoint or slant as time marches forward. When your marketing plans change, you can change your blog posts to reflect the new marketing schema.
- ◆ **Your blog can be optimized for search engines.** A blog can be optimized for specific keywords. You can also optimize each blog post for certain keywords. When your marketing changes, change the keywords to reflect the new content of your posts, and interested parties will be able to find your content by typing the applicable keyword or phrase into their favorite search engine.
- ◆ **Blogs are simple to set up and maintain.** You don't need to be a rocket scientist or a Web designer to create a blog post. In fact, creating one is almost as easy as writing an e-mail, a task you might perform several times per day. You simply log in to your blog, create a new blog post, and start typing. Figure 1-2 shows a post being created in WordPress. After you've had your say and publish the post, it's there for everybody and his little brother to see. Then you sit back and wait for the accolades about your brilliant post. Well, almost. You have to get people to come to visit your blog.

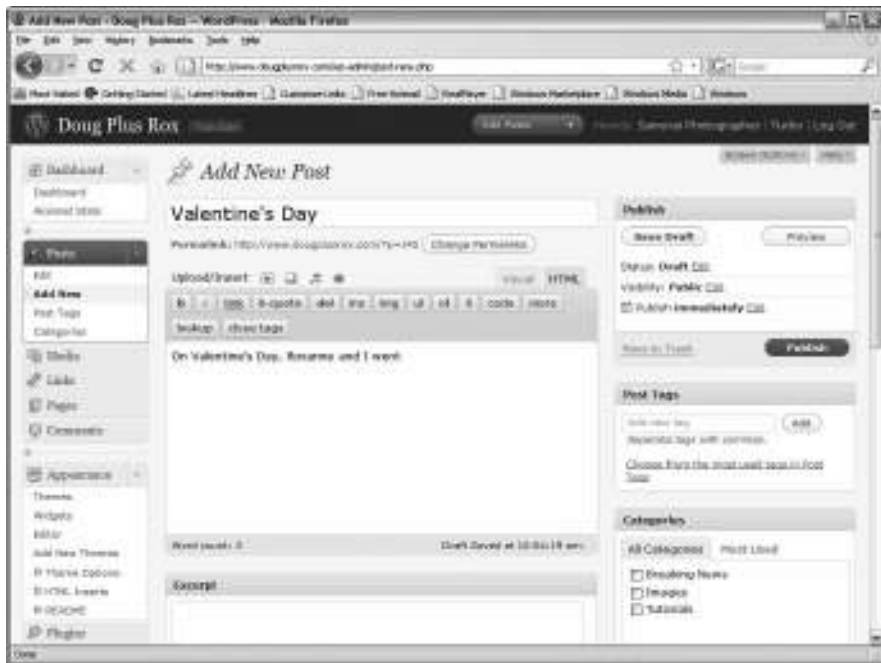


Figure 1-2: Authoring a blog post is as easy as writing an e-mail.

- ◆ **You can delegate some responsibilities.** Your blog can be a team effort. If you're the company marketing guru, you can start the ball rolling and then assign posting responsibilities to other members of your team. You simply add users to the blog and tell the blogging software which permissions they have.
- ◆ **Your blog can serve as the hub for your marketing efforts.** If regular blog posts are all you need to turn your target market into paying customers, create a catchy domain name, register it, find a hosting service, and upload your blogging software. As a matter of fact, many Web hosting services have built-in blogging software. All you need to do is tell a tech-support person to initialize it and you're ready to start blogging. After the blog is set up, you can optimize it so that search engines can find it.

We show you how to set up a blog in Book III, Chapter 2.

Podcasting to reach your audience

The written word and accompanying images are all well and good, but maybe your target customers have no time to read blog posts and prefer to listen to content while doing other things. Or, maybe your target market is highly mobile and prefers to receive their daily enlightenment from a portable device such as an iPhone or iPod touch. Podcasting is a natural fit if you're a ham or if one of your team members has a pleasing voice and the gift of gab. A podcast is the equivalent of an Internet TV or radio broadcast. The podcast has a beginning, middle, and end. The middle and the end are the same for each podcast, just like the beginning and ending of your favorite TV shows. The middle is the meat of the podcast, the information you want to distribute about your company or product.

Here are some podcasting guidelines:

- ◆ **Remember that getting started is simple.** All you need is a good microphone and software program to record the podcast and you're in business. (Well, it's almost that simple.)
- ◆ **Take your podcast to the next level of quality.** To do this, create a video podcast. Doug records a weekly podcast about digital photography, where he can show techniques not easily conveyed with words (see Figure 1-3). The National Association of Photoshop Professionals, or NAPP, uses its video podcasts at Photoshop User TV (<http://kelbytv.com/photoshopusertv/>) to entertain viewers and show new Photoshop techniques.



Figure 1-3:
This
podcast is
about digital
photo-
graphy.



If you want to show viewers how to use a piece of software or manage a task, consider a video podcast.

- ◆ **Capture the excitement of live events.** The group Professional Photographers of America (PPA) creates video podcasts for its annual Imaging USA event, attended by thousands of photographers.
- ◆ **Podcast wherever you are.** A podcast can be recorded almost anywhere. If you're creating a podcast at a live event, you can use a small handheld recorder — a professional-quality recorder, of course — or a small video recorder. If you're recording a podcast at home, all you need is a laptop computer, a good microphone, and a quiet room.

We talk more about podcasting and what you need to do to start one in Book III, Chapter 3.

Vlogging: Marketing with video

Podcasting and blogging are fun and productive ways to promote your business. But what to do when you need to create a series of videos only to promote a product or, for that matter, yourself? In this case, video blogging, or *vlogging* — the process of creating a series of videos about a product, service, or concept. You can use a video hosting service such as YouTube to host your vlog posts and then embed the video in your blog or Web site.



You produce vlog posts as needed rather than on a schedule. Though a vlog is similar to a podcast production, the frequency at which content is delivered is their biggest difference.

Vlogging has many uses. Try these two types, for starters:

- ◆ **Educational videos for customers or employees:** You can use video to let existing customers or potential clients take a behind-the-scenes look at your business. For example, if your company manufactures a product, a series of videos of this type is a helpful way to show clients and potential customers the quality and craftsmanship that go into your product.
- ◆ **Slice-of-life videos, such as a wedding photographer working with a bride:** A few still images sprinkled in a video give a prospective bride an idea of how the photographer interacts with her clients as well as a sample of the finished product.

When you create videos to promote your company, you need to put your best foot forward — no garbled sound or pixilation allowed. Many digital cameras are capable of capturing stunning high-definition video and stereo sound. For much better results, use the best video and audio equipment you can afford. Turn to Book III, Chapter 4 to find equipment recommendations.



Before jumping into vlogging, consider the bandwidth available for your Web site. (Ask your Web host, if you aren't sure.) If lots of people access your videos, you can exceed the allowable bandwidth for your Web hosting package and incur extra charges that may be quite hefty.

To bypass these charges, look at free video-sharing services that can host your videos, such as YouTube (www.youtube.com). Doug posts instructional videos about digital photography there. His channel is shown in Figure 1-4.

We discuss video podcasting and other hosting alternatives in Book III, Chapter 4.



Figure 1-4:
Posting
videos on
YouTube.

Determining Your Lofty — or Not So Lofty — Goals

Now that you have an idea about the type of media you can use to market your company or products, you can figure out how to mix them in with your current marketing strategies. To put your plan in motions, consider these points:

- ◆ **Your marketing goals:** If your goal is to provide customers with timely information about your product or industry, a blog is the logical choice. If you want to entertain and inform customers, a podcast is a great way to go. If you need to provide video information at irregular intervals, consider setting up an account on a video sharing service such as YouTube and then embed your vlog post in a blog or Web page.



A blog hosted on your own domain can serve as your Web site. The blog can be optimized for specific keywords that help potential customers easily find your online presence.

- ◆ **Any services or products you want to promote:** If you have company videos, you can create a blog or podcast or use one of the video sharing services to host them. Your ultimate choice depends on the technology at your disposal. If you're just dipping your toe into the shallow end of the pool, consider using a blog and reinforcing your marketing efforts with other forms of social media.

- ◆ **Multimedia content that you want to include:** A blog handles photos with no problem, and you can embed video into a blog. However, if you're considering combining audio, video, and images, try creating a podcast.
- ◆ **Your schedule:** If feeding information to your customers regularly is your goal, a blog is the perfect choice. If you want to combine multimedia content such as slide shows or videos, host your multimedia content at one of the video sharing services and embed the content in your blog.

You should devote at least a couple of hours a week to either a blog or a podcast. If you don't have the time, are a solopreneur with too much on your plate, or don't have an available and capable employee who can create the content for you, consider using other forms of social media. The only thing worse than an irregular blog or podcast is a poorly done blog or podcast.

- ◆ **Software you need:** If you're technically adept at working on your own Web server or you have an IT department, you can easily upload blog software to your Web site and install it. After it's installed, you're ready to start blogging, or hosting a podcast in the blog.



If you've decided to add a blog to your Web site, determine whether your Web hosting service provides the latest version of MySQL and PHP. Blogs require a database into which blog posts and other pertinent information is written and stored. The blog application is PHP based. The Web server parses the PHP code and delivers it to the client's browser. The latest version of PHP as of this writing is 5.31; the latest version of MySQL is 5.144. When choosing a Web hosting service, make sure it has the proper versions of both application installed to support the blogging software you choose.

Putting the Wheels in Motion

After you've decided to invest your time in a blog, podcast, or vlog, you have to get your ducks in a row. Before you jump headlong into writing your first blog post, recording your first podcast, or creating the first installment of your vlog, you need to do your homework. Follow these guidelines:

- ◆ **Study your competition:** If your competitors blog or create a weekly podcast, determine what type of information they offer for potential clients. For example, your competitors might present offerings that are beneficial to potential clients or are just blatant advertisements. If their messages consists of the latter, you have a leg up on your competition. However, chances are good that at least some of them offer valuable content about a similar product or service that you offer. Study the best contributions offered by your competition and then figure out how you can do better by providing more timely or pertinent information. Or perhaps your offering can fill an unfilled niche.

- ◆ **Read the blogs of the leaders in your industry:** To determine what type of information is considered the norm for your industry, read the blogs of industry leaders. Find out what type of information they're dispensing, how frequently they post to their blogs, and whether they have guest contributors, for example. Popular blogs have large audiences that read every post. That's because the information is timely, pertinent, and relevant. Study the topics that industry leaders blog about, and you'll form a good idea of what you can write about on your blog to build a large and loyal following. After you study popular blogs, put on your thinking cap and come up with a way to put your own spin on similar topics.
- ◆ **Study the podcasts of leaders in your industry:** Industry podcasts generally have a similar format. After all, they're all vying for the same target audience. Develop a feel for the format, and then use your own creativity to create a podcast that's similar to others in your industry, but with your company's personality and flair.
- ◆ **Create an editorial calendar:** Many podcasts and blogs run out of steam after a few weeks because the authors have difficulty staying on track and thinking of good content. You can alleviate this problem if you create an editorial calendar. See Book I, Chapter 3 to create a social media calendar where you can schedule time and topics.



Be sure to keep your editorial calendar filled a few weeks ahead of your current post or episode. Also, schedule a weekly time for brainstorming and for adding new content to your editorial calendar.

- ◆ **Practice:** Before you create your first podcast or blog post, pick a topic from your outline and write a blog post about it. Or, if your chosen media is podcasting, go ahead and create a podcast. After your practice session is complete, solicit some feedback: Contact friends or colleagues and tell them you want a critique of the session.

Introducing Yourself to the Online World

After you decide which social media format to use, it's time to put the rubber to the road. You may think that creating content for social media is as simple as writing your first blog post, creating your first podcast, or recording your first vlog and then uploading it to the appropriate server. But there's more involved than you would think.



From the beginning, your blog post or podcast is a reflection on your company. Think of the old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression."

Creating your first blog post

Before you “go live” with your blog, follow these suggestions:



- ◆ **Limber up your writing “muscles.”** Create several blog posts to get the feel of working with the software. Creativity is also involved.
- ◆ **Allocate enough time to complete the post from start to finish with no interruptions.** Inform your staff, or family members if you work at home, that you need an uninterrupted block of time. You don’t need to specify why. Your goal is to work with no interruptions.

As with any task, when you’re writing your first blog post, resist the temptation to check e-mail or voice mail.

- ◆ **If you’re adding images to a blog post, resize them for the post and upload them to the server.** This process doesn’t qualify as rocket science, but you have to know what you’re doing. If you try to add an image from your digital camera to a blog post, you distort the blog template because the physical size of the image is much larger than the dimensions of the blog template.
- ◆ **Consider your first blog posts as a beta test.** The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. After you create your first blog post, you may be tempted to upload it to your Web server and publicize it by e-mail and on other social media you use. But before doing so, send a copy of the post to other industry professionals you trust. Ask for feedback on the content and value of the post. Remember that your goal is to make an impression with potential clients, not to bore them with a relentless advertisement. After receiving feedback from colleagues, make any necessary changes and upload your post. Upload remaining posts on the schedule you think is right for your target audience.

We show you a lot more about blogging in Book III, Chapter 2.

Creating your first podcast

Before starting your first podcast, follow these suggestions:

- ◆ **Make sure you have all the equipment you need.** If you’re creating a video podcast, don’t use a Webcam to record episodes. Use the best camcorder you can afford. If you’re a photographer, your digital camera may be capable of capturing high-definition video. Refer to your owner’s manual.

You also need good audio equipment to record your podcast. Don’t use the microphone that’s built in to your computer. You’re likely to be too far away from the microphone to gain sufficient volume, and the sound quality won’t be up to snuff. You need a good condenser microphone to get the job done. If you record podcasts in the field or add live interviews to your podcasts, you need a professional handheld recorder.

- ◆ **Find a place to record your podcast.** Many podcasts are created in the comfort of a home or work office space. You need peace and quiet to create a podcast, for not only you but also your intended audience. A podcast episode interrupted by a plane flying overhead has *Amateur* written all over it. Even if you live or work in a noisy area, you can do some things to soundproof your studio. We describe them and more in Book III, Chapter 3.
- ◆ **Find a place to practice your podcast.** If you're not a natural entertainer or a good presenter, your results can be disastrous. Have you ever attended a presentation and fallen asleep from sheer boredom? A bad podcast can do that to you, too. If creating a presentation or speaking in public isn't your specialty, consider having someone else in your organization create your podcast. Know your strengths as a presenter and use them in your podcast.

Your first podcasts will help make you comfortable with the equipment and the nuts-and-bolts involved in creating a podcast. Unless you're a professional performer or a competent public speaker, you won't be perfect. We show you techniques for editing your podcast in Book III, Chapter 3.

- ◆ **Create a stockpile of completed podcasts.** Have at least six podcasts recorded before you go live with your site. Your first podcast introduces the online world to you and gives listeners an idea of what your podcast is all about. It can serve as the introduction for new subscribers as well.
- ◆ **Treat your first podcasts as test episodes.** Show the episodes to trusted colleagues in your industry and ask them for feedback about the content, value, and quality of your podcast. Your goal is to deliver valuable information to prospective clients; information that entices them to subscribe to your podcast and perhaps become loyal customers. You may have to redo a couple of episodes after you get feedback, but that's much better than putting something out there with flaws you may not have noticed during your review.

After you create your first podcast episodes, it's time to upload Episode 1 to your Web hosting service. After you upload the content, you have to create a way for people to find your podcast. The easiest way to do that is to register your podcast with iTunes. You can then use other social media sites to publicize it. You also need to create some kind of physical presence on the Web where people who don't subscribe to iTunes can view and download your content.

Creating a video Web log

A vlog, which bears a striking resemblance to a podcast, is a podcast's little brother. The big difference between them is in the frequency of the vlog. A podcast is — or, at least, should be — recorded regularly, just like a TV

show is. You can create a vlog, however, whenever you need to deliver new content to customers. Someone else can host your vlog. We show you a couple of popular services for hosting video in Book III, Chapter 4.

Here are a couple more vlogging suggestions:

- ◆ **Be sure to make the result as professional as possible.** As with podcasting, you should use the best video equipment you can afford. The content you create will be compressed by the video sharing service you upload it to. During the compression process, some data is lost, which leads to image degradation. If you work with a poor-quality video, it looks worse after you put it online. The same problem occurs with audio, which you know if you've ever watched a YouTube video in which the audio was garbled or the speakers sounded like they were underwater.
- ◆ **Practice using your equipment until you're comfortable with it.** Create a couple of test vlogs and show them to people in your industry whose opinions you value. Use their feedback to perfect the final result. You may have to rerecord your first attempts. When you're confident that you got it right, you're ready to upload your content to a video sharing service. At that point, you can embed the video in your blog or company Web site.

Getting noticed

Putting any content on the Web and expecting somebody to find it is like dropping the proverbial needle in the haystack and hoping someone sees it. You have to put in a little effort to make your cream rise to the top of your genre of social media.

Here are some things you can do to get noticed:

- ◆ **Use keywords in your posts.** This strategy helps with search engine optimization (see Book II, Chapter 2).
- ◆ **Allow people to add comments and trackbacks to your blog posts.** Add links so that people can rave about your content on other sites, such as Digg. Trackbacks, links, and raves on sites such as Digg act like breadcrumbs that lead people to your content. When you're considering using link backs and trackbacks, the more, the merrier — which means, of course, that your site is more visible on the Internet.

Mixing and matching your content with other social media

If you only create a blog or a podcast or occasionally upload a video to your favorite video hosting service, you'll never get the exposure you're looking for. Mix and match your content with other forms of social media.

You can set up a Facebook page relatively easily, and you can use Facebook tools to display blog posts and Twitter messages on your wall. You can also use Twitter to announce a new blog, podcast, or video.

Maintaining your enthusiasm

Setting up a blog or podcast takes a lot of work. You also spend more than just a bit of effort when you create vlog posts and upload them to your favorite video hosting service. In a perfect world, you get instant results from all your marketing efforts. But in a far-from-perfect world, your initial results may be somewhat disappointing. In fact, many people start using social media for marketing and stop when they don't see a reasonable return for the time they invest. The trick is to be persistent and continue creating posts, sending messages on Twitter, and adding content to your Facebook page. Use the other tricks of the social media marketing trade throughout this book to build a loyal base of fellow businesspeople and followers to build your brand and get your marketing message out there. It takes persistence on your part, but persistence pays.