Chapter 2: Building Your Blog

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A blog is a wonderful platform for getting your message out there. Creating a blog post is as easy as writing e-mail, and you can include images and multimedia content in your posts. If you're also hosting video on sites such as YouTube or Vimeo, you can embed this content in a blog post as well. You can include specific keywords in your blog posts to help potential clients easily find your posts. You can host a blog on your own domain, add it to your existing Web site, or use a free blogging service.

When you decide to go blogging, you have choices. You can host a blog on your own domain, or use an existing blogging service like WordPress or Blogger. If you decide to host a blog on your own domain, you can choose the software with which you make your blog posts and manage your blog. You can personalize a blog to match your personal tastes or existing corporate material. You can also modify a blog by choosing a theme (changing the page that the outside world sees, adding plug-ins that handle tasks such as defeating spam or adding widgets to the blog sidebar).

In this chapter, we cover the fine points of blogging, including securing a Web host, choosing blogging software, using blog templates, and creating blog posts.

Choosing a Blogging Application and Web Host

Hosting a blog on your own Web domain has some distinct advantages. You're in total control of the situation. You can choose a reliable Web hosting service, optimize your blog for search engines, and so on. If you choose one of the free blogging services, you're limited to the version of blogging software the service uses and the plug-ins you can use to tweak your blog.

If you're going to host your own blog, you need blogging software. These three blogging applications are the most popular: b2evolution, MovableType, and WordPress.

These PHP applications serve up content on demand. In the case of a database, the PHP code plucks data from a MySQL database that's hosted on the server. The PHP software is hosted on the server as well.

The blogging software stores your published posts and drafts in its database. The software also creates the links, which are also stored in the database. Other blog features give visitors a chance to provide feedback about your blog post. Each software application handles common tasks a tad differently.

If you've already secured a Web hosting service for your Web site, you can host your blog there as well, as long as it meets the requirements for the blog software you use. If you have no Web hosting service, choose one that meets the requirements of the blog software you're using.

The following sections briefly describe these three blogging solutions.

Getting to know b2evolution

`http://b2evolution.net`

This free blogging software b2evolution has been around for a while and has all the features you need. However, you don't find as many plug-ins or templates for b2evolution as you do with WordPress (see the later section "Getting wordy with WordPress").

Many Web hosting companies offer b2evolution as an option for their customers. Check with your Web hosting company, or the company you're considering, and ask whether it offers this application and can help you set up the blog. If you're tackling the installation yourself, the b2evolution Web site includes detailed information that shows you how to install the application on your Web server.

You can find out more about b2evolution and see a sample blog at `http://b2evolution.net/index.php`. Click the Demo tab to see a live blog.

If you decide to use b2evolution as your blogging software, your Web hosting service must meet these requirements:

✦ **Web server:** b2evolution is typically run on the Apache Web server.

✦ **PHP:** b2Evolution requires PHP 4.32 or later.

✦ **MySQL:** b2Evolution requires MySQL 4.1 or later.

Moving in on MovableType

www.movabletype.com

MovableType is another potent blogging solution. It also offers two business packages — one for 5 authors and one for 20 authors. As of this writing, the first business package is available for $395; the second, for $995.

If you decide to use MovableType 5.0 as your blogging solution, your Web hosting service must meet these requirements:

✦ **Scripts:** Your Web server must be configured to run CGI scripts written in PERL.

✦ **Web server:** MovableType typically runs on the Apache Web server version 1.3x or 2.x. Ask your Web hosting service if it meets the requirements for hosting Movable Type

✦ **PERL:** MovableType requires PERL 5.81 or later.

✦ **PHP:** MovableType 5.0 requires PHP 5.0 or later.

✦ **MySQL:** MovableType requires MySQL 5.0 or later.

Getting wordy with WordPress

www.wordpress.org

The WordPress blogging application is extremely popular. The software is easy to install and easy to use. Writing a blog post couldn't be easier with WordPress, and it has lots of templates available for you to get the look you want. If you have an existing Web site, chances are good that you can find a template to match your site. Using a little bit of wizardry, you can customize the template to include the banner from your main Web site.

If you decide to use WordPress for your blogging needs, your Web hosting service must meet these requirements:

✦ **MySQL:** WordPress requires MySQL 4.1.2 or later.

✦ **PHP:** WordPress requires PHP 4.3 or later.

Hosting your own blog for nongeeks

If you don't have a huge amount of technical savvy, the thought of setting up a blog on your own server may petrify you. Alternatives are available. When you're shopping for a Web hosting service, ask whether someone can set up the blog for you. For a nominal fee, the tech-support crew at many Web hosting companies can set up the database and blog for you. Or, your Web hosting company may offer robust tech support that walks you through the process of setting up the database and blog. Many Web hosting companies also have an extensive library of help material.

Using a Blog Hosting Service

Some people would rather have their teeth cleaned before attempting a technical task such as setting up a blog. If you fall into this category, you can get someone to host your blog for you. You won't have your own domain, but you can still blog.

If you have an existing Web site, you can have a Web designer add a link to your Web site from your hosted blog.

Setting up a new blog with Blogger

Google is everywhere. It even has a slice of the blog pie, with Blogger. If the idea of creating a blog on your own Web domain doesn't strike your fancy, you can still get the word out with a blog from the free service Blogger (`www.blogger.com`).

Follow these steps to set up your blog on Blogger:

1. **Launch your favorite Web browser and navigate to `www.blogger.com`.**

The Blogger home page appears, and you can find information about the service and other delights, as shown in Figure 2-1.

2. **Click the Create a Blog button.**

The Create a Google account page appears. You must have a Google account in order to use this service. A Google account is free, so fill in the blanks if you want to blog. If you already have a Google account, click the Sign In link.

3. **Create a Google account or sign in.**

The Name Your Blog page appears.

Figure 2-1:
Get your
free blog —
right here,
right now.

4. Enter a name for your blog.

REMEMBER

Choose the name wisely because you won't be able to change it later. The name you choose appears as a header in your blog, on your profile, and on your blog dashboard.

5. Enter a URL (or blog address) for your blog.

When you create a blog with Blogger, you're creating a subdomain. If you were to enter the URL *myblog,* the final URL for your site would be `myblog.blogspot.com`, as shown in Figure 2-2.

6. Enter the word verification and then click Continue.

The Name Blog page appears.

7. Enter a name and URL for your blog, and then click the Check Availability link.

Blogger checks to see whether the URL is available. If it isn't, you see an error message. Try another name in the URL field.

The Choose a Template page appears, as shown in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-2:
Almost signed, sealed, and delivered.

Figure 2-3:
Choosing a template for your blog.

8. Choose a template for your blog and click Continue.

The Your Blog Has Been Created page appears.

9. Click Start Blogging.

You're transported to the dashboard of your blog.

Creating a blog post with Blogger

After you create a Blogger blog, it's your job to create posts, and create them often. Creating a post is relatively easy. To create a blog post with Blogger, follow these steps:

1. Launch your favorite Web browser and navigate to the URL of your blog.

Your blog appears in live and living color.

2. Click the Sign In link.

The Blogger page appears.

3. Enter your Google account username and password, and then click Sign In.

You're transported to the dashboard of your blog. The dashboard is Mission Control for your blog. That's where you create posts, edit posts, and handle comments, for example. Notice that you have quite a few options. We describe the other options later.

4. Click New Post.

The New Post page appears. By default, the page appears with the Compose tab selected (see Figure 2-4). Notice that you have options here also. You can edit posts and pages and moderate comments.

5. Enter a title for your new post.

The title of any post is important. Use words that prospective clients may use to find your type of content at a search engine. Yep, you guessed it: You're *optimizing* the blog post for search engines, and Google just happens to be the granddaddy of them all. (It also happens to own Blogger. Talk about stacking the deck.) Turn to Book II, Chapter 2 for more about search engine optimization.

6. Enter the content of your post.

Use words that prospective clients will use to find content such as yours on the Web. When you're entering content, you can stylize the text using the buttons in the upper left corner of the dialog box in which you're composing the post.
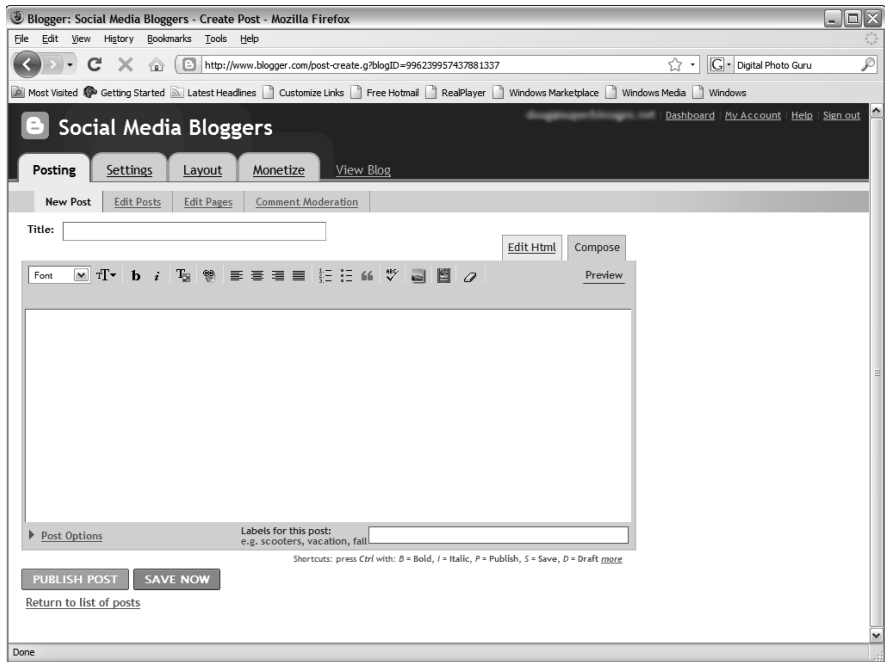
Figure 2-4:
I'm gonna sit right down and write a blog post.

7. Perform other options as needed.

You can stylize the text, change the font, add bulleted and numbered lists, change the text color, and spell-check the document.

8. Click Post Options.

A menu appears, giving you the option to allow comments on the post. You can also delay the day and time the post is published.

9. (Optional) Enter labels for the post.

Search engines recognize labels. Enter labels applicable to the content of the post.

10. Click Preview.

This option displays the post as it will be published. Even though you performed a spell check, you should check your grammar and make sure that the post is easy to understand.

11. Click Publish Post.

If you're including video in the post, and the video is still being processed, your only alternative is to save the post.

TIP

Your blog has a profile. Use it to tell visitors a bit about yourself. You can also upload an attractive photo or your company logo. When people associate blog posts with a smiling face, it makes the connection more personal. Your blog profile can be a valuable asset in your social media marketing campaign. Make sure your blog profile is similar to other profiles you've sprinkled throughout the Web. You can edit your profile in the Blogger dashboard.

Adding links, images, and video

In the previous section, we showed you how to create a basic blog post. But you most likely want to add linkable URLs, or images and videos as well. Here's how you do those three things:

✦ **To create a link:** Creating a link to content outside your blog is helpful. Links are like breadcrumbs that draw visitors to your blog. Highlight the text you want to link and click the Link button. Type the URL to which the text will be linked and click OK.

REMEMBER

Make sure to enter the correct URL including the `http`.

✦ **To add an image:** Place the cursor at the point where you want the image to appear and then click the Add Image button. (It looks like a small picture.) You can upload images from your desktop to Blogger or specify the URL to an image stashed on the Web (see Figure 2-5). Note that if you create a link to an image, you must include the image extension as well. Select the radio button to agree to the Blogger terms of service. Click Upload Image.

The maximum file size you can upload is 8MB. Blogger accepts images in the formats BMP, GIF, JPEG, and PNG.
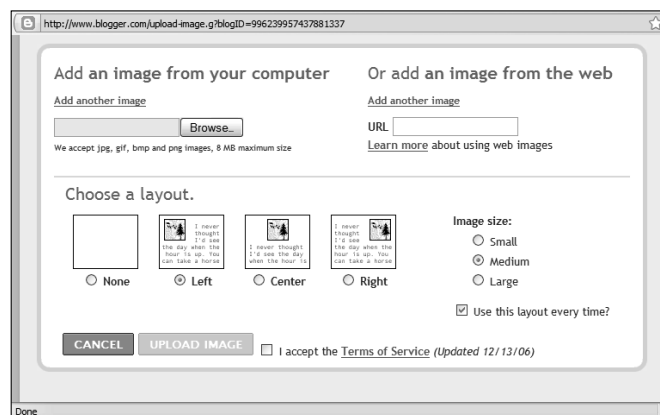
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Figure 2-5: Adding images to a post.

Here are the other options you have

- *Layout:* The left and right options are useful when you want to keep an image inline with text. For example, if you position the cursor at the beginning of a paragraph before inserting an image, you can position the image to the left or right of the paragraph. The text wraps around the image.

- *Image size:* Accept the default Medium image size or choose Small or Large.

Accept the default option to use this layout every time if you like to do things the same way every time.

✦ **To add a video:** Position the cursor wherever you want the video to appear, and then click the Add Video button. Click the Browse button (see Figure 2-6) and navigate to the video you want to upload. Enter a title that contains a keyword applicable to the content of the post. (The title appears as alternative text, which can be read by search engines.) Agree to the terms and conditions and click the Upload Video button.

Figure 2-6:
Adding video to a blog post.

You can upload a video file whose size doesn't exceed 100MB. Blogger accepts the video formats AVI, MPEG (including the popular and Web-perfect MPEG-4), QuickTime (MOV), Real, and Windows WMV.

You can find more information about video in Book III, Chapter 4.

Managing your blog

The Blogger Dashboard is a wonderful thing. From there, you can create new posts, edit existing posts, change the layout, add pages to your blog, and perform other tasks. Here's a list of what you can accomplish after clicking the Dashboard link:

✦ **Edit posts:** Click the Edit Posts link to display the Posting tab and view all posts you've created, including drafts. You can then edit individual posts and delete or view selected posts. Click the Edit Pages button to add pages to your blog or to edit existing pages. You can add as many as ten pages to your blog.

Add at least one page with a detailed bio of yourself and your company. A mission statement is another nice touch.

✦ **Change settings:** Click the Settings link to change your blog settings. To prevent users from spamming your blog with comments, change the Comment Moderation default setting in the Comments tab to Always (which allows you to check all comments before they're posted to your blog). On the Permissions tab, you can invite other authors to post to your blog by clicking the Add Authors button.

✦ **Customize your blog:** Click the Layout link to change the look and feel of your blog. You can change its background colors, choose a different template, change the image banner to match your other online content, and more.

✦ **Monetize your blog:** If you're only in it for the money (as Frank Zappa might have said), you can click the Monetize link to monetize your blog with AdSense (a Google service you can use to post targeted non-competing ads on your blog). You can choose to display ads in the blog sidebar and posts, display ads only in the sidebar, display ads below the post, or choose not to add new ads.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever, and a blog can be beautiful if you customize it to your liking. Okay, maybe it can't be beautiful, but with a bit of work, you can certainly make it attractive.

Hosting your blog with WordPress

If you don't need the features of a Web hosting service, consider hosting your blog with WordPress. It's free and you still get all the features of the robust WordPress application. To host a blog with WordPress, follow these steps:

1. **Launch your favorite Web browser and navigate to** `www.wordpress.com`.

The site's home page appears, as shown in Figure 2-7.

Figure 2-7:
Logging
on to the
WordPress.
com site.

2. **Click the Sign Up Now button.**

   The browser refreshes and displays the information required to set up a WordPress blog, as shown in Figure 2-8.

3. **Enter a username and password, confirm the password, and then enter your e-mail address.**

   Choose a username that reflects your business. If the name of your business is long, consider an acronym that users associate with your business. Remember that some people have to type this information on the Address bar of their browsers. Your username becomes part of the URL for your blog — for example, `myblog.wordpress.com`.

4. **Accept the legal flotsam and the option to create a blog, and then click Next.**

   Your browser refreshes, showing the URL of your blog and its title, as shown in Figure 2-9. You can make changes to the URL and the blog title, but you can't make those changes after you click the Signup button. Be sure to double-check them.
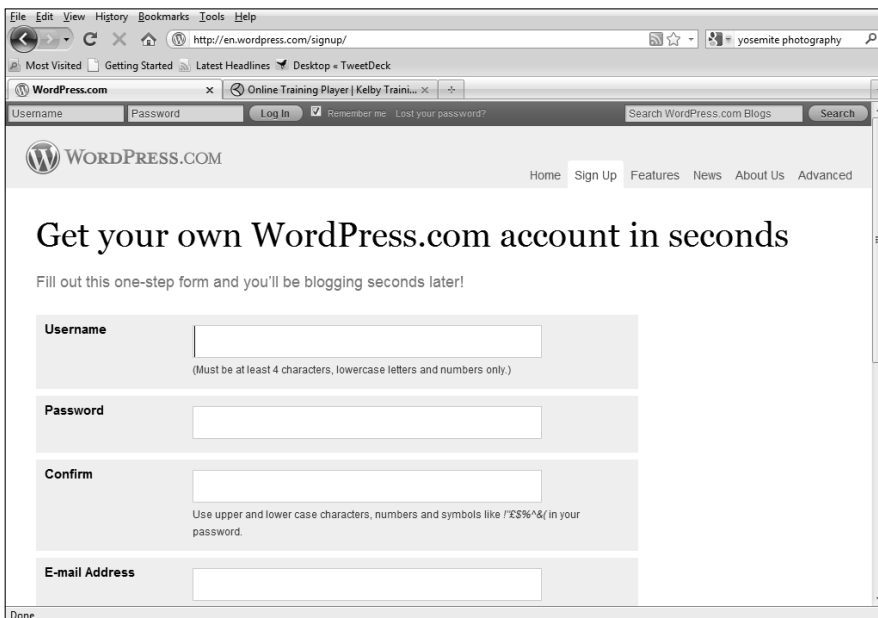
Figure 2-8:
Setting up a
WordPress
blog.

Figure 2-9:
Changing
the blog
particulars.

5. **Click Signup.**

   The Check Your Email to Complete Registration page appears. This page notifies you that a message has been sent to your e-mail address. You have to respond to it to complete the signup process. On this page, you can also update your profile. Add your first and last names and create a brief bio in the About Yourself section.

6. **Click Save Profile.**

   This option saves your profile to the blog database.

7. **Check your e-mail.**

   You should have a message from WordPress.com.

8. **Click the link to activate your blog.**

   A Web page appears, telling you that your account is active. At this point, you can log in to your blog. The Dashboard then opens — a place where you can manage your blog, add new users, create posts, and more. We introduce you to the fine art (or black art) of blogging in the later section "Discovering the Fine Art of Blogging."

Setting Up Your WordPress Blog

If you host your own blog with a Web hosting service, you have to upload a blog application to your server.

TECHNICAL STUFF
You set up a MySQL database into which each blog post is saved. Most blog applications use PHP code to parse a visitor's request and serve up a blog post. If this task is beyond your technical ability, you can ask your Web hosting service for assistance in setting up your blog.

We recommend using WordPress. This robust blogging application is well documented. In fact, your Web hosting service may offer WordPress.

Follow these steps to set up a blog on your own domain:

1. **Set up a MySQL database on your domain.**

   You usually complete this step on your Web site Control Panel. Check with your Web hosting service for more information on setting up a MySQL database. When you set up the database, write down the path to the database on your server, as well as your username and password. You need this information in order to configure the blog.

2. **Download the WordPress application from `wordpress.org/download`.**

3. **Extract the documents from the zipped file.**

4. **Rename the file wp-config.sample.php to** wp-config.php**.**

   This document is further modified to include the information to open the MySQL database.

5. **Modify the wp-config.php document.**

   Include the path to your MySQL database, database username, and database password. Installation instructions are on the Web page `http://codex.wordpress.org/Installing_WordPress`. The link named The Famous Five Minute Installation tells you everything you need to know to install WordPress on your Web site.

6. **Use your favorite FTP client to upload the files to your Web site.**

   If you're using WordPress as the basis for your Web site, upload the files to the root directory. If you have an existing Web site to which you're adding the blog, create on your Web site a folder named `blog` and upload WordPress to it.

7. **Run the installation program.**

   If you uploaded WordPress in the root directory of your Web site, the path to the installation program is `http://www.mysite.com/wp-admin/install.php`. If you uploaded WordPress to a folder named blog, the path is `http://www.mysite.com/blog/wp-install.php`.

   If you've done everything correctly, a page tells you that the install was successful. It also shows your blog username and password.

8. **Write down your username and password.**

   You may be tempted to change your password to one that's easier to remember. Don't do it. If the password is easy to decipher, your blog is prone to hackers.

You now have everything you need to begin blogging. We show you how to blog in the section "Discovering the Fine Art of Blogging," later in this chapter.

Using the WordPress one-click install

If you're technophobic, the thought of installing an application on your own domain probably scares you worse than a long-overdue visit to the dentist. Though the vast majority of Web hosting services are robust enough to support WordPress, you have to work with their tech support team and manually install the software. Wouldn't it be helpful if you could get your blog up and running in one click? You can do it: WordPress has partnered with a few Web hosting services that offer this powerful option. As of this writing, these Web hosting companies support one-click WordPress installation:

✓ **BlueHost:** `www.bluehost.com`

✓ **DreamHost:** `www.dreamhost.com`

✓ **Go Daddy:** `https://www.godaddy.com`

✓ **Laughing Squid:** `http://laughing squid.net`

✓ **Media Temple:** `http://media temple.net`

Other Web hosting services may support a simplified installation of WordPress. Be sure to ask any Web hosting service you're looking at whether it offers one-click service.

Modifying your blog with themes

The standard WordPress blog template has been around since the invention of dirt. It isn't particularly eye-catching. You can, however, download a spiffy-looking blog theme and upload it to your blog site. A great-looking blog theme that looks similar to your other Web content unifies your online marketing strategy. You can find a wide variety of WordPress blog themes for download at `http://wordpress.org/extend/themes`, as shown in Figure 2-10.

You upload your theme to the Themes folder at your blog Web site and activate it from the WordPress Dashboard. At `http://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Themes`, you can find complete documentation for installing and working with WordPress blog themes.

REMEMBER

After a WordPress update, your blog theme may not work. (WordPress is updated frequently.) Therefore, you should install a blog theme that has been around for a while and is updated for new versions of WordPress as they're released. You can decide, of course, not to upgrade to the latest version of WordPress. However, some updates are crucial and have security fixes for potential problems. Failing to update can put your site at risk.
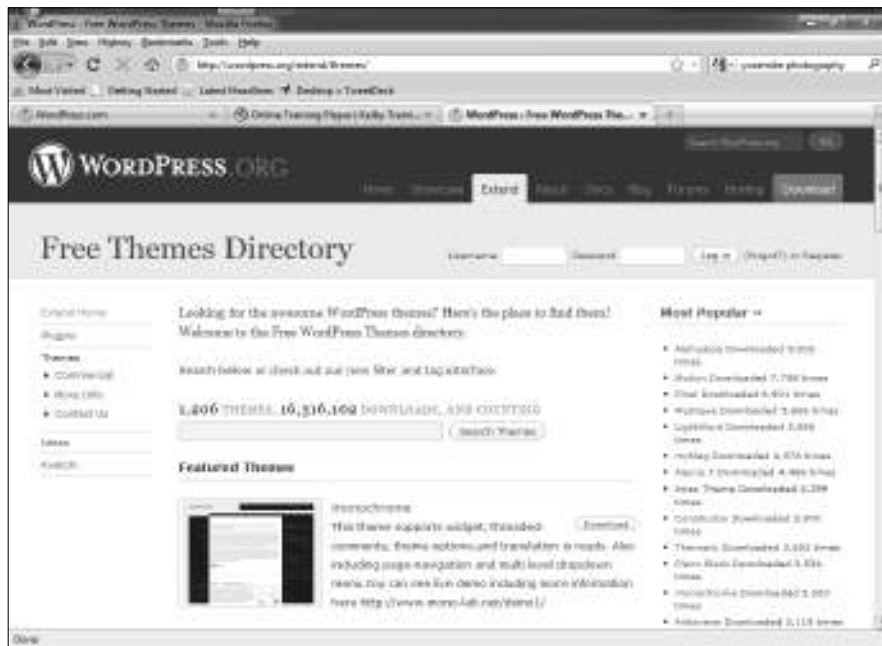
Figure 2-10:
The Themes directory for WordPress.

Modifying your blog with plug-ins

You can extend the usefulness of the standard WordPress application by using plug-ins, which add multimedia support, spam control, widget additions, and many other features to your site. A plethora of plug-ins is available for the WordPress blog at `http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins`, as shown in Figure 2-11.

WARNING!

Be sure to choose plug-ins that are compatible with the version of WordPress you're using. (We hope that you're using the *latest* version.) Otherwise, you may create undesirable results.

Plug-ins are loaded into the `Plugins` folder in your blog (`www.mysite/blog/wp-content/plug-ins`). After you upload a plug-in, you activate it from the WordPress Dashboard, shown in Figure 2-12. After installing a plug-in, you may end up with additional tabs in your Dashboard. Detailed instructions for using a specific plug-in are usually at the developer's site.

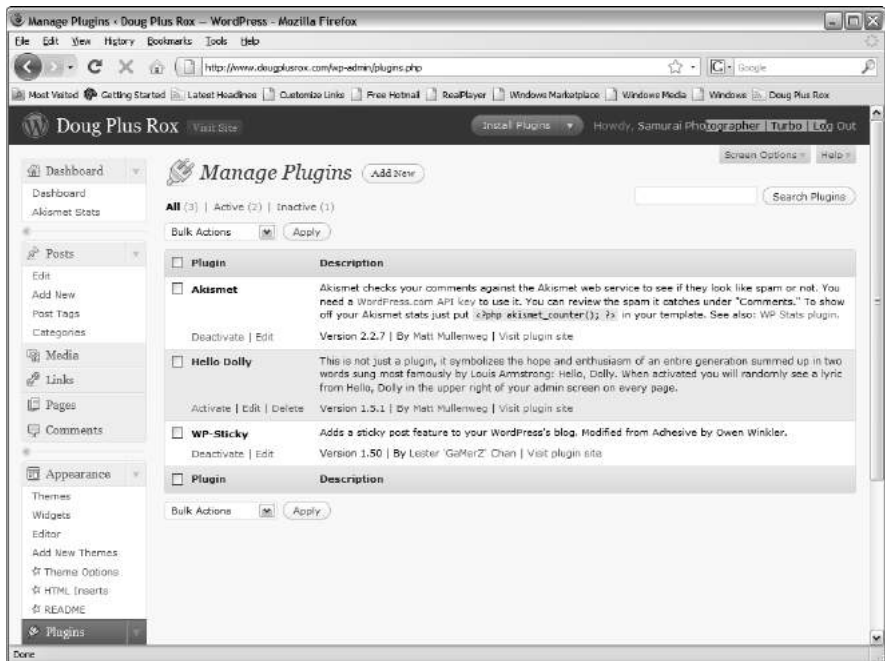**Figure 2-11:**
Adding
functionality
with
plug-ins.
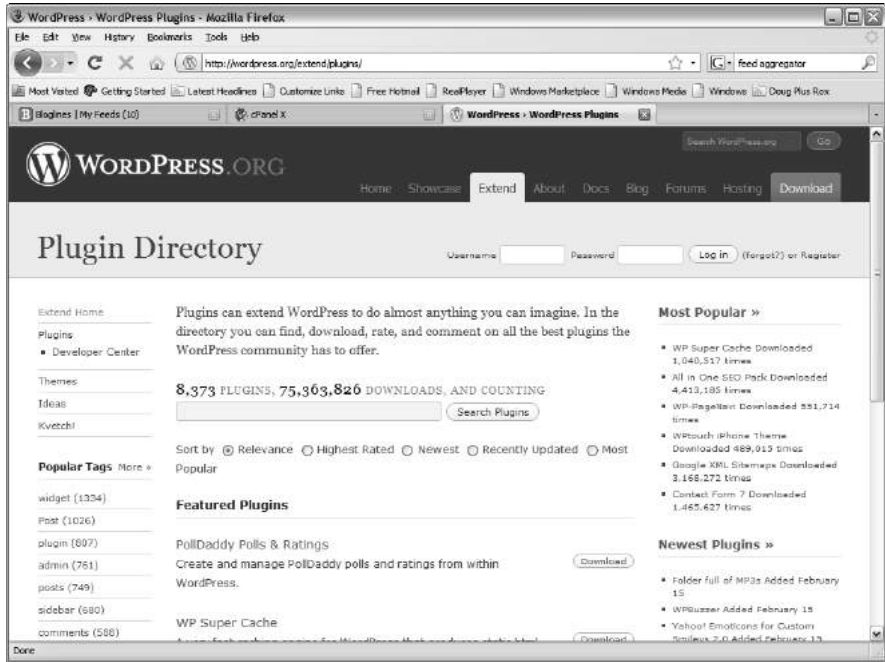
Figure 2-12:
Activate
plug-ins
here.

The Featured Plug-ins section in the `Plugin` directory is a good place to start your search.

REMEMBER

Like themes, plug-ins are applicable to certain versions of WordPress. Make sure that the plug-ins you download have been tested for the version of WordPress you're using.

Check to see whether the plug-in has a history of updates. If you're downloading the first iteration of a plug-in and the developer decides not to keep it updated, you'll have issues when you update to new versions of WordPress.

Check the date of the last update for the plug-in. A plug-in with an old date stamp is almost as bad as tuna with an expiration date of last month.

In the following sections, we discuss three plug-ins that we think are essential to have on a blog.

Captcha

A *captcha* is a funky-looking string of letters you enter in order to gain access to a download or to submit a comment. The WordPress application has a useful plug-in named Captcha. You can find more information about it at `http://recaptcha.net`. You can also find one or more Captcha plug-ins on the WordPress plug-in page.

The Captcha plug-in creates a word verification similar to the one on the Blogger Web site shown in Figure 2-13. The word verification makes sure a human being is accessing the page and not a robot computer. A computer would not be able to recognize the gibberish as actual letters and therefore would not gain access to the site or form the plug-in is protecting.

RSS

You must have an RSS icon on your blog. Users click the orange icon to subscribe to the feed from your blog. If you're adept at using HTML, you can manually create the code to display the icon.

You can also find plug-ins that do the grunt work for you. Like Web sites, plug-ins come and go. To find a list of current RSS plug-ins, enter *RSS* in the Search box on the WordPress plug-ins page.

Figure 2-13:
Add a captcha plug-in on your blog similar to this one.

ShareThis

Face it: You blog to get noticed and to get your message to potential customers. Whenever someone sees your blog and finds out how totally cool and informative it is, they want to share it with others. Enter the ShareThis plug-in, which you can find at `http://sharethis.com`. Click the button labeled Get the Button, in the upper-right corner of the page. When you register at the site, you receive the code to display the green ShareThis button on your blog (see Figure 2-14).

If the thought of manually adding code to your blog scares you, copy the code from the site to Notepad (in Windows) or TextEdit (on the Mac). Enable a text widget on your blog and paste the code into it. The result is the ShareThis icon in your blog. Whenever someone clicks it, it reveals every social media site and its little brother.

Using Google Analytics

Google has a wide variety of useful tools for social media marketers, and they're free for Google accountholders. You can use Google Analytics to track site visits, bouncebacks, page views, and other statistics, which of course tells you whether your blog is successful. Figure 2-15 shows Google Analytics for a podcast site. For more information on setting up Google Analytics, see Book VIII, Chapter 1.

Display a ShareThis button

Figure 2-14:
Adding a
ShareThis
icon to a
blog.

Figure 2-15:
Google
Analytics at
work.

Google FeedBurner

As a blogger, you can use Google FeedBurner (`www.feedburner.google.com`), which has been around for a while, to notify subscribers whenever you create a new blog post. (Podcasters use FeedBurner to burn feeds for iTunes.) It's a quick and easy way to deliver content to people who want to see your content immediately, without having to journey to your Web site.

The outstanding quality of FeedBurner is its huge syndicate. You can reach out to more people who may be potential clients by disseminating your feed to the Google network of syndicates. Figure 2-16 shows the information you get when you burn a feed with FeedBurner.
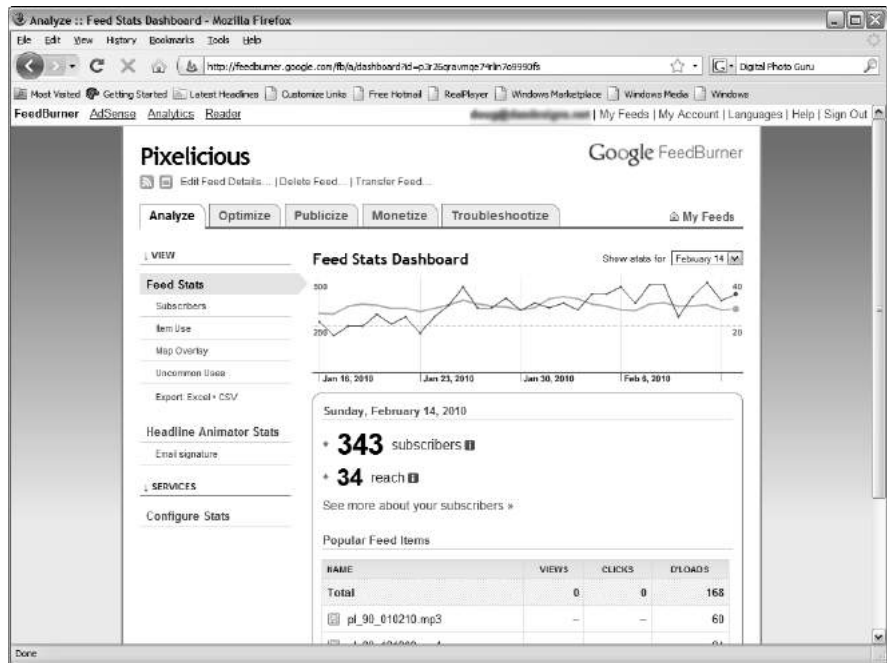

Figure 2-16: Just the facts, ma'am.

Burning a feed

Burning a feed with Google FeedBurner is easy. You need a Google account, which is free. After that, all you need to do is follow these steps:

1. **Open your favorite Web browser and navigate to `http://feedburner. google.com`.**

2. **Sign in with your e-mail address and Google password.**

   If you don't have a Google account, you can create one at this time by clicking the Create an Account button. If you have a Google account and have existing feeds, they're listed at the top of the page.

3. **Enter the URL for the feed you want to burn, as shown in Figure 2-17.**

4. **Click Next.**

   The page refreshes with the Google FeedBurner address filled in.

5. **Enter a title for your blog.**

   Subscribers see this information in their feed aggregators. If you set up a blog at WordPress.com, the title is already filled in, as shown in Figure 2-18. It doesn't hurt to use words that visitors would associate with your site, to provide — yep, you guessed it — more optimization for search engines.
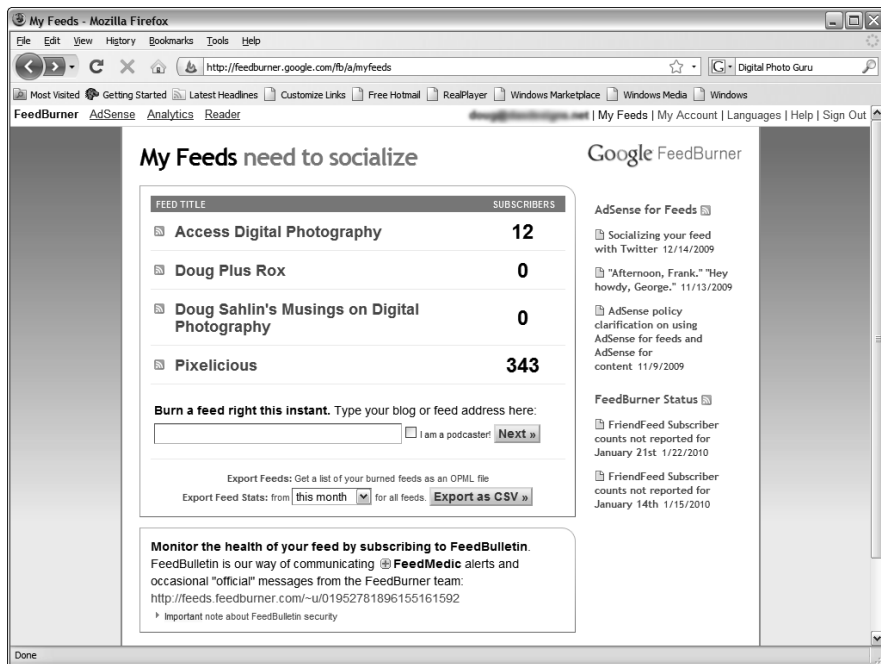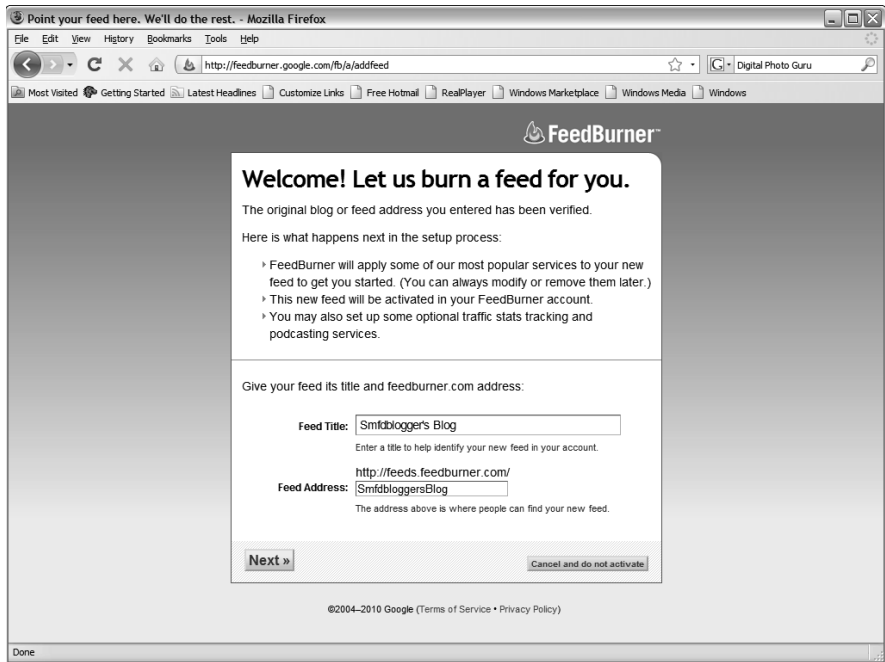
Figure 2-17:
What's your
URL, Duke?

Figure 2-18:
Christening
your feed
with a title.

6. **Click Next.**

   The page refreshes with a note congratulating you on burning your feed.
   FeedBurner makes your feed browser friendly by default and gives you
   basic FeedBurner stats to track circulation, readership, and uncommon
   uses. You now have the option to spiff it up with the optional
   FeedBurner Stats plug-in.

7. **Click Next.**

   The page refreshes and you see other options for feed stats.

8. **Choose the other statistics options you want to track.**

   You can add any of these:

   - *Clickthroughs:* Monitor the number of people who click items back
     to your site. If someone creates a link to one of your blog posts from
     their Web site or blog, it shows up as a clickthrough.

   - *Item Enclosure Downloads:* Monitor podcasts downloaded directly
     from your site.

   - *I Want More:* Monitor individual item views and resyndication. This
     option tells you which posts are the most popular. You can also
     target the *reach* (the viewed or clicked content in your feed) of your
     blog or podcast.

   9. **Click Next.**

      The page refreshes and you have options for integrating the feed into your blog, as shown in Figure 2-19.

   10. **Choose to integrate the FeedBurner Google feed with a blog hosted by Blogger, TypePad, or WordPress.com or a self-hosted WordPress blog. Choose whether to publish a chiclet (small icon) on your MySpace page or offer an e-mail subscription to your MySpace blog.**

Publicizing a feed with FeedBurner

After you burn a feed, it's time to tell the world all about it. You can do so with your other social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter. However, you can also tap in to the far-reaching Google network. To get your feed noticed in the Google network, follow these steps:

   1. **Launch your favorite Web browser and navigate to `www.feedburner.google.com`.**

      The Google Feedburner home page appears.

   2. **Enter your e-mail address and Google password, and then click Sign In.**

      You're redirected to a page that shows your current feeds. In addition, you see stats for every feed you've burned.

Figure 2-19: Integrating your blog.

3. **Select the feed you want to publicize and then click the Publicize tab.**

   The page refreshes and shows your current content and the options available for publicizing your podcast or blog. The options are on the left side of the page. Click the desired link to use that service to publicize your blog.

Discovering the Fine Art of Blogging

Blogging began as a way for anybody to have a voice. By using a blog, you can publish your thoughts for a few hundred or several thousand people to see. Many blogs serve as ways for their authors to vent their feelings. Though you also want to express your opinions, your primary goal is to dispense information about your industry and product without creating an advertisement. When you do it right, you attract a throng of interested readers who subscribe to your blog and eventually become paying customers. But first, you must learn the fine art of blogging.

Doing your homework

When you use a blog to market your company, you may think it's as easy as typing some material and posting it in your blog. Do some homework before starting to post. Check out other blogs in your industry. Search the Internet for the name of your industry followed by the word *blogs* (as in *wedding photography blogs*).

Creating a post

Creating a blog post in most blogging applications is straightforward: After you enter the blog dashboard and click the button or icon to create a new post, you end up with a cross between an e-mail application and a word processing application. Figure 2-20 shows a post being created in a WordPress blog.

You edit a post from the dashboard in the blog application. The WordPress blog application has a Posts section under which you see the Edit option. Click the link and all your blog posts appear. Then just pause the cursor over the post you want to edit and click Edit, as shown in Figure 2-21.
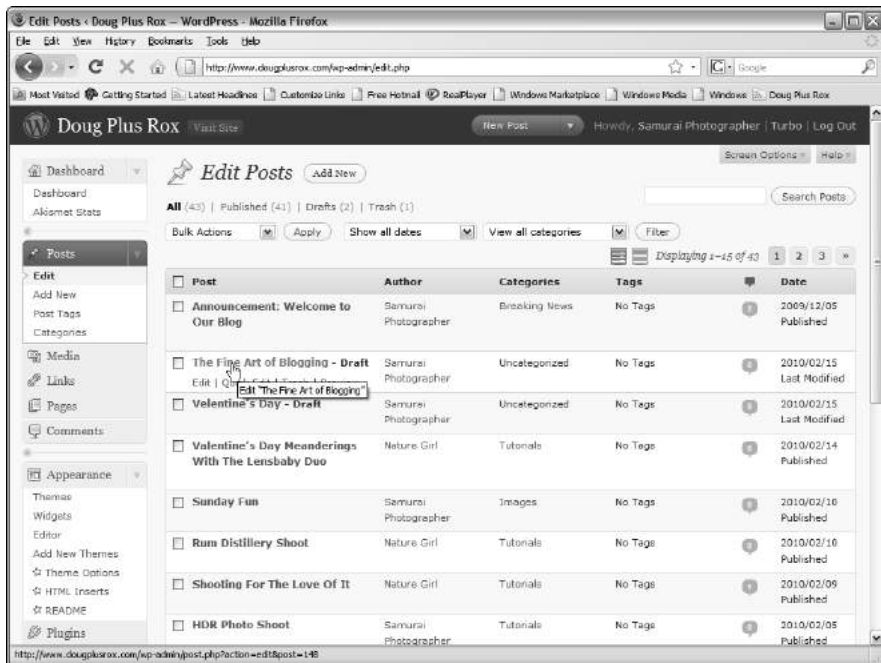
REMEMBER

Before publishing, double-check your grammar and spelling. Most software programs check spelling and grammar. Nothing turns off an educated buyer or a potential customer quicker than a Web site with typos and grammatical errors.

Figure 2-20:
Creating a
post.

Figure 2-21:
Editing a
post.

Adding keywords and tags

When you create a post, your goal is to persuade as many potential customers as possible to read it. But first they have to *find* your needle in the haystack. Unless they're already subscribed, this task may be next to impossible unless you optimize your post for search engines. You can optimize a post in two ways:

✦ Add keywords directly to the post text.

✦ Add tags to the post.

When you add keywords, make sure the text is readable. Some blog authors try to pepper their posts with so many keywords that the resulting post is grammatically incorrect or reads as though it were written by a chimpanzee. The trick is to pepper the post with *relevant* keywords and then mirror them as tags. In WordPress, you add tags in the Tags text field, as shown in Figure 2-22. Each tag must be separated by a comma, and you can use multiple words to create a tag. A tag is a word or phrase that people would use in a search engine to find the type of information in your blog post. For example, if we were creating a blog post about this book, we would add the tag *social media marketing*.
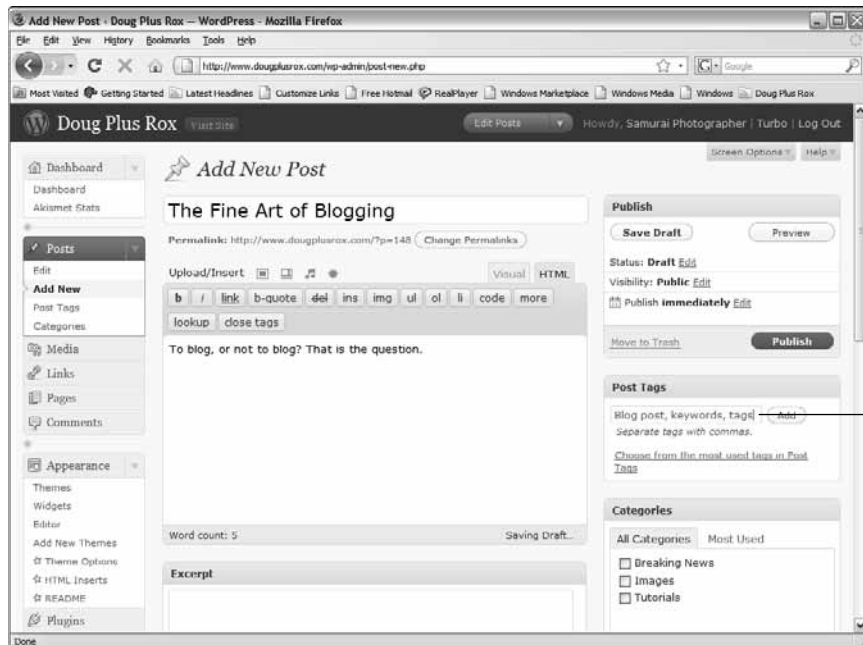
Add your tags here.

Figure 2-22: Adding tags to a post.

Book II, Chapter 2 talks more about search engine optimization. All the tricks in that chapter apply to blogs as well.

Making posts public, private, or sticky

When you create a post using the WordPress blog application, you have options for the visibility of your post. You can create one for all the world to see, keep it private for other authors on your blog, or password-protect it. However, if a post has instructions or information for a few select people, this option may be perfect.

WARNING!

Don't post sensitive information about your company even though you can designate a post as private. Hackers have a way of getting to see what they want to see.

Another useful option is to create a sticky post. When you create a *sticky* post, it's displayed as the top entry in your blog, no matter when you created it. A sticky post is useful for welcoming visitors to your blog. You can make a WordPress post public, private, password-protected, or sticky by choosing an option, as shown in Figure 2-23.
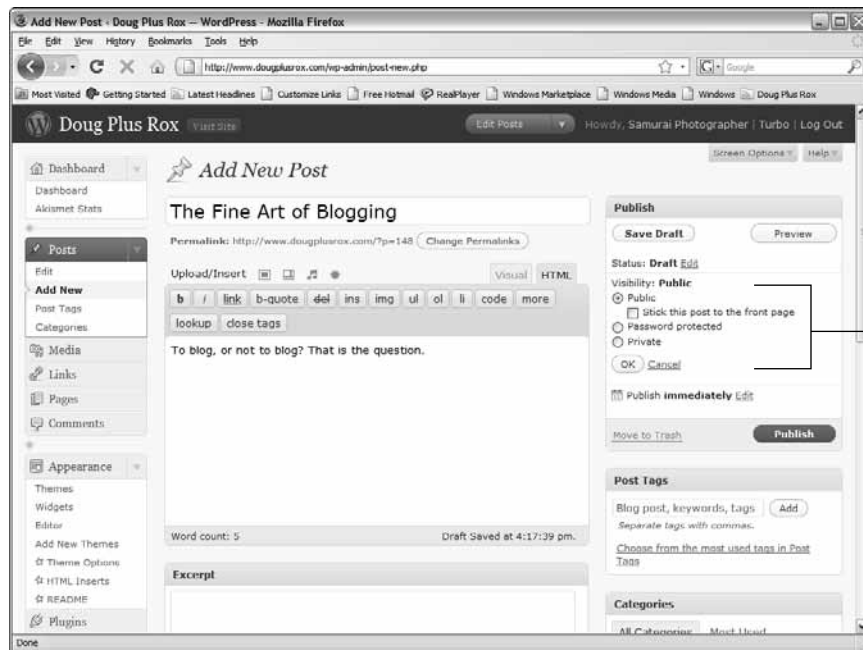
Choose a visibility level here.

Figure 2-23:
Is this post public, private, password-protected, or sticky?

Keeping posts timely

Readers of a blog look forward to receiving its posts at about the same time of whatever day or days you write your blog posts. It's like the morning paper: Readers get their regular dose of your blog on the same days and at the same time. Notice that we said *days.* That's right: You should create more than one blog post per week. What happens when you can't write a post on the day or time that your subscribers expect one to be published? You delay the post from the time it's written to the applicable day and time.

You can easily schedule a post in WordPress. After you write and proofread it, click the Edit link next to the Publish Immediately option. The current date and time are shown on drop-down menus, as shown in Figure 2-24. Choose the date and time you want to publish the post, and then click OK. Write enough posts to keep subscribers satisfied, and delay the post to the applicable days and times.
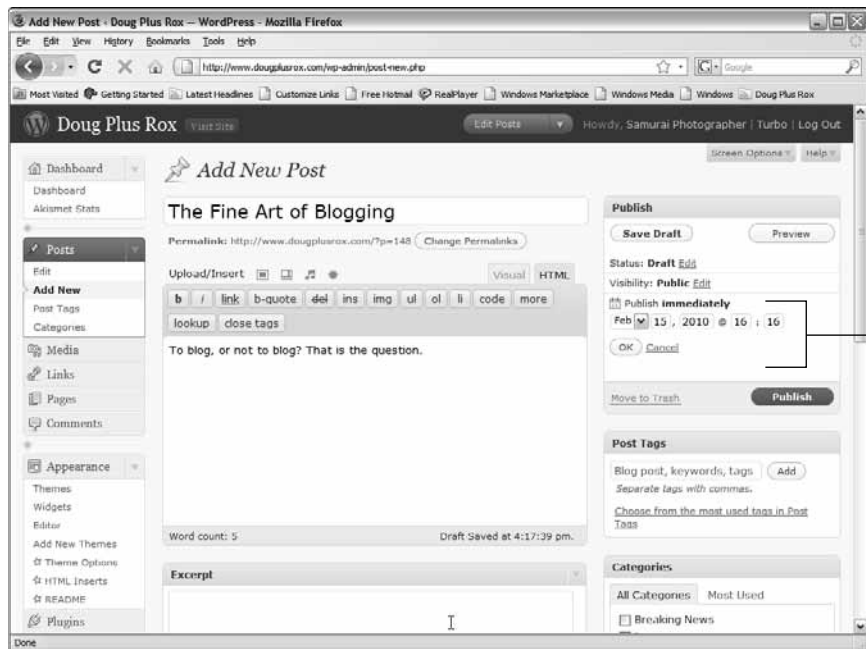
Choose a day and time here.

Figure 2-24: Delaying a post.

Handling comments and spam and other delights

Comments on your blog posts show that you have readers who are interested in what you have to say. Unfortunately, comments are also used by spammers. They see a blog as their personal forum to publish links to a product they're promoting. The best way to combat spammers is to require every comment to be moderated by the blog administrator. When a comment is posted to your blog, it is not made public until you approve it. If you choose to have comments moderated, the WordPress application notifies you whenever a comment is made about one of your posts.

If you have the WordPress blogging application, another ally in your defense against spam is Akismet. This plug-in is installed automatically whenever you install a WordPress blog, and you need an API key in order to activate it. The plug-in puts comments that contain several URLs or commonly used words in a separate folder. You can review the comments at your leisure. If you decide not to review the comments Akismet flags, they are automatically deleted in 14 days. You can find the plug-in in your WordPress. com account, and you can find Akismet in the Plug-ins section of your WordPress Dashboard.

Creating meaningful categories

If you post messages about different topics — for example, new and newsworthy information about your product, company, or industry or promotions offered by your company — you can organize your posts using categories. When you write a post, you can choose from existing categories or create new ones (see Figure 2-25). Each category you create is added as a link to your blog sidebar. A visitor clicks the link to see all posts created for that category.

When you create several categories for your posts, the categories show up as menu options on your blog sidebar, as shown in Figure 2-26. Visitors can read all installments in a specific category by clicking the category name on the sidebar.
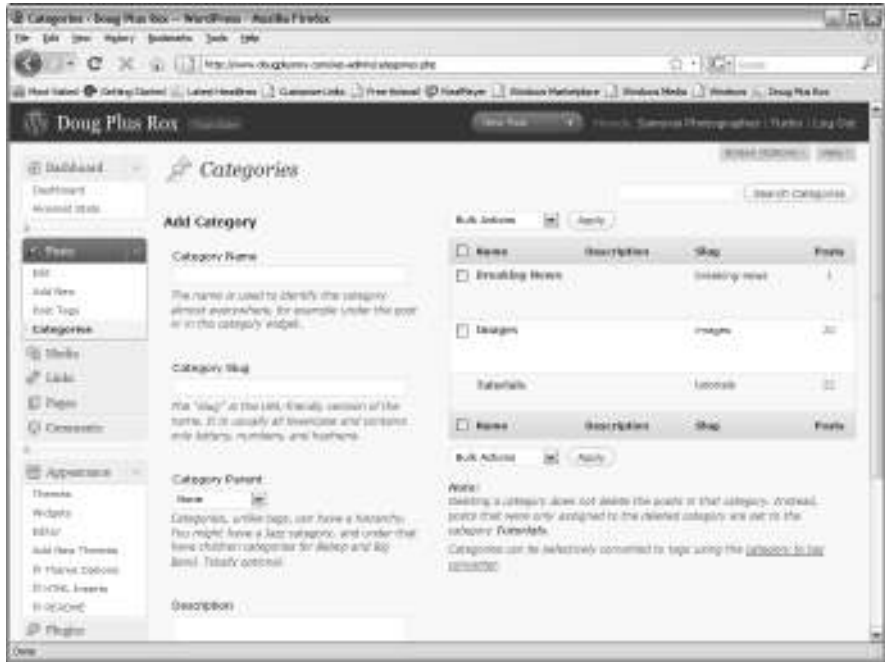
Figure 2-25:
Organizing
posts with
categories.

Figure 2-26:
Categories
become
menu
options on
the blog
sidebar.

Sort posts into categories.

Announcing new posts

Whenever you create a new post, your subscribers are automatically notified. However, you want to add new subscribers to your blog and get your message out to more potential clients. When you create your first posts, you may have only a handful of subscribers, which means that you have to get the word out whenever you create a new blog post.

An easy way to announce new posts is by using your other social media outlets. If you're on Twitter, for example, copy the URL of the post and send it to your followers in a *tweet* (a Twitter message).

Another way to announce a post is from Facebook. In fact, you can have your blog posts (or even your Twitter messages) appear on your Facebook wall.

You can also use a Ping service to automatically announce your posts. (Pinging is discussed in detail in Book II.) Ping-o-Matic, at `www.pingomatic.com`, is a helpful service to use. Enter the URL for your podcast and click the button to ping a wide variety of services, including Google, Technorati, and Bloglines.

Using trackbacks

Trackbacks are the breadcrumbs of the Internet. Whenever another blog or Web site creates a link to one of your blog posts, the visibility of the post increases. It is seen by not only visitors to the site that created the trackback but also search engines, which gives your post a higher priority over a similar one with fewer or no trackbacks.

How do you serve up a heaping helping of these powerful trackbacks? One way is by using your other social media outlets. If you announce a new post to your Twitter followers, and one or more of them creates a link to the post, you have trackbacks. Your Facebook page can serve the same function. If you use the option to automatically show new posts on the wall of your Facebook page, your fans will notice. If they add the link on their Web sites — voilà — another trackback.

You can create trackbacks the old-fashioned way, of course, by sending a message to a Web site owner requesting a reciprocal link. However, one of the easiest and quickest ways to publicize your blog and create trackbacks is by using FeedBurner, discussed earlier in this chapter. FeedBurner makes it possible for you to publicize your feed, which in essence gets your blog out to the masses.

Moving your blog to a new domain

Moving a blog to a new domain is a big job. You might think that all you need to do is install WordPress at the new domain and you're good to go. The only problem is that after installing WordPress, you end up with a squeaky-clean MySQL database that contains zilch. Zip. Nada. You have to export the contents of the database (*not* an action to be taken by technophobes) from your old server into the squeaky-clean database from your fresh install. Contact someone at your current server and ask for a copy of all tables in your blog database. Do this right before you pull the plug on the old server. When you set up WordPress on the new server, ask a tech support rep to replace the contents of the new database with the content exported from your old Web server. Alternatively, you can ask your new service to move the entire blog for you. Many Web hosting services will move one Web site at no charge.