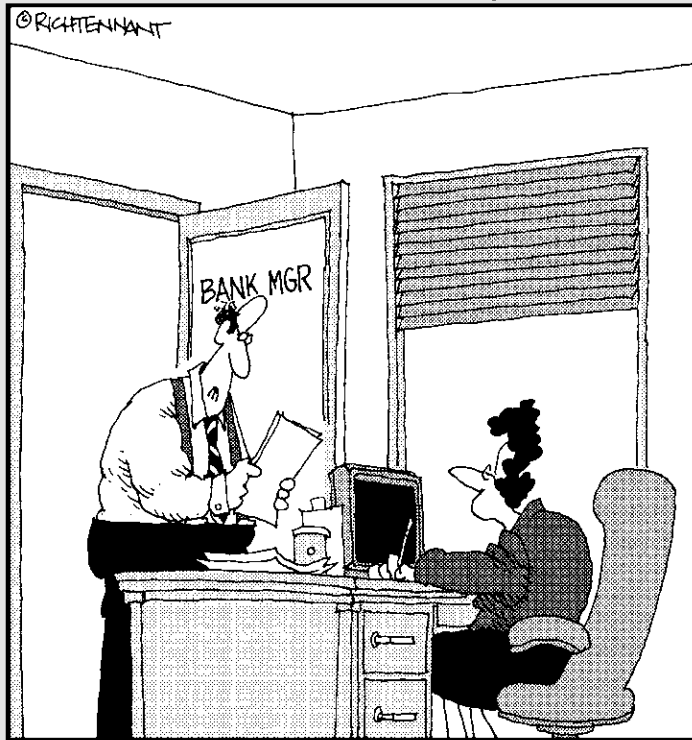


Part II

Mapping Out and Implementing Your Corporate Blog

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Our customer survey indicates 30% of our customers think our service is inconsistent, 40% would like a change in procedures, and 50% think it would be real cute if we all wore matching colored vests."

In this part . . .

This part is dedicated to helping you understand corporate blogging from a technical and logistical perspective. Chapter 4 introduces the domain structure of your blog, providing you with the information you need to make an informed decision about your blog's setup.

Chapter 5 takes you through the different blogging platform options, giving you information about what key factors should be used to evaluate and select the right platform for you. Explore all of the options before making a decision to ensure that you choose the best fit for your organization.

Although selecting the correct platform for your needs is necessary, your blog's success is determined by the results from the effort put into it. Chapter 6 helps you identify who should be on your blogging team and what type of content they should write. Ghost blogging and legal protection of your blog content is covered, too.

Chapter 7 builds your strategy for selecting, educating, and motivating your blogging team. All organizations should read this chapter no matter how much blogging experience they have.

Chapter 4

Using a Domain That Matters for Your Corporate Blog

In This Chapter

- ▶ Putting the company's best foot forward online
 - ▶ Adding search capabilities to a corporate blog
 - ▶ Fitting an online domain to your company's needs
 - ▶ Placing your blog to best advantage
-

You may have just written a blog entry that will set your industry on its ear or get the masses clamoring for your product. But if the company Web site is so clunky or boring that nobody manages to find your blog, then nobody can see what a fascinating, informative, valuable resource it is for your company, right? Well, the old marketing maxim that “you don’t get a second chance to make a first impression” is more relevant than ever when you’re trying to make contact on Internet time. Hordes of Web-surfing visitors may land on your company Web site — but how many stay long enough to become customers, or even regulars? How many just glance at your site and zip away to somewhere else? An inviting, attractive site may capture your visitors’ attention just long enough to give your blog a chance to start building relationships. An ugly or dull site may repel all those visitors in the blink of an eye. It’s worth asking two questions: (1) How will your blog fit into the company Web site, and (2) can your company really *afford* ho-hum Web design?

This chapter is about giving your corporate blog its best shot at reaching your business audience. Here you can find a perspective that may help you change some in-house minds about the importance of a dynamic Web presence. You get pointers on helping to jazz up the company Web site, integrating your company’s look, brand, and mission into your blog, and positioning your blog to best advantage within the company’s online domain.

Integrating Your Corporate Identity into Your Blog

As companies are pressured to become more social by their customers and prospects, the line is blurring between the corporate brand and the personal brand. Brand management has always been a critical component of marketing, but ordinary brand management never allowed for consumers to have insight into the actual people behind the brand.

In the early days of corporate blogging, there was a wide gap between marketing and blogging. In fact, many company's marketing departments felt threatened by the transparency that a blog provided. Now that companies have been blogging for a decade, companies with a tight integration between the blog and the marketing have been able to successfully capture attention on the Web, to engage readers, and to route them directly into the company's sales funnel.

Corporate blogs are no longer outside of the company's domain; they are now being integrated directly into an overall Web presence. This convergence has made it easier to measure, manage, and implement inbound marketing strategies between the blog and the company. Your Web site is still a critical component, providing all the data, facts, figures, and other expected information — but your blog has become the *voice* of the company. To maximize the benefits of a corporate blog, investing in a comprehensive, integrated strategy with your other marketing efforts will maximize your return on investment.

As chairman and founder of the Online Marketing Summit (<http://onlinemarketingsummit.com/>), Aaron Kahlow has a practiced eye for what does and doesn't work to get a company's message out. He often remarks that most businesses spend more money on decorating the company lounge than they do on sprucing up the company Web presence. Of course, when you think about it, most visitors these days drop in via the Web — and many will form a first impression of your company when they arrive at its Web site. Sure, putting an Italian leather couch in the real-world waiting room is impressive — gee, nobody seems to question the Return on Couch Investment (ROCI) — but you can bet that most of the online visitors will never see or touch it.

This neglect of the Web presence is strange, considering how little it can cost a company to incorporate good design ideas into presenting its message (*and* its corporate image) online. A minimum investment of \$3,000, for example,

can get a company a professional design through *crowdsourcing* — essentially connecting with Web designers online: Companies and individuals post design requests, and then artists from all over the world submit ideas. The process allows you to fine-tune the design, and you only pay after you make a selection. Two of the more popular sites are CrowdSPRING (www.crowdspring.com) and 99designs (www.99designs.com).

If you're a larger company, hiring a professional design firm or agency could cost you \$50,000 — and be well worth the price tag, depending on the situation. A talented designer can often work miracles. A great design firm can make a small company look like a Fortune 500 corporation — and sometimes that's all it takes to get the revenue flowing. Whichever route you take, don't skimp on your design.

Balancing your personal expertise and your corporate brand isn't difficult, sometimes it can be accomplished simply by allowing an author page that displays a friendly portrait and biography. If you already have a team responsible for your online presence, that team should ultimately decide on the look and feel. Blog administrators or bloggers, though, should fight to ensure that *people* are the focus of the design and not products or services.

Who's responsible for paying the bill can differ greatly! If the purpose of your blog is to acquire leads, typically, the team that's responsible for acquiring those leads would also be responsible for funding and monitoring the progress of your corporate blog. If the purpose is to reduce customer service calls, the customer support team may be responsible for the investment. If the purpose is simply to build authority in your industry to get the spotlight more, it's typical that the marketing team covers the costs. In any case, be sure to justify the investment by reviewing the purpose of the blog with the decision-makers. Many companies severely underestimate the power of great design, but design matters — the proof is all over the Web. One example is National Savings & Investments. In 2002, NS&I spent two million pounds on a rebranding effort, and the result was a sales increase of forty-four million pounds in just eight weeks! Your blog may not see those kinds of results, but an investment in the design of your blog can significantly impact its performance.



You should know that crowdsourcing has some pretty stiff opposition from many professional designers who are opposed to producing designs without the guarantee of getting paid. The professionals, after all, have worked hard to hone their craft and point out that their portfolio should be the deciding factor on whether they're hired. "Spec" work is the official term for supplying samples at no cost, and many designers believe it's pure evil. So, if you decide to use a crowdsourcing service, you may want to keep it hush-hush.

Bringing your brand and corporate identity to your blog theme

The overall layout and graphical designs behind a blog are typically referred to as a *theme*. Most blogging software allows you to install add-ons, plug-ins, or other packages that have no impact on the content of the site and leave all the changing up to you (which is as it should be). Be sure to ask about whether your blogging software has this feature — it makes updating your blog's design or rebranding easy!

Your blog's theme doesn't have to be a perfect match for the company's corporate look and feel — but it should reflect your purpose clearly. So, from time to time, refer to your original goals for your blog — make sure its look and feel match the goals. Is it too sedate when you're trying to be friendly? Too frivolous when you're trying to build credibility? Often a corporate blogging goal is to create engagement and show the true personality of the organization — which is (ideally, at least) expressed in its branding. If this is the case, then your approach to the blog should reflect what the branding is saying to the customer. If what you want to say is, "We're trustworthy," that will affect not only the look and feel of the design theme, but also the tone of the writing and presentation. Ditto if you're saying, "We're a fun place!" Either way, what the brand represents should feel authentic and personal to the readers of your blog.

When your blog's theme does match the corporate brand, it conveys consistency and authority. Walker Information, for example, is an international customer intelligence company. Walker has built an incredible organization, and does its best to ensure that the branding is consistent across their Web site (www.walkerinfo.com) and their blog (<http://blog.walkerinfo.com>). Figures 4-1 and 4-2 give you a look at how they do it.

When you compare Walker's blog with its Web site, it's easy to see that both come from the same company. Note, however, that the blog provides a focus on the company's internal talent and how they lead the industry and help customers. The Web site focuses on results, products, and features.



A quick look under the hood shows that Walker's Web site and blog are on two totally different content management systems — but the brand and identity expressed is identical. (See Figure 4-2.) It's a neat trick. Here's where robust content management systems with fully customizable theming (software that supports cascading style sheets [CSS] and editing of template files) come in — they allow your company to match your look and feel with precision! All the popular blogging platforms offer this customization, including WordPress, TypePad, Expression Engine, Compendium, Blogger, and many more.



Figure 4-1:
Walker
Information's Web
site and
brand.

Ensuring that your customers recognize your blog as authentic

Okay, what (in practical terms) does it mean for a business to be “authentic” these days? Well, people still prize good service and the feeling that their needs matter — those desires can’t be met by stale information, robotic dullness, or an aloof attitude. So one highly effective way to show that your blog is authentic is to combine consistent branding with attention to detail — in effect, showing that real people from your organization are writing the content. Then you’re sending an inviting message — “Somebody here cares enough to tell you what you want to know.” After all, when prospects arrive at the company blog, they’re looking for answers. Before they decide to do business with your company, they’d like insight into the talent of the people who work there. A blog provides a unique experience that breaks down the barriers of the brand and allows the consumer to read (and even converse with) the company, person to person.



Figure 4-2:
Walker Information's blog shows clear consistency with the company Web site.

Some companies have decided that the expense of integrating and designing their corporate blog is too difficult. Instead, these companies host their blogs on subdomains of free blogging engines. This means the domain is totally different from the corporate site, the design is inconsistent, and because the corporate site doesn't actively promote it — visitors to the blog wonder whether or not it's actually part of the company! There are hundreds of thousands of blogs out there — many of them spam sites hosted on these free platforms — so your blog simply gets disregarded because it can't be trusted. That's counterproductive to the entire purpose of blogging: building trust!

Trust is ultimately what businesses and consumers are purchasing when they decide to do business with your company. Here's a striking example: Doug Theis, Vice President of Business Development for Lifeline Data Centers (www.lifelinedatacenters.com), likes to say that people hire his company so they don't get fired. In this case, he's talking about fending off the effects of disasters that can take down a business.

Lifeline Data Centers houses tens of millions of dollars in hardware for companies throughout the country. Their facilities have custom cooling, fire

suppression, redundant power, and 24/7 security and maintenance. Hospitals and other organizations depend on Lifeline to keep their infrastructure running through power outages — even an F4 tornado. When the Information Technology team at an organization decides to move into Doug’s facilities, they are putting their jobs in his hands.

Doug’s blog is a reflection of this responsibility. Doug blogs about industry certifications, power systems, requirements, outages, best practices, challenges, and changes throughout the industry. Although Doug is often blogging to clients directly, he’s also picked up readers over the last few years who are drawn in by the information — so he’s grown an impressive clientele. This hasn’t happened by accident, by cutting costs, or by writing flawless requests for proposals. Lifeline Data Centers continues to grow as the Midwest’s largest Data Center provider because people trust the staff at Lifeline. And Doug is the public face of the company, so his blog has to reflect and cultivate that trust.

Doug networks extensively and is often seen at many regional events, including running a local network organization called Techmakers (whose parent company is Rainmakers). People instantly recognize Doug because he is trustworthy and always available via the blog, at events, and by e-mail.



To take full advantage of blogging as a strategy, put your people out in front of your brand — especially those who are good at developing trust and following through.

Personalizing your corporate blog with portraits and biographies

If putting your people first is a key strategy, then it’s only logical that providing a photograph and biography is essential. Most blogging platforms have author biography sections, and plug-ins or sticky post options to display them.



A *sticky post* is a blog post that always sticks to the top of the blog. When new posts are added, the sticky post remains. Sticky posts are perfect for displaying the profile of your blogger.

Law firm Alerding Castor Hewitt displays a photo and biography of each of its attorneys on their blog through sticky posts (<http://blog.alerding-castor.com/blog/alerding-castor>). Alerding Castor specializes in new business startups. Instead of piling on the jargon of business law, they actually become partners with many of their client companies — to help them become bigger companies.

That personalized touch was something that can't be fully described on a Web site but is easily identified in a corporate blog. The attorneys at Alerding Castor Hewitt may blog about privacy litigation, business politics, how to treat employees, or even the local art scene and everything in between. (See Figure 4-3.)

What Alerding Castor Hewitt has effectively accomplished through the blog is the removal of the stodgy, boring, sometimes frightening business of startup law and played directly to their audience — the entrepreneur.

For your profile, you will want to include your job title, responsibilities, qualifications, and even your outside interests. As the world dives deeper into social media and social networking, it's a great idea to share your Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn pages and links.



Figure 4-3:
Implementing an inviting portrait and profile by using sticky posts.

Using Your Existing Search Engine Authority with Your Company Domain

Just as a driver's license number holds a lot of meaning to your personal history, your domain holds your *traffic* history on the Internet. Search engines place a lot of value on the history of the domain, what topics people searched it for in the past, whether the domain was ever used to produce spammy or questionable content, and how popular the domain is (measured in links back to the site).

Domainers are people or companies who find expiring domains and buy them for later sale or profit. Many domainers figure out the history on a domain and purchase them simply because they have a great history with a lot of backlinks. This allows them to launch a new blog and immediately get a decent ranking with the search engines.

Some companies are tempted simply to use a free online blogging service to host their corporate blog. They select a subdomain at a provider like Blogger, TypePad, or WordPress — creating a blog at a Web address that looks like this: `http://mycompany.wordpress.com`. Sorry, but this is a huge mistake: The company has handed over all of search engine authority to the core domain! (To see more about why that's a serious no-no, flip to the section called "Controlling how a domain affects search engine authority," later in this chapter. **Hint:** Somebody just lost control of something valuable.) If you are using a free online blogging service, don't use a provider subdomain — set up an alias. Each of these services allow you to set up what's called a *canonical name record* (CNAME) that allows you to point your domain or point a subdomain to the service. If you decide to go this route, ask about — and use — the CNAME option. For corporate purposes, it's an absolute necessity!

For example, if your company decides to set up a blog at Blogger.com, you might host the blog at `mycompany.blogger.com`. Any search engine authority that you build up, all the subsequent links, and all your rankings, then, are basically in the property of `blogger.com` — they don't belong to your company. If `blogger.com` decides to close down, or if you decide to move to another platform, you lose all your search engine visibility and authority. By hosting the blog on your own company domain, you can freely move between software-as-a-service blogging solutions or even host the blog on your own server because the search engines have built up reputation and authority on *your* domain, not `blogger.com`!



A canonical name record (CNAME), is a record within your domain registration service that you can add that will point a domain or subdomain that you own to another server. Canonical name records make it convenient since you can still own the authority but have the flexibility of moving to any hosted blogging provider.

If, for example, you're hosting your blog at Compendium, you'll add a record with your domain registrar to point your blog (example: `blog.yourcompanydomain.com`) to `compendiumblog.com`. This is invisible to visitors. As a person types in `blog.yourcompanydomain.com`, they are brought directly to your blog — which is simply hosted and managed by Compendium.

Controlling how a domain affects search engine authority

Search engine authority is the history of your site that's maintained by search engines. It's analogous to credit ratings: With a high credit score, you're able to get credit easier, and with a high authority, you'll be able to get better ranking on search engines. Google measure authority with its pagerank score. *Pagerank* is a number between 0 and 10, where 10 means you had outstanding authority.

Starting a blog on a new domain— or on a totally separate domain — can be a very slow climb because the domains lack any authority. It could be six months or more before you're starting to see any significant quantities of search engine traffic coming your way.



Search engines are slow to pay immediate attention to a new domain because there are so many companies out there launching thousands of domains and blogs to try and garner search engine ranking without any quality content. Some companies buy up thousands of domain names and throw hundreds of pages of content up overnight to simply try to build links back to another site or get some search engine traction for some keywords they hope to sell goods on. Don't be tempted to take this route if you hope to build credibility with your readers and truly help your business.

There's another factor as well: The actual words in your blog's domain could have an impact on its authority. There are three ways to select a domain:

- ✓ To identify your corporate brand. These are domains that are specific to the brand like `dknewmedia.com`, `compendium.com`, `pointbrake.com`, `xemion.com`.
- ✓ To identify what your company actually does. These are practical domain names, and speak more to what your company does like `corporatebloggingtips.com`, `marketingtechblog.com`, `digitalhomeinfo.com`, `hertakeonmarketing.com`. Notice that the brand name isn't included in these but they have combination of words that describe what they do.

- ✓ A combination of the two. These companies use keywords in their brand or combine the brand with a keyword. Examples are blendtec.com, smallboxweb.com, and slingshotseo.com.

With a strong brand on a domain with a lot of history, adding a blog and getting search engine traffic is practically expected — especially if your site is already getting some search engine traffic.

Without history, it's difficult to gain momentum with search engines. In this case, if you don't have a highly remarkable brand and you're open to it, you may want to try using a practical domain name instead. By ensuring that your domain has relevant keywords in it, you are providing a relevant destination. In search engine results, you will sometimes find that the domain that has keywords within it rises above other results.

Fairytale Brownies, for example, is a national brand that strategically purchased the practical domain name for the keyword *brownies*. Their blog can be found at <http://blog.brownies.com>. (See Figure 4-4.)



Figure 4-4:
Fairytale
Brownies
uses a
keyword-
rich domain
name.

Using your existing authority to your advantage

If you have an existing domain with authority, be sure to use it by building your blog on a subdomain or subdirectory. Some businesses decide to build their blogs on new domains. Unless you're confident that you can attract a lot of attention on a new blog on an external domain, take advantage of your existing domain. Your domain already has history and is (most likely) trusted.



There are plenty of geeks in back rooms out in the Internet that would love to argue the point about using an existing company domain. If you feel compelled to argue, putting your resources into writing a few more blog posts will probably benefit your company much more than wasting the energy on an argument that's virtually impossible to prove a result for.

Subdomains do afford other opportunities for inbound marketing efforts. By pushing different efforts to different subdomains (such as `email.yourcompanydomain.com`, `landingpages.yourcompanydomain.com`, `blog.yourcompanydomain.com`, `sales.yourcompanydomain.com`, `support.yourcompanydomain.com`), it's much easier to maintain multiple profiles in your analytics program. If you simply had these pages and strategies mixed in subfolders or subpages across a single domain, trying to analyze each strategy and how visitors are arriving, behaving, and converting can be a huge challenge.

Subdomains can be more convenient for establishing different analytics profiles and accurately measuring your traffic to the blog alone. You might want to take advantage of this characteristic if it fits the needs of your blog and your company.

Working to establish authority as fast as possible

When your blog is ready for you to write that first blog post, imagine someone just provided you with the keys to an incredibly powerful race car. Many companies ask, "How many blog posts should I write?" That's a lot like asking "How slow can I go and still win the race?" You've got a state-of-the-art content engine and if you want to win, you must hit the gas when the green flag comes out and continue to push it as hard as you can!

A business blog with entries written once a week has about 50 posts by the end of the year. That's 50 chances to win search and win some customers.

A business blog that publishes a post a day has over 250 posts by the end of the year. If a blog has 5 times more content — assuming, of course, that the stuff is worth reading — it has 5 times more opportunities to capture search-engine traffic!

Your blogging platform is going to allow you to publish as often as you'd like. So, if you have a lot to say about your business and can make it a thundering good read, take advantage of this incredible content engine and go win the race!



Be sure to use keywords that are going to attract search engine traffic within your blog posts. Always write quality, compelling content. Many businesses make the more-is-better mistake, and seldom see results because poor content (that is, say, too redundant, too obscure, too superficial, or too complex) leads to little or no business. Writing quality content will drive conversions.

Link your content from your Web site to your blog and your blog to your Web site. Associating new content with content that has already been indexed and ranked by search engines by association makes it easier for the search engines to find.

Chapter 8 shows you how to find out more information about the ways search engines find your content.

Moving your blog and retaining authority

Many companies start with a free subdomain and are actually surprised when their blog grows in popularity. They decide to move the blog and are aghast when they're not getting any traffic where they moved it. That's because the search engines recognize all the authority at the provider's domain.

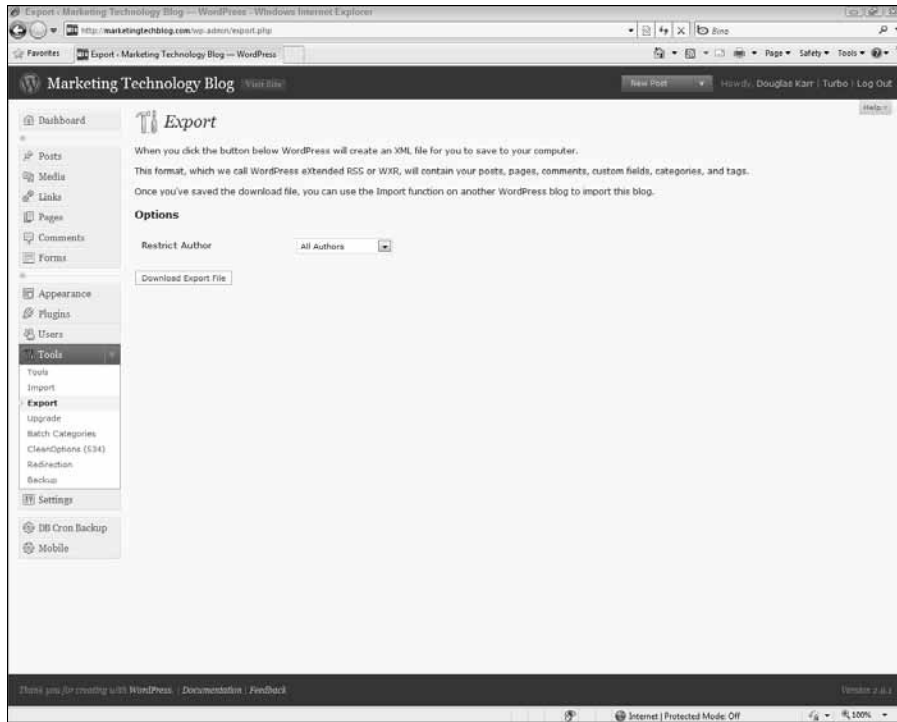
If you decide to ever move your blog from one service to another, there are a number of steps you must take to ensure that nothing disrupts search-engine traffic. Remember, a new blog platform may have a new Web-address structure — which could cause incredible problems when someone clicks an old address! It can also result in the search engines dropping your ranking for specific pages because the links back to the pages that guaranteed your popularity no longer exist.

To move your blog from one service to another *and* retain your search-engine authority, just follow these steps:

- 1. Export your old blog content and then Import that content into your new blogging platform. (See Figures 4-5 and 4-6.)**

Most major blogging platforms have a universal export feature. Even if you have to do this manually, however, get it done; it's better than starting with no content at all.

Figure 4-5:
Exporting
your blog
content
from
WordPress
for use with
another
blogging
platform.



2. Write redirects from the old blog post Web addresses to the new blog post URLs. Some platforms have redirection modules or plug-ins to make this easier.

Each time a request is made for a Web page, a code is sent to the requesting service. You've probably noticed this when you've seen "Page Not Found" errors associated with the number 404. 404 is the code that is actually sent to the requesting service. Users typically don't see these codes passed back and forth — that's the job of browsers and Web servers. A normal Web page produces a code of 200.

A 301 code tells the requester that the page has been moved. This technique ensures that users who click a search-engine result will still land on the content they were looking for. It also notifies the search engines that the page has moved. You will still lose some momentum in your search rankings, but at least you're not losing it all. Be sure to deploy 301 redirects on any pages that are being redirected.

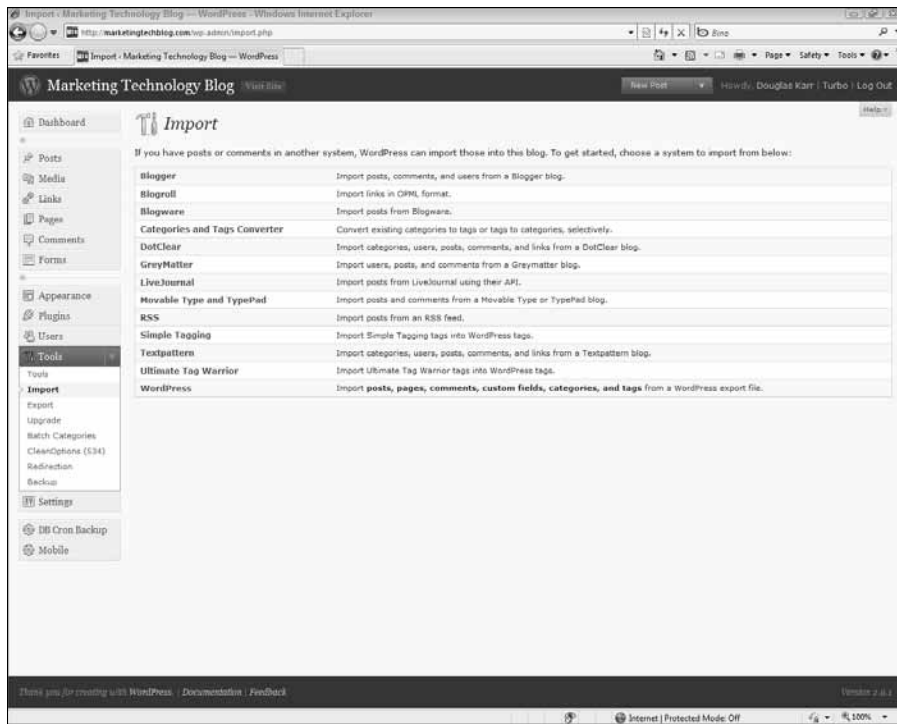


Figure 4-6:
Importing
your blog
content
from
another
blogging
platform into
WordPress.



Although you may want to employ the assistance of an expert to create your redirect, you can do it yourself in a number of different ways, including the following:

- You can write directly to an `.htaccess` file if your blog is deployed in a Unix or Linux hosting environment.
- You can add the redirects in Internet Information Services (IIS) if your blog is hosted in a Microsoft environment.
- You can deploy the use of a plug-in. If you're using WordPress, John Godley's Redirection Plug-in allows you to manage redirects with an easy-to-use management interface.
- You can also program the redirects directly in the code of the old page to point to the new page. In PHP, this looks like:

```
<?php header("Location: http://newdomain.com/newpage",  
TRUE, 301); ?>
```

Some content management systems also accomplish this for you. Squarespace is a popular content management system and blogging

platform that allows you to import your blog and it ensures that all of your old content URLs will still work properly!

3. Write a redirect from the old blog RSS feed to the new blog RSS feed.

An RSS feed is nothing more than a Web page that's formatted differently (instead of HTML, it uses XML so that it can be read easier by applications and programming languages). Just as you wrote a 301 redirect for your pages, you'll also want to write one for your blog's RSS feed. I recommend using a feed analytics application such as FeedBurner so you can update the feed without interruption in the future. Read more about setting up your blog on Feedburner in Chapter 15.

4. Switch your CNAME record to point to the new service or server.

If you're moving domains or subdomains, it's still possible to redirect to the new blog address. You will lose some of your ranking when you transfer the subdomains but you may be able to bounce back quickly.

Changing domains altogether can have a drastic impact — avoid it at all costs.



5. Test many of your old blog posts' Web addresses and ensure they forward properly to your new blog address.

6. Monitor Google Webmasters, Bing Webmasters, and Yahoo! Site Explorer for pages that are not found — and correct them. Don't bother checking every day, though — it will take a week or two before you'll see problems.

7. Republish your Sitemap and resubmit each time you correct items.

This is accomplished by logging into Google Webmasters, selecting Site configuration → Sitemaps, checking your sitemap, and clicking Resubmit.

If you're changing your domain or subdomain, the biggest loss you're going to take are on sites like Technorati, which require that you register your new blog address. They don't have a means of updating your actual address.

Moving your blog is painful and will hurt your momentum, regardless of how hard you tried to keep all the pieces moving. This is why selecting a great domain and an outstanding platform is such a critical *early* decision.

Selecting the Best Domain Structure for Your Organization

A *subdomain* refers to the portion of text in your Web address before your actual domain name. Typically, the default of the Web has been to use the main “www” as a Web site. As the Web has evolved, subdomains are used to designate other sections of the domain.



Companies use subdomains for shopping, mail, support, video, and, of course, blogging. Subdomains are convenient for many companies because they can point a subdomain to another server much more easily than they can point a subdirectory to the same location.

The taxonomy of a Web address appears like this:

```
http://subdomain.domain.com/subdirectory
```

You can have multiple subdomains and subdirectories as well, of course. You might be wondering which is better — hosting your blog in a subdomain or in a subdirectory. There are some advantages and disadvantages to each approach, but ultimately there appears to be little difference in ranking between them.

Understanding the pros and cons of subdomains

In some ways, search engines treat subdomains like a separate domain altogether. For example, in search engine results pages you will often find a company with multiple subdomains gets additional results while a company with a single domain only gets one. There are other advantages as well, such as the following:

- ✓ Real estate matters, even online — maybe *especially* online. By having both a domain and subdomain showing up on search engines, you can cover more area in the Search Engine Results Page (SERP). Search engines are adjusting accordingly, filtering subdomains, and only showing a single relevant result.
- ✓ Consumers are tuning into blogs to make purchasing decisions more and more, so prominently using a blog subdomain makes it clear to them that your company is trying to achieve a relationship with them as customers. Blogging denotes honesty and trust — and that’s what you want search engine users to see.
- ✓ Putting your blog on a subdomain can be a distinctive advantageous to differentiate your company’s polished, slick, glitzy marketing from its inviting “voice.”
- ✓ Organizing subdomains used to be difficult — but by now it’s pretty mainstream in hosting administration panels.
- ✓ Using subdomains opens you up to taking advantage of existing third-party software as service applications that may be best suited to do the job. Delegating your e-mail subdomain to an e-mail service provider, for example, is a great way to monitor and maintain your e-mail reputation.
- ✓ A subdomain can be pointed anywhere, internally or externally, giving you a lot more flexibility in moving your blog between providers or

changing your Web site's content management system, and so on, without having much impact on the blog's content.

- ✔ A subdomain can be set up independently within Webmasters' accounts and analytics accounts, providing you with discrete search engine monitoring and measurement on your blog strategy alone.
- ✔ Blogging platforms often have their own software for generating sitemaps. Keeping your sitemap independent of the blog — in effect, parking it on a subdomain — ensures that your blog is getting crawled properly and won't require you to manage multiple sitemaps throughout a single domain (which can be a major headache).
- ✔ Subdomains will allow your company mobility if you ever decide to switch blogging platforms or set up your own servers and do it yourself. Pointing a subdomain is much easier than configuring subdirectory redirects. Most blogging platforms do not offer anything but canonical name (CNAME) records to manage this situation.
- ✔ Most importantly, using a subdomain allows you to control, monitor, and adjust your corporate blogging strategy separately from your other marketing initiatives.

Understanding the pros and cons of putting your blog in a subfolder

Okay, you have an absolutely killer blog, decked out in the company livery, ready to bring in new friends from all over the Web. Where do you *put* it on the Web? Much of what you read out on the Web simply compares subdomains to subfolders, but says nothing about the advantages and disadvantages of each when you're singling out a corporate blogging strategy.

Matt Cutts of Google has some interesting feedback on this question, and promotes the use of a subdirectory, largely because of the complexities involved in configuring a subdomain.

"The single largest advantage of a subfolder is that it's simple to set up," he says. "If your company is setting up your own blogging software, it's often very simple to just place it in a subdomain and be up and running. This doesn't require any domain name changes and the blog will directly inherit search engine authority of the domain."

When you're blogging for business and tracking conversions, the advantages of a subdomain become a bit clearer. Although subdomains will allow your blog to assume some of the search engine authority of your parent domain, you will be provided all the advantages of communicating with search engines, monitoring, and analytics.

Chapter 5

Choosing a Blogging Platform

In This Chapter

- ▶ Determining a budget for implementation
 - ▶ Choosing a platform that fits your company
 - ▶ Assessing blogging platforms
-

Not all blogging platforms are created equal — and that’s great for your organization! If you have competent internal resources with the time and expertise to implement it, a variety of blogging platforms are available for your team to download for free, purchase, or integrate with. If you’re a large enterprise without the resources, fantastic Software as a Service (SaaS) vendors can will host and manage the blog — including the infrastructure, backups and software for you. If you’re a one-person shop, you still have options.

Blogging platforms come in all shapes and sizes, across all Web technology platforms, and with a variety of costs, from open source with no licensing fees up to enterprise software that can cost more than \$100,000 (US). And you’ll find everything in between.

Determining Your Blogging Platform

Determining the right blogging solution for your company is critical, but your choice is dependent upon your internal resources, your internal expertise, and your ultimate goals. If your company has the IT resources, search engine optimization experience, analytics expertise, content writers, and online marketing experience for driving inbound marketing strategies, a simple platform like WordPress can be an outstanding platform to deploy.

If your IT team is restrictive and difficult to work with, you don’t have internal expertise, and you really need a coach and professionals to help you build a successful program, then investing in a professional software-as-a-service solution like Compendium may be your best option. Choose wisely!

There are hundreds of blogging platforms on the market to choose from, but several stand out:

- ✔ **Blogger:** Used by personal and publication blogs.
- ✔ **Compendium:** Specifically developed for corporate blogs.
- ✔ **Expression Engine:** Used for personal, publication, and corporate bloggers.
- ✔ **Movable Type, TypePad, Vox:** Used for personal and publication blogs.
- ✔ **TypePad Business:** Used for professional publication and corporate blogs.
- ✔ **Wordpress.com, WordPress, and WordPress Multi-User:** Used for personal, publication, and corporate blogs.
- ✔ **WordPress VIP:** Hosted solution for professional publication and corporate blogs.

Make the right choice by taking the time up front to assess the pros and cons of each blogging platform.

Perhaps the most widely adopted blogging platform is WordPress. WordPress offers several versions of their content management system and has an entire ecosystem of developed integrations, themes, and plug-ins. WordPress can be expanded for use with forums (bbPress) and even social networks (BuddyPress). The basic versions of WordPress are as follows:

- ✔ **WordPress.com:** A fairly restrictive, hosted solution. This version is simple to use, but users are very restricted in the customization of their platform. Many plug-ins and themes cannot be used with WordPress.com.
- ✔ **WordPress VIP:** A version of WordPress that is a full software-as-a-service hosted solution that is supported and monitored by WordPress and is targeted towards large scale implementations. Companies like CNN, the BBC, and TimeWarner use WordPress VIP.
- ✔ **WordPress.org:** The most commonly used version. The software is free to use for commercial use and runs on Linux with an Apache Web server using PHP and MySQL (LAMP). This version allows you to operate a single blog on a hosting platform of your choosing. You are free to customize your blog however you see fit. If you want to fully leverage the platform, though, you'll want to hire a professional to get you off the ground, a designer to build out your theme, and possibly even a search expert to fully optimize the platform.
- ✔ **WordPress Multi-User (MU):** A version of WordPress that allows you to run unlimited numbers of blogs within the same installed instance.

✔ **WordPress MU powers edublogs (<http://edublogs.org>):** A system of more than 400,000 blogs for students and educators. WordPress MU could be selected for large organizations that wish to offer their own platform where users can simply sign up and begin blogging or for industry organizations who wish to manage blogs throughout multiple companies.

However, you don't have to be an educator to use WordPress MU. JC Hart is an apartment management firm in the Midwest that operates over a dozen different apartment communities. JC Hart implemented WordPress MU, providing each community with its own blog, but also distributing centralized news throughout all the communities.

Again, although this is “free” software, it's pretty complex stuff. You'll be best served by hiring a professional firm with extensive experience in optimizing the platform and ensuring its stability and performance.

The Compendium Blogging platform (www.compendium.com) is new on the blogging platform block but ingeniously combines all the features of a single corporate blog and rolls user blogs and keyword-centric blogs into one enterprise platform. This allows the company to have a comprehensive blog with all the latest posts, users to have their own unique blogs, and keyword-centric blogs that focus on micro-target search engine users.

Budget Considerations When Selecting Your Platform

Selecting a blogging platform that your company can grow with is an important decision, so you don't want to simply jump to a quick conclusion because of the popularity of a platform or the price. Too many companies jump into free, open source solutions, only to find that they can't properly implement, maintain, scale, or integrate with them.



Too many companies, at this point, are mesmerized by the notion of *free* software. Blogging is not *free*. Your company is going to invest a lot of hours of employee time to build your content. A single blog post per day can cost your company more than \$5,000 in human resources yearly. That time spent on blogging might be time that was budgeted for your employees' primary responsibilities as well. Making a hasty or ill-advised decision based on the cost of the platform will not only cost your company lost time and resources — it will also cost you in lost revenue as your competitors pass you by.

Therefore, you must bring in a solution that's easy to implement and use, can grow with your organization's goals — and most of all, provides you with a return on investment (ROI). You want to make the right decision early.

Building your blog on a solid infrastructure

At its simplest, a blogging platform doesn't require a lot of resources. Written content is stored in a database, and when someone visits the site, that content is extracted from the database and displayed. Simple. As companies continue to integrate and add tools to their blog, though, the blogging platform begins to do much more work, including, at times, any of the following:

- ✓ Handling, at times, waves of traffic produced by mentions on other blogs or social media sites. Your blog may be able to handle a hundred visitors easy, but can it handle tens of thousands when you need it most?
- ✓ Performing scheduled publishing tasks.
- ✓ Integrating comments with external spam systems.
- ✓ Integrating third-party plug-in, widgets, and integrations.
- ✓ Publishing sitemaps and communicating with search engines effectively.
- ✓ Capturing analytics and information.
- ✓ Categorizing and tagging content and retrieving that content.
- ✓ Automatically syndicating that content to countless other platforms.

As you continue to integrate, automate, and enhance your blog — and your blog continues to acquire new readers, it can require much more resources than the average hosting platform can supply. And the average company doesn't realize this until it's too late.

Say that you're tempted to purchase a \$5-per-month hosting package with the most popular hosting company. You purchase the hosting platform, go for the infamous one-click install, and your blog is up and running. You blog with the platform for a few months and feel great about the decision you made. It was effortless!

Then it happens. . . .

Guy Kawasaki or Seth Godin or Jason Calacanis or Michael Arrington or perhaps a *BusinessWeek* editor reads one of your posts and thinks your product may be the greatest thing since sliced bread. They comment on Twitter about your latest blog post, and then the world comes crashing down on you.

Gee, your hosting platform ran fantastic when you had only a few dozen visitors per day. However, on the day that Guy, Seth, Jason, or *BusinessWeek* readers decide to click the link to your blog, they get nothing but a blank page. Your blog is dead — argh! — because your \$5 hosting package can't handle it. And that single day could have turned your business around, but you risked it all to save a few hundred bucks a year.

There is a trail of tears across the Internet from bloggers who missed their big day because they didn't have a platform that could keep up, or they didn't have a platform that even backed up their data on a regular basis, or they used a platform that got hacked because they weren't installing patches and upgrades when the alerts hit their dashboard.

A corporate blogging platform like Compendium offers redundancy, back-ups, monitoring, and can dynamically add server resources instantaneously if your blog's performance begins to suffer. They also use Amazon EC2 services, a platform that caches resources geographically so a visitor from Tokyo or New York won't see a major difference in your blog's performance. Using a high-end platform like Compendium can help you concentrate on blogging and executing your corporate blogging strategy instead of worrying whether your blog is down!

If you wish to host your blog yourself, newer *cloud* services offer inexpensive alternatives. The Marketing Technology Blog is hosted on a combination of MediaTemple and Amazon Web services. Amazon S3 serves all the images while MediaTemple serves WordPress and the database runs on another service — all for under one-hundred dollars per month. (Amazon pricing is dynamic based on how much bandwidth you're consuming).

Even pairing up Amazon S3 with a five-dollar-a-month hosting account can significantly increase your blog's performance. Caching plug-ins can help as well. Caching plug-ins publish pages in a file and refer to that file directly instead of making a database query for the content.



If you are going to host the blog with internal resources, be sure to accommodate for growth of one-thousand times and even ten-thousand times the traffic. Don't risk your business on a cheap solution that won't be there when you need it most.



Recent additions to Google's algorithms take the amount of time it takes for your pages to load into consideration when ranking your content. Most of Google's recommendations are to keep your pages serving in under five seconds. You can monitor your site's page speed in Google Webmasters' Site Performance. Google has a number of tips and even browser plug-ins that assist you in analyzing your page speed and troubleshooting issues that are slowing your site down.

Hiring a blog consultant to assist with your strategy

If you're not sure what to implement, hire a blogging consultant with experience in implementing corporate blogging solutions. If the consultant begins talking about the free platform he uses without ever asking you about your resources, goals, infrastructure, cost per lead, marketing budget, and so on . . . finish your coffee quickly and show him the door.



A corporate blogging consultant isn't the same as a blogging consultant, a social media consultant, or an IT consultant. Corporate blogging consultants can take in your resources, goals, and research and develop a blogging strategy around them.



Blogging consultants can vary in cost from twenty-five dollars an hour to launch your blog up to tens of thousands of dollars to implement a complete blogging strategy for your company. As with any consultant, it's important that you understand the impact that a consultant will have on your business results.

Choosing a Hosted, Self-Hosted, or SaaS Solution

The first decision you need to make is which type of hosting solution your business will use:

- ✓ **A hosted solution:** You manage a blog on the blogging platform itself.
- ✓ **A self-hosted solution:** You install and manage the blog on your own servers or hosting platform.
- ✓ **An SaaS solution:** *Software as a Service (SaaS)* refers to a new model of purchasing software where you purchase it as a service. That is, you don't have any rights or access to the core application code, but you purchase usage of the application. Typically, annual licensing fees and scaled cost models are associated with SaaS. In recent years, this has become a very popular way of purchasing software.

Advantages and disadvantages of hosted solutions

Hosted software solutions, such as Blogger (www.blogger.com), TypePad (www.typepad.com; nonbusiness), and WordPress (www.wordpress.org; hosted solution), provide basic blogging that's simple to set up and easy to use. Typically, getting your blog up and running on a hosted solution takes only a few minutes. (See Figure 5-1.)

However, because hosted solutions are often housed on shared server farms, there are limitations on how you can use the software, whether you can integrate with it, and strict licensing conditions.

Often times, a hosted solution may actually have a Terms of Service limitation that denies users the right to reclaim its own content in the event the service is no longer available, provides no guarantee of up-time, and sometimes retains rights on users' content for their own purposes.



Figure 5-1: Blogger is an example of a hosted solution for personal blogs.

Hosted solutions are typically best for nontechnical, personal blogs of individuals. Few hosted solutions allow you to use your own domain name without incurring an additional fee. If the domain on which you're writing your blog isn't owned by your company, you're providing someone else with the content and authority you worked hard to attain.

In sum, then, hosted solutions aren't suited for hosting business blogs. For a corporate blog, steer clear of this solution.

Advantages and disadvantages of self-hosted solutions

Self-hosted solutions are the most popular solutions for corporate blogging. (See Figure 5-2.) Companies that host on specific technologies such as ASP.NET can find a blogging solution (like Subtext) that's natively designed for their servers.

If your company already has the server space and bandwidth available, adding a blog may not add to the expense at all. If you are starting from scratch, you may spend a few thousand dollars on a server, hundreds of dollars per month in rack space at a datacenter, and hundreds of dollars per month for bandwidth. You may also want to pay more for backup plans, monitoring, and deployment services. Consult your IT management team or a data center representative for additional details and costs.

One big advantage of using a self-hosted solution is that it can typically be integrated directly into your Web site's content management system (CMS), customer relationship management (CRM) solution, and e-mail marketing platform. If your company has full rights to the source code or is using an open source solution, self-hosted solutions allow you to develop some incredibly complex and usable solutions for capturing data, processing content, and reusing content for other publications.

On the other hand, disadvantages of self-hosted solutions include the following:

- ✓ Many self-hosted solutions were developed without the average user in mind. As a result, some of the interfaces are horrid, and the user experience can be very poor. You might have to hire developers who are familiar with the platform to ensure you have a usable system.

Placing software that's been developed by other parties on your own servers comes with a certain degree of risk. In recent times, open source platforms have been a popular target of hackers.



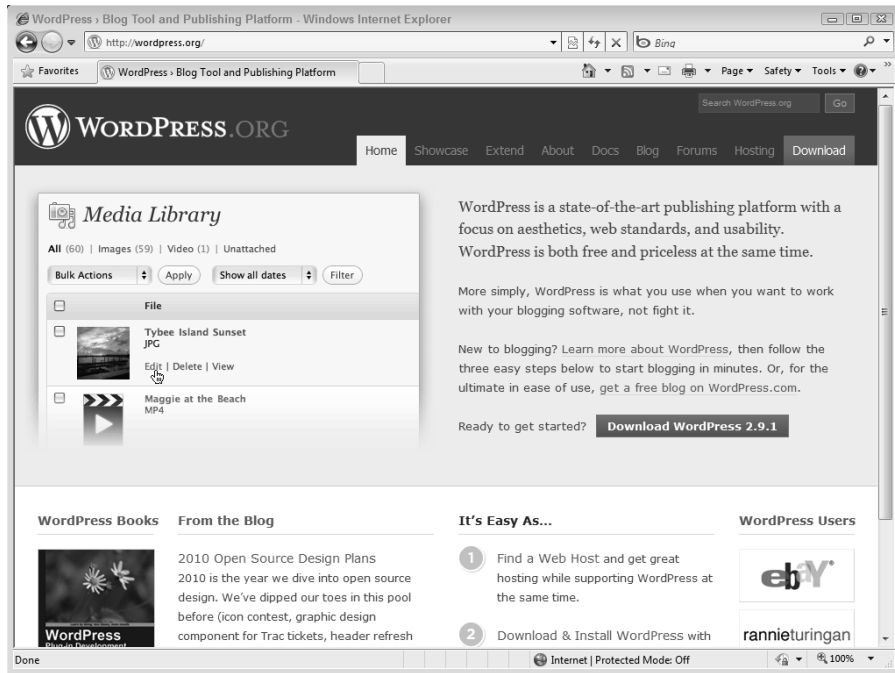


Figure 5-2: WordPress.org is a self-hosted solution.

- ✔ Many necessary components of a business blog are third-party integration packages for typical self-hosted solutions. Adding third-party plug-ins is a great way to expand the versatility of your blog, but plug-ins that aren't well written can add a lot of resources to your server — or worse, leave security gaps that typical maintenance upgrades won't help to block.
- ✔ Self-hosted platforms often come in an all-in-one package but can't take advantage of high-performing infrastructures, such as cloud hosting, Web acceleration, redundant databases, caching, load sharing, and so on. Companies that built enterprise blogs on free or self-hosted solutions have often had to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars to upgrade to a system that's reliable and performs well.
- ✔ Self-hosted platforms with plug-ins can have software upgrades that are required on a daily basis, resulting in a lot of unforeseen maintenance that might not be anticipated. Thankfully, many of the latest blogging platforms — like WordPress — have upgrade alerts and can be upgraded at the click of a mouse.
- ✔ Self-hosted platforms aren't optimized for search engines and can require a number of enhancements to the blog themes as well as third-party plug-ins to get up to par. Within the setup of the blog, simple

settings can weigh heavily on your blog's ability to be found in search engines. Without an experienced blogging optimization expert, this is difficult to identify and correct.

- ✔ Designs of your blogging theme must be accomplished not only to be aesthetically pleasing and to match your corporate brand, but they must also be optimized for search engines. The typical theme designer doesn't realize the effect that they will have on search engine optimization (SEO). Applying a poorly designed theme that looks fantastic can spell disaster for your program.
- ✔ Many blogging platforms come with little or no documentation on how to use them. This dearth of information might be okay when your blogger is a techy geek, but the average employee could face a very steep learning curve.
- ✔ Blogging well requires additional insight and training on how to effectively use keywords, write compelling content, use white space effectively, write post titles that generate clicks, and write posts that will drive more sales. Blogging software doesn't provide any of this direction.
- ✔ Blogging applications lack any analytics to provide feedback on how the blog is actually performing. Initiating a blogging strategy and understanding what tools need integrated, how to analyze the results, and implement new strategies for growth is information that doesn't come with the software.
- ✔ When you host your blogging solution, you're responsible for how well it performs, what your up-time is, how fast your pages load, how you're backed up, and so on. If your blog goes down after you release the big news on the company that's going to drive a lot of traffic, who are you going to call?

Self-hosting is the most common method for implementing a corporate blogging strategy nowadays because until recently, no other options were available. Many companies absolutely underestimate the cost and resources needed to maintain a corporate blog. Free is not free.

Advantages and disadvantages of SaaS solutions

The new method on the block is the SaaS solution. (See an example, Compendium, in Figure 5-3.) Just as companies like Salesforce (www.salesforce.com) revolutionized the CRM and ExactTarget (www.exacttarget.com) revolutionized e-mail, with SaaS solutions, blogging platforms are now being adopted in the SaaS model.

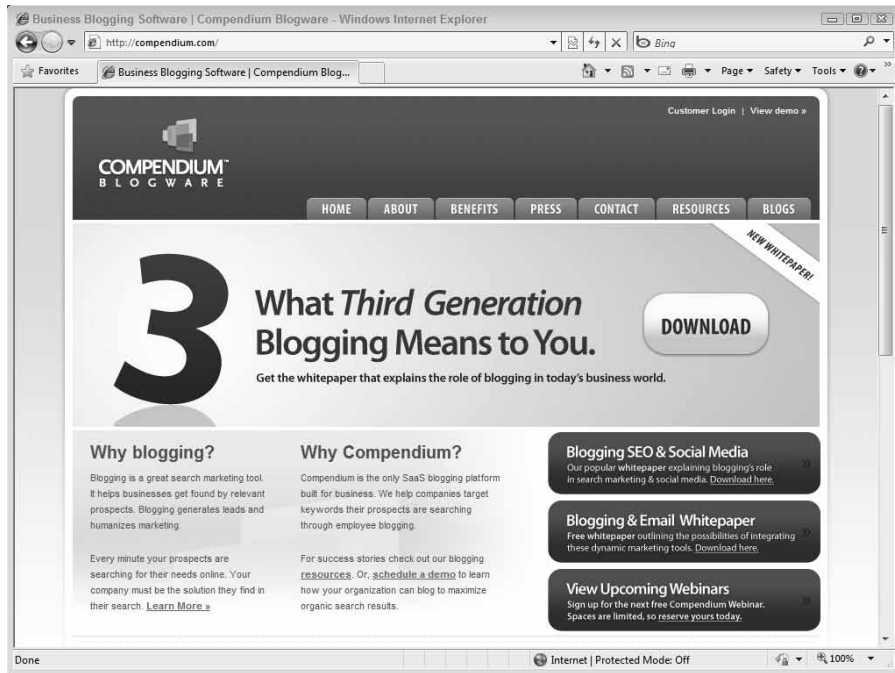


Figure 5-3:
Compendium is a SaaS solution.

SaaS solutions are hosted solutions that companies subscribe to and use via a Web browser. SaaS advantages include that your company does not have to install or maintain software or worry about infrastructure costs. SaaS companies monitor their software and security, ensure system performance, and regularly upgrade their software with features and fixes. Additionally, many SaaS providers also include professional training and services when needed (sometimes at an additional cost). Companies have moved to SaaS solutions because they require minimal startup investment and internal IT resources.

Businesses like Rubbermaid, Coca-Cola, General Electric, and Forrester — and even publishing giants like the *Los Angeles Times*, ABC News, and *USA Today* — have chosen the SaaS model using services like TypePad Business (www.typepad.com/business).

The advantages of using a company like TypePad or Compendium are many, including the following:

- ✔ Businesses have access to superior infrastructures, security, and monitoring that they could not likely invest in if they were self hosted.
- ✔ Some companies like Compendium provide additional services, like *cloud bursting*. This service allows your blog to dynamically add

resources on the fly when they're needed to ensure that your blog is up and running when it's needed most—when hundreds of thousands of visitors head your way!

- ✔ SaaS solutions typically offer Service Level Agreements (SLA) that guarantee up-time, monitoring, and backups.
- ✔ Your blogging team can focus on the blogging strategy and not the blogging platform.
- ✔ Using these systems typically comes with account management, support, coaching, and training.
- ✔ SaaS providers rapidly develop new features and integrations as demanded by their clients and the competitive marketplace. Your company will continue to benefit from these updates with no additional costs or maintenance issues to implement.
- ✔ Blogging companies like Compendium often solicit the expertise of others in the industry to help them prioritize features and ensure that clients get maximum results.

The ultimate advantage a company has when using a SaaS solution is that the ROI will determine whether you continue to use its platform. If you don't get results, you're not going to use it. This is huge pressure for SaaS companies to ensure that they get the results you demand.

On the other hand, SaaS blogging platforms have at least one disadvantage. Because the platform is shared, there's typically little or no opportunity for modification of the core platform.

Many SaaS providers overcome this with a robust application programming interface (API), which allows your company to develop whatever solutions you require on top of the platform.

Flexibility in Blog Templating Engines

As technology has advanced, so have blog templating engines. Early blogging platforms had simple customization components, which allowed for simple things like changing a header or a background color. Newer platforms allow designers and administrators to fully customize the look and feel of the blog and even integrate it with external platforms.

Technologies like Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) have been incorporated and allow a user to publish content in one page but define how it looks in another

file altogether. This means that two blogs running the identical content can look totally different from one another. For more information on CSS, check out *CSS Web Design For Dummies*.

Using a template, your company can integrate forms with a third-party tool like Formstack, or integrate e-mail subscriptions with a tool like MailChimp. Perhaps you want to integrate social media commenting using a tool like JS-Kit Echo: all are possibilities because you can make edits directly to the blogs' template. Using CSS also allows a blog to look different depending on whether you're printing the page, viewing it on a mobile device, viewing it on an iPhone, or accessing the actual content through other devices (for those users who employ accessibility aids).

Modern text editors allow writers to go crazy with their content. If you don't want your bloggers throwing in different fonts, enlarging and reducing fonts, or changing spacing and colors, you should be able to control all your content by using CSS and having your bloggers write only plain text.



However, CSS can't handle everything. Exceptions include adding subheadings, bolded words, images, and links. These are editing techniques you might want to train your bloggers on. Ask them to avoid any additional editing so that you can ensure your blog is consistent and readable.

If your blogging platform doesn't provide you access directly to the template, but instead has a simple interface that only asks you to define the header image, the footer image, and some pages, you're not using a blogging package that provides the customization that you might need.

Some blogging applications will claim to offer "highly customizable templates" where CSS can be employed, but that doesn't necessarily mean you can customize every element of the template. The easiest way to ensure that you're adopting a CSS-compliant platform with a robust templating engine is to get that guarantee in writing.

If you view your page content and see that everything resides in tables rather than an XHTML CSS-driven solution that allows elements such as `divs`, you might wish to walk away from the solution altogether. (Check out *CSS For Dummies* for more information.) Tables were used in the early days of HTML editing to control page layouts, but CSS allows much more flexibility. Not only are table-driven systems difficult to customize, they are also difficult to optimize for search engines. A templating engine that has table-driven content needs its engine rewritten to move components around the page. A templating engine that has CSS-driven content simply requires an edit to the attached stylesheet.

Balancing SEO and optimal design

A great design for your blog can lead to increased conversion rates by providing the reader with a perception of professionalism. However, your company can pay up to \$50,000 for a custom-designed theme for your blog.

You'd probably guess that if you paid \$25,000 for a custom design, the theme would be optimized for search — and you'd be wrong. Most theme developers don't realize the effect that their beautiful design has on SEO.

Search engines recognize HTML components, so the use of specific HTML tags as well as the layout of your overall page can have a significant impact on your blog's optimization.

Search engines view the importance of those HTML components on a page to evaluate the importance of the words used in those components. Aside from your domain name, here are the elements ranked from most important to least:

- ✔ **Home page title tag:** Your home page title tag provides the words that you wish to associate with your domain to the search engines. The home page title tag looks like this:

```
<title>A few keywords | My blog name</title>
```

- ✔ **Page title tags:** Each blog post has its own title tags. The title tag should start with the keyword-rich blog post title and optionally end with your blog name. The page title tag looks like this:

```
<title>Keywords in my Post Title | My blog name</title>
```

If at all possible, keywords should be used in the first words of your post title rather than the last.

- ✔ **Heading tags:** HTML uses heading and subheading tags. The most important is the H1 tag, followed by H2, H3, and so on. After H3, there's little focus from search engines. Your blog's name should always be held in an H1 tag. Best practice dictates following your H1 tag with an H2 for your blog post title and then using H3 for subheadings within your post. A heading tag looks like this:

```
<h1>Blog Name</h1>
  <h2>Keywords in Post Title</h2>
    <h3>Keywords in Subheading</h3>
    <h3>Keywords in Subheading</h3>
    <h3>Keywords in Subheading</h3>
```

Your theme designer should avoid the common mistake of using high-level headings in the sidebar headings. If you use an H2 tag for sidebar headings and an H3 tag for your blog content, you're effectively telling

search engines that the information in your sidebar headings is more important than your post titles!

- ✔ **Content in the top of the page:** Content at the top of your page is more important than content at the bottom. This doesn't have anything to do with how the page looks — it's how the page is designed. Here are two pages that can look exactly the same:

```
<body>
  <div id="sidebar">
    My sidebar content
  </div>
  <div id="content">
    My blog posts
  </div>
</body>
```

and

```
<body>
  <div id="content">
    My blog posts
  </div>
  <div id="sidebar">
    My sidebar content
  </div>
</body>
```

Whether your sidebar is on the left when you view your blog doesn't matter to a search engine. The search engine doesn't *look* at your page: It reads the HTML in the page source. Your page design should ensure that your content is higher than any sidebar content. This is another common mistake made by designers.

There is a tool for everything on the Internet these days! If you don't wish to learn HTML but want to see how your page might look to a search engine, you can use SEO Browser www.seo-browser.com. (See Figure 5-4.)

Follow these steps to find out how your page is viewed by a search engine:



1. Copy the Web address of a typical blog post page from your blog.

Much of your site's search engine traffic comes directly from single post pages, so don't test just your blog's home page.

2. Enter your Web address in the Address field at www.seo-browser.com.

3. Click Parse URL.

4. Review your results.

As you review your page, note whether the headings are sized according to their importance on the page. Also check whether the content on the top of your page is shown at the top of this page with any sidebar content below.

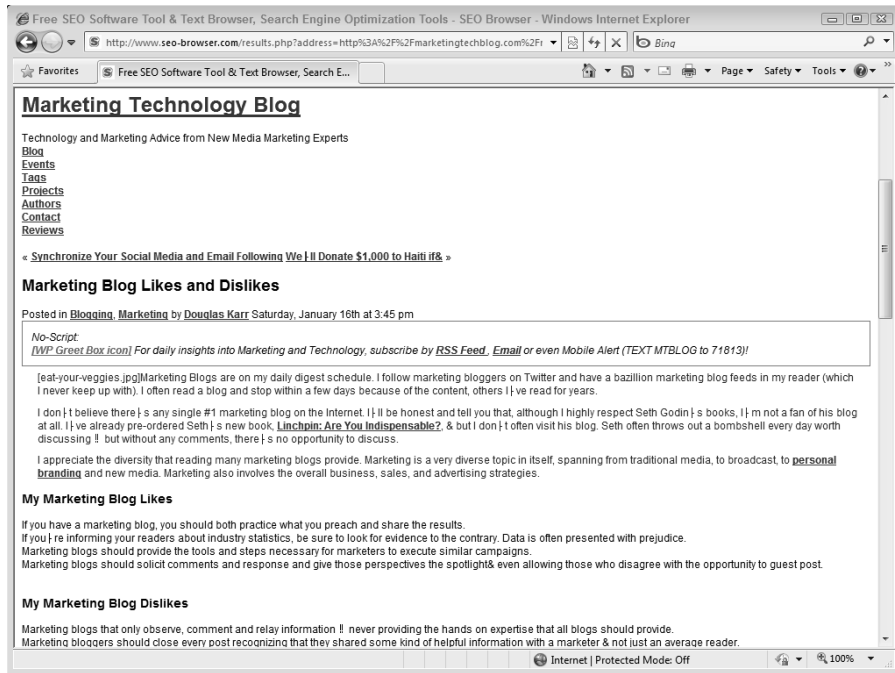


Figure 5-4:
Viewing a
blog post
page in
the SEO
Browser.

If the layout of the content doesn't appear logical or if all the font sizes appear the same, your designer might not have incorporated headings and subheadings properly. And if your sidebar content is listed first, be sure to ask the designer to swap the HTML and adjust the CSS to correct the issue.

Developing an attractive and readable blog theme

Fact: People don't read blogs or Web pages. No, don't shut this book and run away in disgust! People don't *read* blogs — but they do *scan* them. You can deploy a number of techniques with your Web theme to make your content more digestible to the human eye, including the following:

- ✓ **Don't use a dark background with light text.** Use dark text on a white background so that visitors can read your content with much less effort. Black can look cool on the background on your page, but don't use it for your actual post content. Keep your content background light and contrast the font significantly darker.

- ✔ **Don't use tiny fonts.** We live in a world of giant screens that support very high resolutions, and advanced users will have a difficult time reading your tiny fonts. Even on a normal screen, you're making a visitor work harder to digest your content.
- ✔ **Use a theme width that matches your audience.** Use analytics to get a breakdown of screen resolutions. For example, if you select a layout with a width of 1,024 pixels (px) and more than 95 percent of your readers have screen resolutions larger than that, you're fine.

Here's how to view your screen resolution breakdown in Google Analytics:

1. **Log in to your Google Analytics account.**
2. **Navigate to Visitors → Browser Capabilities → Screen Resolutions.**
3. **At the base of the report, select the maximum amount of rows to view all resolutions and the breakdown of resolutions. (See Figure 5-5.)**
4. **(Optional) To make analyzing this information easier, choose Export → CSV for Excel and view the data within Excel.**



Figure 5-5:
View a
breakdown
of screen
resolutions
in Google
Analytics.

- ✔ **Incorporate mobile CSS and themes to optimize reading on PDAs, iPods, iPhones, Android Phones and other mobile devices.** If you're using WordPress, Crowd Favorite has developed a theme-and-plug-in combination, WordPress Mobile Edition, which displays your content perfectly for each device.
- ✔ **Use white space effectively throughout your theme.** *White space* is the area of padding between objects. When elements like images, text, borders, and so on are too close together, it makes reading difficult. Adjusting your template to provide additional room around objects will make it easier to comprehend. Use significant amounts of space (from 10px to 20px) between components and also above and below headings. Also use a line height large enough that you don't cross lines as you read from left to right.
- ✔ **Go longer rather than shrinking content, reducing white space, or going wider.** Don't try to keep content within the height of the screen. Visitors won't mind scrolling, but they will mind a site that's difficult to read.
- ✔ **Use serif fonts.** Serif fonts (like the type used in this sentence) increase the speed at which people can read content. Don't be afraid to use a serif font in your blog's theme to make it easier to read the post content. Georgia is a serif font that's common across operating systems. Avoid using Arial and Comic Sans, both common sans serif fonts.

Enhancing Your Platform with Plug-Ins, Widgets, and Gadgets

Don't want to do all the work yourself? A number of different technologies can enhance your blog for you. Plug-ins, widgets, and gadgets are all technologies that make new features, integrations, and enhancements easy to package and distribute. So what exactly are plug-ins, widgets, and gadgets? This is where it might get confusing with all the overlap between the three.

Yahoo! purchased a company called Konfabulator that had developed a desktop application for Windows to display small applications — *widgets* — on your desktop. An example might be a weather widget where you get weather information displayed directly on your desktop without opening an application. Of course, now Windows offers applications very similar to the Yahoo! widget technology, but Windows calls them *gadgets*.

Google gadgets are a bit different. These gadgets are intended only for Google pages, but because you can use Google to build mini-applications and distribute them, you can find gadgets more or less everywhere. All this is similar to an iPhone with its applications, which you can search for, download, and install, and that are developed in their own proprietary language.

In addition, Adobe launched *AIR*, a technology to build applications or widgets easily for Windows and Mac.

A nice feature of all these technologies is that they're typically independent of whatever operating system you're running (aside from Microsoft Windows gadgets). See Figure 5-6.

Confused yet?

Blogging applications liked the approach and developed their own methodology for developing sidebar widgets. Developers could now develop a simple widget that's installed through a plug-in and then can be dragged and dropped in the widget interface of the blogging platform.

Plug-ins, widgets, gadgets, or even custom integration are fantastic ways of enhancing your customer experience, including Related Posts plug-ins that provide recommendations for further reading. This helps keep visitors on your site longer, reduce bounce rates, and increase the opportunity for conversion.

You can find some very robust plug-ins for other purposes as well, such as the Webtrends analytics plug-in that allows you to view your analytics directly within the WordPress dashboard. (See Figure 5-7.)

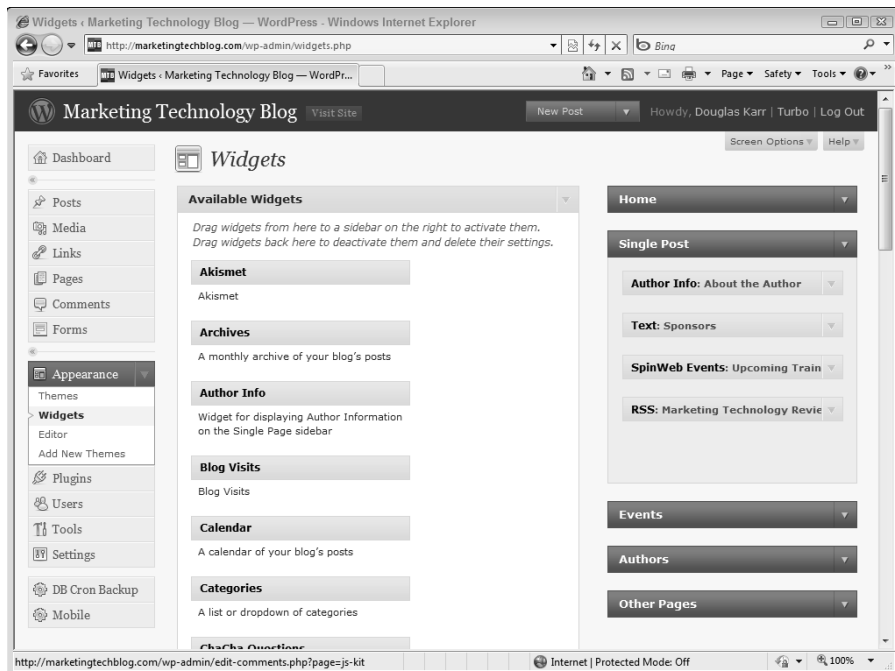


Figure 5-6:
Viewing
a list of
sidebar
widgets in
WordPress.

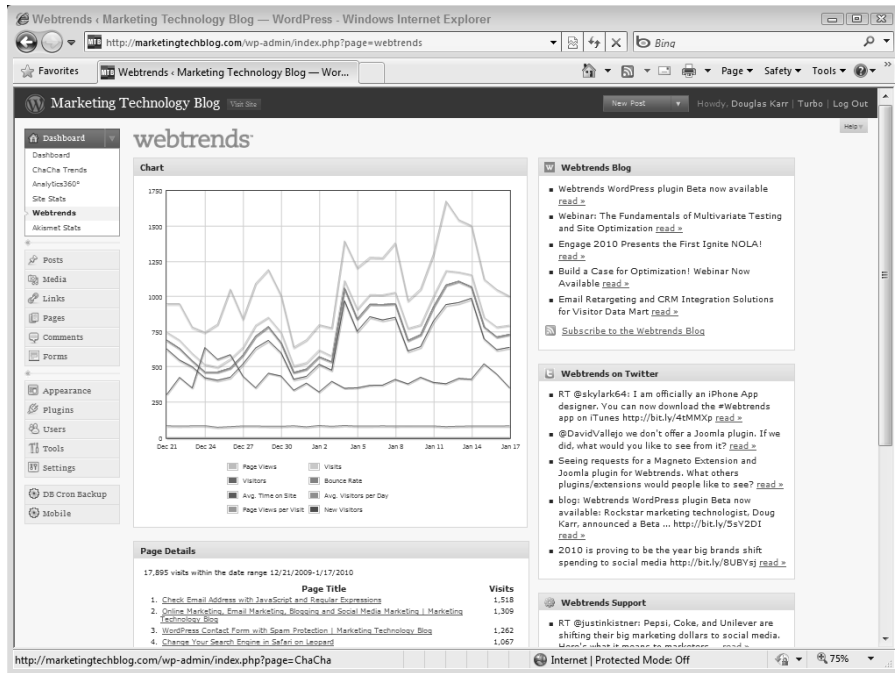


Figure 5-7:
Viewing a
Webtrends
analytics in
WordPress
with the
Webtrends
plug-in.

Installing WordPress plug-ins and widgets on your Hosted WordPress Blog

WordPress provides a unique statistics package that shows you how many visitors your blog is getting as well as what they're reading. This can be helpful for you to target your content to what's most popular as well as monitor the number of visitors you're getting to your blog. Follow these steps to install this plug-in:

1. Navigate to **Plugins** → **Add New**.
2. Search for **WordPress.com Stats**. (See Figure 5-8.)

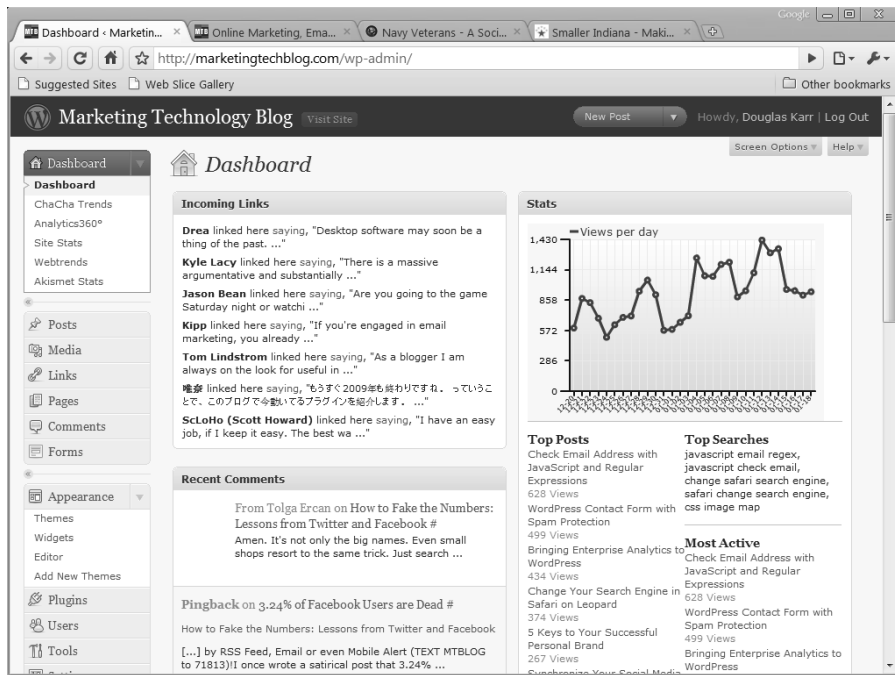


Figure 5-9:
Viewing
analyt-
ics in the
WordPress
dashboard.

Then, after a plug-in is activated that enables a widget, you also need to add that widget to your sidebar. All you need to do is follow these steps:

1. Navigate to Appearance → Widgets.

The page is broken down into Available Widgets, Inactive Widgets, and your sidebar. Depending on the complexity of your theme, you might even have more than one sidebar to add widgets to.



If you don't see any sidebars listed, your blog theme might not support them. This is a rip-off! Go see that developer and tell him to add them.

2. Drag an available widget to the sidebar within the location you wish to add it.

The widget opens and asks for any additional information you need to enter. (See Figure 5-10.)

3. Enter the requested information.

4. Click Save to publish the widget.

To remove a widget, simply drag it back to the Available Widget section.



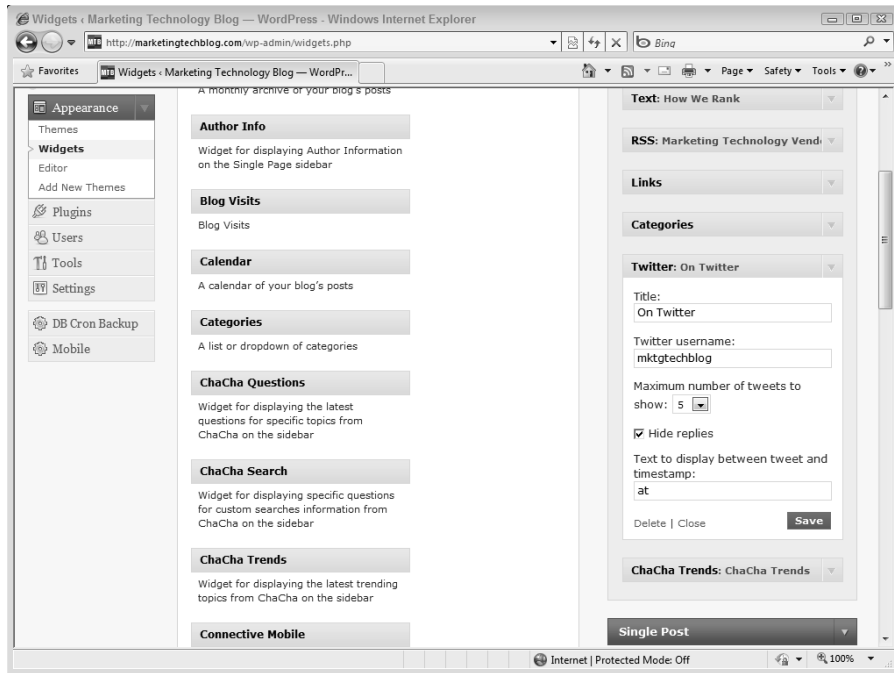


Figure 5-10:
Customizing
a widget.



TIP You can also load a widget without enabling any plug-in if the widget developer developed the widget with JavaScript or Flash. These widgets are easily identified because they are surrounded by `embed`, `object`, or `script` tags. You can select a text or an HTML widget from the Available Widgets, drag it to your sidebar, and it will open. Enter your title and paste the code in the body of the widget.

Resist the temptation to get a bit plug-in and widget crazy after you see how easy it is to add new features to your blog. Be mindful of the line between cool and distracting. Your blog's objective is to build authority, attract new visitors, and close business — not to show the world how many widgets you can stick in your sidebar.

Selecting components that drive traffic to you, not away from you

Your theme, content, sidebar widgets, and every other element of your blog should be focused on driving leads to your company. Many companies add

widgets that have little or nothing to do with their strategy, like local weather or news widgets, or worse, widgets that promote other social sites on given topics. These widgets can be a distraction or even drive visitors away from your corporate blog.

Other widgets can help in establishing authority; for instance, if your blog is ranked or awarded within your industry. Other widgets may be social media widgets that relay your latest Twitter or Facebook updates. These may entice a visitor to follow you and do business with you later.

To decide, think about whether it will drive traffic to your business or away from your business. Many publishing Web sites have dozens of widgets, advertisements, and other noise on their blog. That's okay because their objective is to increase advertising revenue, not a direct purchase from their company.

But don't mistake your own corporate blog for a publishing blog. The objectives are very different. As an example, Kyle Lacy, marketing authority and author of *Twitter Marketing For Dummies*, has a personal blog (www.kylelacy.com) that drives business to his company, Brandswag. Kyle's blog is carefully designed to accomplish five objectives (see Figure 5-11):

- ✔ **Increasing sales:** The Buy My Book photo in the header is a great call to action to drive book sales.
- ✔ **Defining Kyle as an authority:** A photo of Kyle with a Contact link above his head helps make more recognizable his authority in the social media space and provides a means of reaching him.
- ✔ **Providing ways for visitors to return:** Social media requires trust, and often a visitor has to return multiple times before making a purchasing decision, so Kyle promotes his e-mail newsletter and his feeds for visitors to subscribe to.
- ✔ **Increasing offers to appear as a speaker:** Kyle speaks on the subject of Twitter Marketing a lot so he's provided a call to action in his sidebar to request a speaking engagement.
- ✔ **Directing traffic to Brandswag:** Kyle provides a call to action to his company so that visitors can find out additional information.

As you scroll down Kyle's sidebar, there's a ton of additional information, but all of it provides readers with a sense of authority as they read his blog. Kyle was careful in the design to include only those components that drive his goals and keep visitors.



Figure 5-11:
A blog
layout for a
social media
author and
consultant.

Bottom line: If you have a corporate blog and provide an industry news widget, for example, you might end up driving away traffic from your blog and to the other Web sites that are syndicated in the widget. Unfortunately, Google Analytics doesn't provide any detail on links that are driving traffic out of your blog.



TIP Webtrends (www.webtrends.com) has an Offsite Links custom report that you can add to your profile that will supply this information. Another is the small analytics application, Clicky (<http://getclicky.com/5416>). See Figure 5-12. Clicky isn't an analytics application built for enterprise corporations, but being able to view outbound links is a great feature to keep an eye on. You can develop similar reports in enterprise analytics applications.

Testing components to measure performance

Plug-ins and widgets can also be resource intensive, slowing your page load times and overloading your server. Page-load times have a direct correlation to visitors' site experience, and many visitors will leave if a page fails to load within a couple of seconds. Keep your blog lean, mean, and on target for your objective.

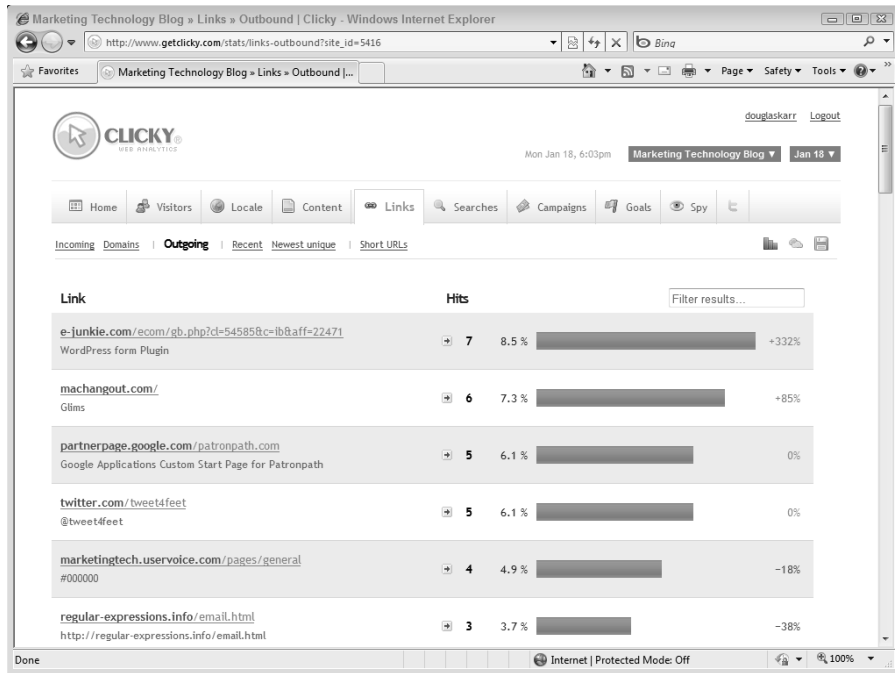


Figure 5-12:
Watch out
for links that
drive traffic
away from
your blog.

Measure how well your blog performs before and after you publish a widget or install a plug-in.

Many widgets use a technology called Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX). Widgets that use AJAX typically load content after your page is opened and won't slow you down. This is a great way of managing performance and still providing some additional value.

Measure your blog's load times with a monitoring tool like pingdom (www.pingdom.com) before and after your plug-in is loaded. Test it several times throughout the day under different load conditions (peak and off-peak times). Review the data to look for a change in the overall performance.



Don't rely on local testing applications or your own browser to see how your site is performing. Your browser will typically load objects on the page locally so that pages will load faster the next time you return. This is called *caching*. As well, in a corporate environment, you might have an Internet connection that leads directly to your servers . . . your visitors don't have that.

Monitoring tools like pingdom will test your page from noncached resources around the globe. pingdom also has services you can set up to alert you if your blog is down or if pages are taking an excessive time to load.

Expanding Blogging Platforms Capabilities through Integration

As your company gets accustomed to blogging, there are also incredible opportunities to integrate other services through your blog. You can integrate your newsletter sign-up; push content from your e-mails to your blog or vice versa; and integrate shopping carts, registration systems, calendars, Webinars, and even live streaming video.

For just one example, Cantaloupe (www.cantaloupe.com), a video production company, offers a compelling video-management product called Backlight. Backlight's VideoHere feature allows you to embed a video directly into your blog's text editor at the click of a button. As well, Backlight enables you to add links to your video timeline — perfect for driving sales. (See Figure 5-13.)

Understanding the capabilities of your blogging platform will open a lot of doors to new opportunities to communicate effectively with your audience. Take advantage of them.



Figure 5-13:
Embed videos directly in a blog post.

Using a blogging platform's API

Most blogs have an application programming interface (API) that allows you to embed content or add additional processes to your blog through third-party services. An *API* is an interface created by a software program that enables other software applications to interact directly with it. An API, then, is essentially a gateway for direct interaction from one set of data to another. Because it allows you to transfer data from one location to another to build a more complete picture through data sharing or collection, this is a powerful tool, one that allows you to share and display data in a format that serves your needs. One robust example is the WordPress API, which enables you to program your self-hosted WordPress blog externally through the use of plug-ins.

One example of such a plug-in is a Text Messaging plug-in developed for Connective Mobile for crime alerts, emergency notifications, concert notifications, or even simple restaurant specials. (See Figure 5-14.) Connective Mobile (www.connectivemobile.com) has a text group feature that companies can purchase for companies to opt in to text alerts. The Connective Mobile integration connects the Mobile account to WordPress so that each time you publish a new post, an alert goes out to all of your mobile subscribers. This feature is great for universities and colleges; in the case of a security incident, the school can simply publish the alert via WordPress, and all the subscribers are notified.

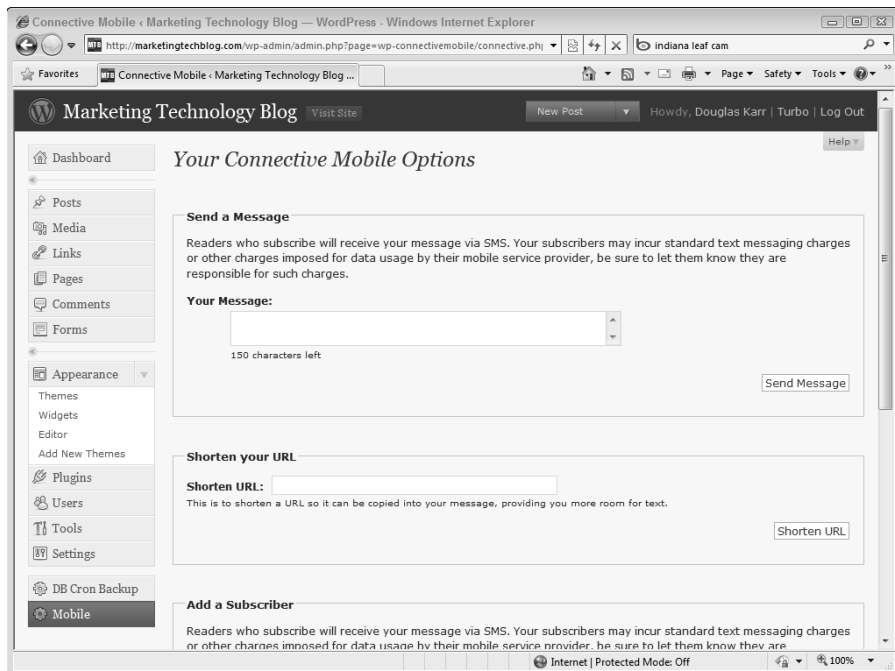


Figure 5-14:
Using your
blog as an
alert plat-
form with
text mes-
saging.

MailChimp (www.mailchimp.com) is an e-mail service provider (ESP) that has integrated heavily with WordPress. MailChimp has an RSS to E-mail feature that allows you to effortlessly publish your blog directly to a daily e-mail that goes out to a mailing list within MailChimp. No fuss, no muss — you don't even have to click Send! MailChimp has taken it a step further and developed a Google Analytics, MailChimp, and WordPress integration — Analytics360 — that breaks down your blog performance, your e-mail performance, and the effect of each on the other. (See Figure 5-15.)

These plug-ins are great, but be careful. Many plug-ins offer third-party integrations whose authors have bypassed key security controls within the framework of the application programming interface. This could put your company at great risk.

Automating and routing content through integration

Syndication has been around before the Internet. Mass media producers in television, newspapers, and radio have syndicated content for many years. Syndicated content is content that one media outlet owns but other media outlets can use, either for free or at a cost. Blogging supports syndication as well, through a key feature, called really simple syndication (RSS).

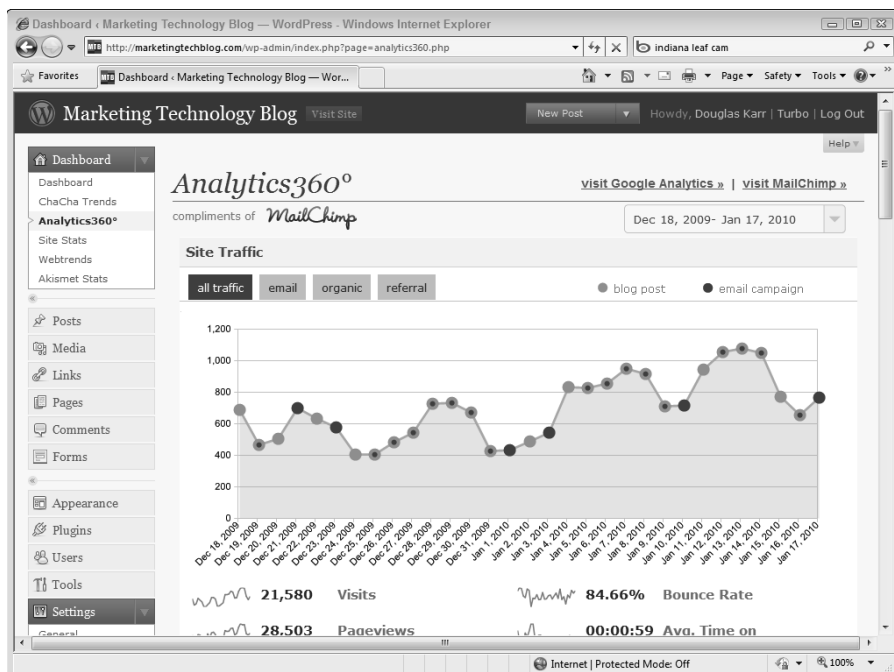


Figure 5-15: MailChimp Analytics360 integrates MailChimp and Google Analytics statistics.

RSS is a way to publish your content in a standardized way so that it can be syndicated to other locations. Sometimes syndication is not that easy to use, though. Most applications have the tools necessary to syndicate content from a blog into the application simply by inserting the Web address to the feed. However, if you're developing an integration, feeds can be a little bit more difficult to work with. A feed has several components and there are a few different standards to work with. You'll want to consult a developer when it's time to do some heavy lifting!

The power of RSS is its ability to automate and route your corporate blog content to multiple platforms/locations, such as Web sites, corporate social platforms (Ning), social sites (Twitter or Facebook), or other industry blogs that wish to syndicate your content.

RSS is an inherent feature of blogging. Each time you publish your content, a mirrored version of that content is available via a "feed" address. Your feed address is a specific URL that other people or applications use to access your content.

Generally, feeds are most commonly used through *feed readers*, which allow you to centrally read blogs without having to visit them. All you have to do is subscribe. To subscribe to a feed using Google Reader (www.google.com/reader), just follow these steps:

- 1. Login to Google Reader.**
- 2. Click the Add a Subscription button.**
- 3. Enter the name of the other blog you wish to subscribe to.**

Google Reader visits the blog and identifies the feed URL automatically.

You should now have a message saying that you have subscribed to your blog.

You will now see the actual blog posts in the reading pane. You can scroll through and read the posts. Google Reader automatically keeps track of what you read. (See Figure 5-16.)



Set up folders within Google Reader and find blogs by searching for blogs on Technorati, PostRank, or BlogCatalog. All these sites have an extensive directory of blogs, and they keep track of the popularity of each. You'll also want to add your blogs to them after you get started.

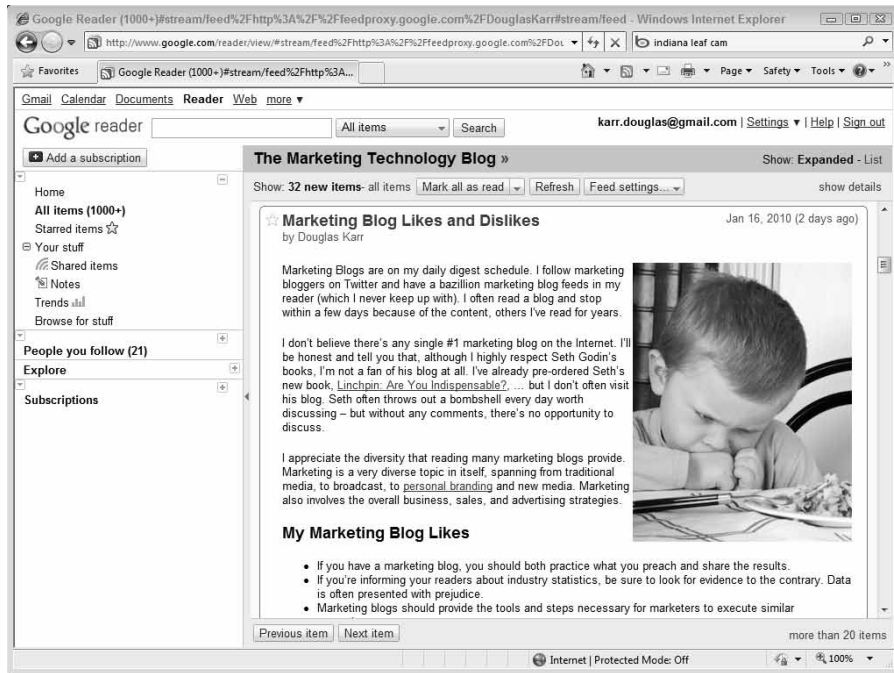


Figure 5-16:
Read feed
content
in Google
Reader.

Differentiating your feed from your blog with integration tools

As they strive to drive conversions, many blogging platforms and companies ignore their feed subscribers. Because your feed subscribers read your content as often as you publish it, they may be the best prospect list you have. Don't forget to market to this group as well.

Although your blog design integrates sticky posts and calls to action, your feed is clean of all blog design components. Be sure to customize your feed with a call to action directly in the feed. If you're using WordPress, this can be accomplished with the PostPost plug-in.

Figure 5-17 shows three additional customizations:

✓ Author Plugin

`http://marketingtechblog.com/projects`

This plug-in displays a photo of the author and his user profile information.

✔ PostPost Plugin

<http://marketingtechblog.com/projects>

This plug-in allows you to post custom HTML at the base of the feed: in this case, a Thanks for Subscribing and a link to download an e-book.

✔ Related or Most Commented Posts

<http://fairyfish.com/2008/03/21/wordpress-related-posts-plugin>

This plug-in allows visitors to find relevant topics or topics that received a lot of attention. This can lead readers back to your blog, where you can convert them.

The last way to differentiate your feed is to always include images in your blog posts. As subscribers quickly scan their feeds on a daily or weekly basis, having a great image in your blog post will make your blog stand out.

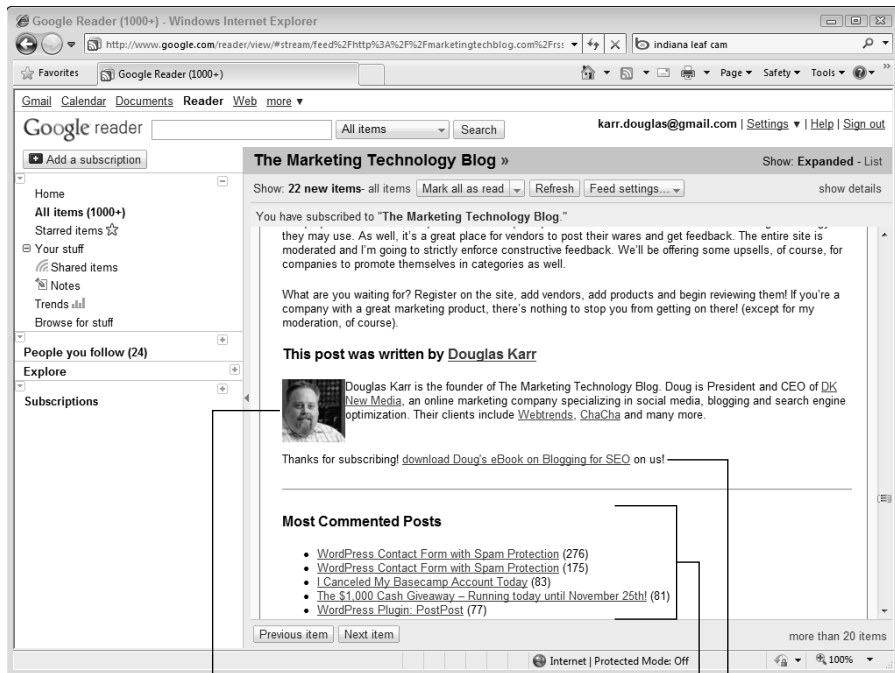


Figure 5-17:
Customize
your feed.

Author plugin

Post Post plugin

Most Commented Posts

Chapter 6

Regarding Time, Resources, and Content

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding resources to blog
 - ▶ Evaluating external resources for content
 - ▶ Protecting your content
 - ▶ Adding the necessary legal statements and disclaimers
-

Like with many organizations, a key concern when it comes to launching a corporate blogging strategy is, “How am I possibly going to add this to my plate?” In hard economic times, marketing departments are typically the first to have staff cuts and are always figuring out how to do more with less. Blogging is a marathon, though — not a sprint — that requires many resources to produce the content, administer the program, and analyze the results.

Bloggging does take time, but you can minimize the demands on your organization by finding nontraditional sources of fresh content or by reusing content. Rather than wondering how *you* might find time to write every day, recruiting a team of 10 bloggers can produce enough content so that you have to write only once per week!

Purchasing content, although one way to fill pages, has been controversial because the appeal of blogging is the humanity and transparency it provides. Just like the President of the United States has a speech writer, though, you can find quality content providers to speak well for your company. And guest bloggers can provide new perspectives as well as an additional layer of authority to your blog. Even better still is finding customers and industry leaders!

Of course, before you publish a word of content, remember to take the necessary precautions to protect your company from using or distributing content that could cause problems. The section, “Providing Legal Protection for Your Blog,” later in this chapter, discusses your blog and legal issues in greater detail.

Using External Content Resources

One of the first actions any bad marketer takes is to try and manipulate the medium. In the early days, marketers discovered the hard way. Politicians hired third-party companies, sometimes offshore, to develop their blogging platforms and even seed them with positive comments. When their efforts were discovered, it ruined their credibility online and turned a great opportunity into a terrible public relations incident.

Taking a medium whose core strategic advantage is transparency, built on trust, and manipulating it like this will surely get you in trouble. Don't be tempted to do it. That said, many critics of blogging disparage the hiring of third-party content writers and believe they're in violation of some cardinal law as well. (There are no cardinal laws, by the way.)

As the demand for quality digital content is rising, so is the very lucrative business of supplying companies with that content. Here are three kinds of external content providers:

- ✓ *Ghostblogging* is the most common method. A blogger writes on behalf of an individual and authors the blog posts with the name of the individual.
- ✓ *Supplemental blogging* is purchasing content written by other bloggers to supplement the blog: for example, an article about how to keep your home safe while you're on vacation, posted on an insurance or a real estate blog.
- ✓ *Third-party blogging* occurs when the source of the blog posts is actually transparent, and the people providing the content are named. These may be paid engagements or simply guest-blogging opportunities offered to industry leaders.

We discuss each of these cases more fully in the following sections.

Winning back time with ghostbloggers and professional content writers

Ghostblogging isn't a dirty word, nor is it a dirty profession: It's an incredible profession, in fact. A great ghostblogger investigates a source and accurately writes the posts on the company's or company leader's behalf. Attorneys, for example, often use ghostblogging because of the high return on investment (ROI) in search engine acquisition from blogging and because they are often too busy to find time to blog themselves.

problogservice (<http://problogservice.com>) is a company that ghost-writes for many professionals, including attorneys. (See Figure 6-1.) problogservice calls or visits its clients on a weekly basis, asking lots of questions, compiling a list of ideas for content, and then writing that content on behalf of the client. The client ultimately decides whether the posts will be published, but over time, problogservice will often gain enough confidence with the client to write and publish without moderation.



Companies like problogservice write the words of the client for the client. Just like the President of the United States has his own speech writers, so do the clients that use these services. That doesn't mean that the content is any less transparent or sincere. In fact, it usually ensures better results because firms like this understand the importance of search engine traffic, transparency, and humanity.

You might be surprised that the blog you're reading of a well-known Internet guru isn't actually written by them at all — but by a ghostblogger!

How can you go about selecting a ghostblogger? The following list provides some tips:



Figure 6-1:
You can use a ghost-writing service for businesses.

- ✓ Find a ghostblogger who is experienced with your industry and its jargon. Most ghostbloggers promote themselves on the Web. Doing a search by city and the term *ghostblogging* should provide many results. Review his work online and speak to his clients.
- ✓ Find a ghostblogger who is experienced in writing for search engine optimization. Calling the first few search results may be a great tactic — since these writers are obviously getting the right search results!
- ✓ Find a ghostblogger who understands your corporate culture and the level of education you're wishing to target.
- ✓ Find a ghostblogger with writing credentials. Writing well is important, even in an informal medium such as a blog. Be sure your ghostblogger has the formal education, they spell correctly, and their writing is grammatically sound.
- ✓ Decide ahead of time whether you wish to disclose that you're using a ghostblogger. There is always the possibility of a ghostblogger being discovered — is that something you're comfortable with?
- ✓ Set budget expectations in accordance with the frequency of the writing as well as the size of the blog posts.
- ✓ Many ghostblogging organizations have some serious credentials when it comes to public relations and crisis management. If you require consulting in addition to content, be sure your ghostblogger understands the expectations of their turnaround time and assistance he'll be providing.
- ✓ Most of all, find someone whose writing accurately reflects the professionalism and tone that you wish to provide.

Purchasing topical content to enhance your blog content

Almost all industries can seed their content with other content to enhance their readers' experience. Services like Raidious Digital Content Services (<http://raidious.com>) have sprouted up to reach this demand. Raidious isn't a gang of writers; rather, it's an organization structured like a traditional newspaper. Raidious has writers and journalists, editors, and publishers who ensure content is original, relevant, and of the highest quality. (See Figure 6-2.)

Services like Raidious can work on-demand, providing a number of articles on a given topic for a specific period of time, or they can fulfill content writing schedules just like ghostbloggers.

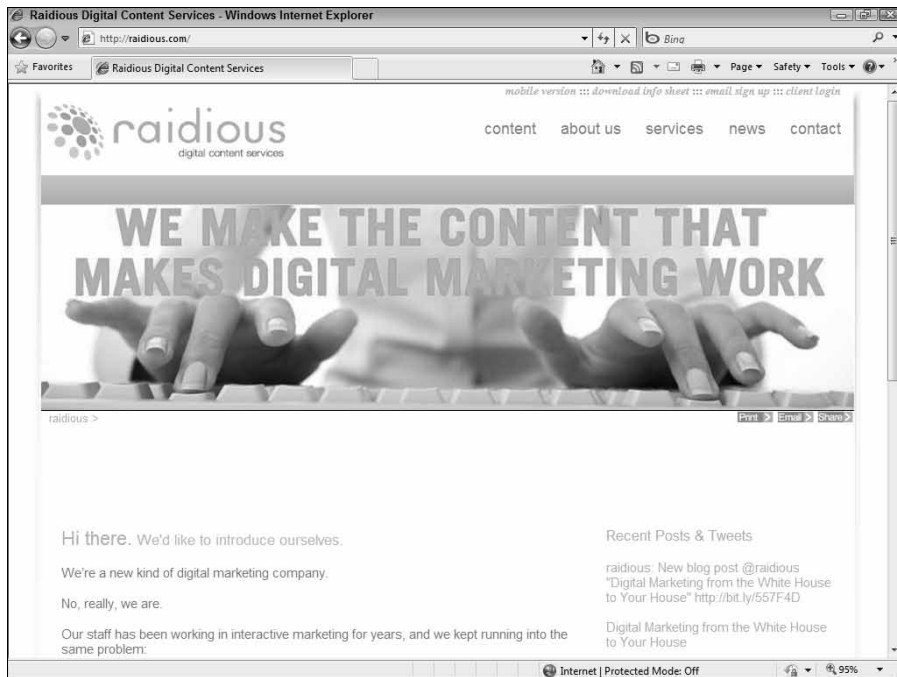


Figure 6-2:
You can use
a content
services
provider for
profession-
ally written
content for
businesses.

Here are some ideas for buying blog content from other sources:

- ✔ If you're a technology company, purchasing content about products, services, or technology can be a boon to your blog.
- ✔ If your blog promotes security services, purchasing content about home defense, self-defense, crime statistics, and other relevant information can make your blog invaluable to prospects.
- ✔ If your blog is a real estate blog, purchasing content about neighborhoods, school districts, local news, and real estate trends can get your blog found for relevant terms.

Your company will need to do a cost-benefit analysis on whether supplementing your content is worthwhile. An easy way to calculate the value of the content is to divide the total revenue per year acquired by your blog by the number of blog posts.

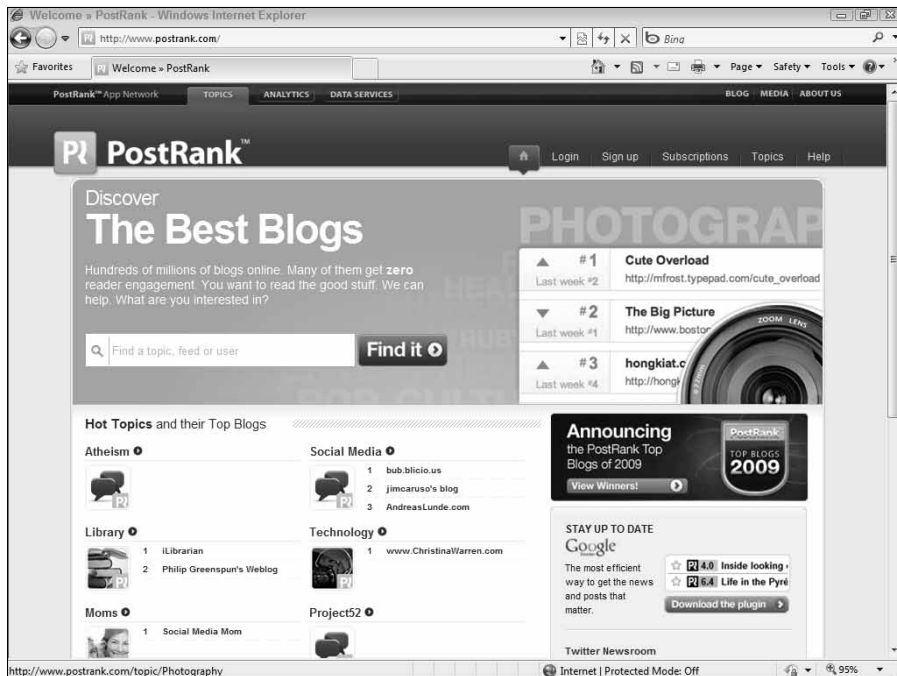
Many companies with higher return on blogging investment find that a blog post may be worth \$200 (US) or more. In these cases, paying \$50 per blog post is a great investment.

Hiring industry bloggers to write for your blog

Using tools like PostRank (www.postrank.com) or Technorati (<http://technorati.com>) can help you track down the top bloggers or influential blogs on specific topics. (See Figure 6-3.) If these folks are industry bloggers who don't work for competitors but can provide authority with your blog, you may invite them to guest blog on your blog.

Most bloggers will appreciate the opportunity to reach a new audience and build a relationship with your organization. Most will blog at no cost and will even promote the post, providing some new traffic to your blog. Additionally, there is benefit to them as well since they can link back to their blog. This is known as *backlinking* and helps sites gain search engine authority.

Some bloggers put themselves out for loan as well. If you're paying a blogger to blog for you from time to time, you might want that blogger to state that you are a client: that is, the blogger isn't simply doing it out of the goodness of his heart. In fact, new Federal Trade Commission (FTC) laws may require it. There's still a lot of confusion as to how and when bloggers must disclose compensation, please refer to FTC guidelines (www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/10/endortest.shtm).



The screenshot shows the PostRank website interface. The main heading is "Discover The Best Blogs". Below this, there is a search bar with the text "Find a topic, feed or user" and a "Find it" button. To the right, there is a list of top blogs for the topic "PHOTOGRAPHY".

Rank	Blog Name	URL	Last week
#1	Cute Overload	http://mfrost.typepad.com/cute_overload	Last week #2
#2	The Big Picture	http://www.boston.com	Last week #1
#3	hongkiat.c	http://hongkiat.c	Last week #4

Below the search bar, there are sections for "Hot Topics and their Top Blogs" and "Social Media". The "Hot Topics" section includes:

- Atheism: 1. iLibrarian, 2. Philip Greenspun's Weblog
- Moms: 1. Social Media Mom
- Library: 1. iLibrarian, 2. Philip Greenspun's Weblog
- Technology: 1. www.ChristinaWarren.com
- Project52

On the right side, there is an announcement for "Announcing the PostRank Top Blogs of 2009" with a "View Winners!" button. Below that, there is a "STAY UP TO DATE" section for Google, mentioning "The most efficient way to get the news and posts that matter." and a "Download the plugin" button. At the bottom, there is a "Twitter Newsroom" section.

Figure 6-3:
PostRank
helps dis-
cover the
best blogs.

The distinction between someone blogging for compensation and someone ghostblogging is a thin line. One blogs on your behalf, writing your words but crafting it with their talent. A guest blogger or a paid blogger is writing his own words and putting his reputation on the line for your company.

If you're interested in getting content this way, you'll need to first track down top bloggers with tools like Technorati. The following steps show you how:

1. Click **Blogs** in the Technorati search field (at the top of the window).
2. Click the magnifying glass icon to execute the search.

The resulting list provides you with a list of blogs in descending order of “authority.” (See Figure 6-4.) In this context, *authority* is a proprietary number applied by Technorati that takes into consideration a blog's popularity.



The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window displaying the Technorati search results for the term "marketing". The browser's address bar shows the URL: <http://technorati.com/search?return=sites&authority=all&q=marketing&x=8&y=10>. The Technorati logo is prominently displayed at the top of the page, with a search bar containing the word "marketing". Below the logo, there are navigation links for various categories: Technology, Business, Entertainment, Lifestyle, Sports, Politics, Videos, Blogging, Twittorati, and Facebook vs. Social Searching. A secondary navigation bar includes links for Blog Directory, Top 100, Tags, People, Technorati Blog, Write for Technorati, State of the Blogosphere, Android, and Guru. The main content area features a search result for "marketing" with 31,897 blogs found out of 118,0572. The results are sorted by authority, with the top two results visible: "Search Engine Land: News About ..." (Authority: 742) and "Seth's Blog" (Authority: 746). The "Search Engine Land" result includes a recent post about Google Street View on the iPhone. The "Seth's Blog" result includes a recent post about upcoming events. On the right side of the page, there are several advertisements, including one for "Impossible Question" and another for "SHARK ATTACKS HELICOPTER".

Figure 6-4:
Finding
marketing
blogs on
Technorati.

Owning Your Content

Many companies jump onboard blogging and social media platforms that provide them an audience but don't provide them ownership over the content they publish there. At issue is that your blogging platform might actually have Terms of Services that enable it to own your content. Through ownership, your blogging platform might be able to use your content to market its brand, or it might even be able to sell it altogether. For personal bloggers, this might not be of importance. However, for a company, it's important that you own the content that you've invested so much in. If you do not legally own the content that you've published on another site, the company who owns the platform can sell your content, republish it, or utilize it for their own benefit.

Verify the terms of service associated with all platforms you wish to use to identify whether or not you own your content and have the right to leave with it. Consult legal counsel if there's any doubt. Also ensure there is a way to export your content in the event you do leave.

The other problem with putting your blog on another domain that you don't own is that you cannot control what happens to your content. If the business that owns that domain decides to move the service, shut down the domain, or even simply remove your access, you could lose all of your content, all of your search engine authority, and the subsequent traffic and business you were acquiring through it.

Always, always, always publish your blog on a domain name that you control through a domain registrar. Blogging will provide your domain with search engine authority over time. If you're blogging on someone else's domain, regardless of how powerful they are, you're simply giving them the authority that you should have.

In 2009, JournalSpace was sabotaged and their client data lost. Some bloggers lost 6 years worth of data. The lack of a backup strategy, and their clients' dependence on their domain, left their customers high and dry with all content lost. This is a risk that you do not want to take with your corporate blog. Ensure your blog is on a domain that you control, that your content is backed up regularly, and can be accessed when and if you need it.

Owning your domain allows you to host your blog yourself, or host it with a Software as a Service (SaaS) provider. This means that you can move it whenever and wherever you'd like and keep the authority that you've worked so hard to attain.

As well, if the provider ever goes belly-up, you can launch your next blog at the same exact address with another service or internally with no issues. Regardless of where you decide to blog, ensure that the provider's standard contract allows you to extract your content in a standard format that you can import into your next platform.

Exporting Content to Import It to Your Next Platform

Exporting content from your old blog to import into your next can be a bit tricky, especially if you wish to maintain integrity with the links you have out there. You don't want someone clicking on a link in a search engine results page (SERP) and landing on a Page Not Found (also known as a *404 error*).



If you migrate your content to different Web addresses, you will lose search engine authority. Don't be surprised if your ranking drops significantly and search engine traffic drops off. If you move from one domain to another, you will lose most of your authority.

The best way to migrate your content to a new blogging platform is by following these steps:

1. Export your old blog content and import it into your new blogging platform.

Many platforms (such as WordPress; see Figure 6-5) have features that help you do this. Even if you have to do this manually (by copying and pasting the content), that's better than starting with no content at all.

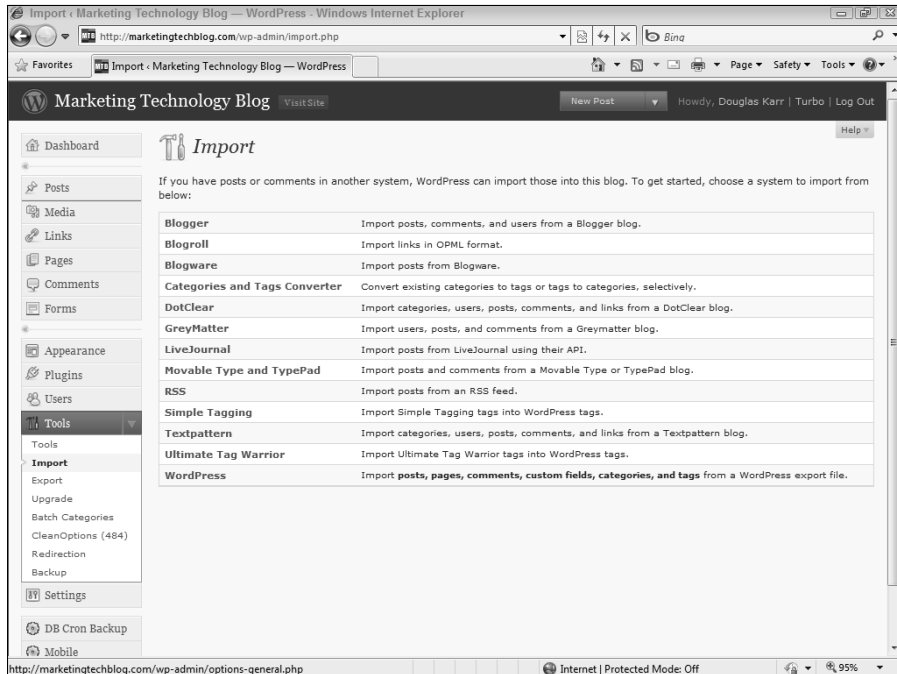


Figure 6-5: WordPress has a wide variety of built-in import tools.

2. **Write 301 redirects from the old blog post addresses to the new blog post URLs. Refer to Chapter 4 for additional information.**

Some platforms have redirection modules or plug-ins to make this task easier.

3. **Write a redirect from the old blog's really simple syndication (RSS) feed to the new blog feed. Refer to Chapter 4 for additional information.**

We recommend using FeedBurner (<http://www.feedburner.com>) for this step so that you can update the feed without interruption in the future. (We do wish, though, that someone would come out with an alternative to FeedBurner. It's terrible).

If you're moving domains or subdomains, it's still possible to redirect to the new blog address. If your blog is hosted using Apache's Web server, you can write a redirect using an `.htaccess` file. Refer to Apache documentation on writing redirects using `.htaccess` files at apache.org.



If you're changing your domain or subdomain, the biggest loss you're going to take are on sites like Technorati, which require that you register your new blog address. Unfortunately, Technorati doesn't have a means of updating your address. We've noticed that clients lose some of their ranking when moving subdomains although they can sometimes bounce back quickly. However, changing domains altogether can have a drastic impact. Try to avoid this at all costs.

4. **Test many of your old blog URLs to ensure that they forward properly.**
5. **Monitor Google Webmaster (www.google.com/webmasters), Bing Webmasters (www.bing.com/webmaster), and Yahoo! Site Explorer (<http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com>) for pages that are not found and correct them.**



Don't bother checking every day. It will take a week or two before you'll see problems.

6. **Republish your sitemap and resubmit each time you correct items.**

Protecting Your Content

Content theft and hacking are becoming commonplace because content has become such a valuable commodity on the Web. Sites called *splogs*, which republish your syndicated content without your permission and benefit from the results in both search authority and advertising revenue, are on the rise.

The first means of protecting yourself is to ensure that your blog has the necessary legal statements to notify those interested that your content can't

be used without your permission. Refer to the section, “Providing Legal Protection for Your Blog,” later in this chapter, for detailed information.

Securing your corporate blog from hackers

As corporations dive into blogging and blogging software is not adequately maintained, more and more companies are finding their blogs hacked. If you host your own blog, you need to monitor the blog for any intrusions as well as keep the blog maintained. Open source blogging platforms like WordPress often publish security patches immediately, but most companies don’t have monitoring services to ensure implementation.

If you’re hosting your blog with a service provider, ensure that the service provider has intrusion detection and find out what its security prevention methods are.

Backing up your content regularly

Believe it or not, most hosting and blogging packages don’t back up your data by default. This means in the event that your blog is hacked, the service has a system-wide failure, or you accidentally delete content, you have no way to get that content back.

Ensure that you or your service provider has offsite backups and can be readily available to restore content in the event of an outage. Some platforms, such as Blogger, require you to manually back up the data. Other platforms, such as WordPress, have backup plug-ins. If your blog is hosted on your own servers or a hosting package elsewhere, you may simply wish to back up the database and files through a solution or service they provide.

Monitoring your blog to ensure it’s up and running

There are many services for ensuring your blog is up and running and that it’s performing well. The monitoring program from pingdom (www.pingdom.com) tests your blog from different parts of the world, and will actually e-mail or text message you if your blog isn’t available. Webmetrics, Uptrends, and Panopta are additional services for monitoring outages, performance, and uptime.

Like with your blog, you should also ensure your feed is also available. You can point a service like Pingdom to your feed address to ensure it's up as well.



Many administrators set up alerts that to test that a Web page actually displays. Because blogging systems generate content queried from a database, your blog could be down but alerts never go off. Alert systems have additional steps you can take to ensure that your site is completely available, including checking for specific text within the content of the page.

Providing Legal Protection for Your Blog

If your company has ever gotten into legal trouble, you realize how much it can cost to protect yourself, even when you've done nothing wrong. Your blog is an extension of your company and requires all the benefits and protections of the law as well.

There are three key concerns when it comes to protecting your blog:

- ✓ Ensure that your bloggers understand the legalities and ramifications of blogging as well as what they can or cannot say on the corporate blog.
- ✓ Protect your company from legal attacks from others.
- ✓ Ensure that you're protecting your intellectual property and know what to do if it's infringed upon.

Copyright infringement occurs when someone uses your content, text or images, without asking your permission or providing you credit. You must have copyright statements on your site to notify readers of your expectations of use of your content.

What to do when your content is stolen

Setting up Google Alerts for mentions of your domain is a good idea. Each time your domain is mentioned, Google Alerts can send you an e-mail alert to let you know that you've been mentioned. Because blog posts publish with internal links, this is a simple way to identify whether or not someone has stolen your content and published it on their site. This is a tactic used by spammers and aggregation sites to build content and gain advertising revenue using tools like AdSense.

When you've identified a domain that has stolen and republished your content, take immediate action. At times, tracing down the culprits who stole your content can lead to dead ends. At minimum, you should

✔ **Use a Whois service to look up the domain owner.** All major domain registration companies (`dotster.com`, `google.com`, `whois.net`) offer a Whois service that allows you to search for the owner of a domain. If the domain owner is available by e-mail, send him a notice and request that he immediately remove the content in question. If there is no e-mail address, a physical address is legally required for the registered owner. Send him written notice. Requesting an attorney's assistance is recommended.

If you can't reach the owner, contact the Web host or Internet service provider listed in the Whois record.

✔ **Contact business partners listed on the site in question to try to reach the person.** Advertisers and affiliate organizations have strict terms that do not allow for stolen content. Notify them of the site in question and be sure to provide evidence of the stolen content.

✔ **Notify each of the search engines of the stolen content.** There is always the chance that a search engine may believe you are the root cause of the content being misused, and your search engine authority could thus be at risk.

Including all the required legal components

Your corporate blog should have four specific legal elements:

- ✔ A disclaimer
- ✔ A privacy statement
- ✔ A copyright statement
- ✔ A Terms of Service statement

These are discussed more fully in the following sections.

Writing your blog's disclaimer

Many law and law-related articles are available regarding Web site disclaimers. Blog sites, however, are different than most Web sites. Blogs often have more of an interactive feeling and advice-giving component than standard Web sites often provide. Blog sites are more closely comparable to popular social media sites than traditional company Web sites.

Most company blogs provide a level of advice to the reader regarding areas of the blog writers' expertise. Thus, disclaimers need to address issues of opinion versus fact. Also, reader comments and comment responses provide a conversational function of the site that serves to provide direct advice on particular subjects. This can give rise to claims by readers that the advice was directed toward them, which becomes more aligned with traditional professional consulting rather than broad publication.

Blog disclaimers are usually short and appear on the bottom of each page of the blog site. The disclaimer terms are also included in the more comprehensive Terms of Use section of the blog, discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The disclaimer should approach a few key points.

- ✔ All blog posts are purely of the opinions and personal views of the authors and are not supported or endorsed by the authors' employer.
- ✔ The post should not be relied upon and may contain inaccuracies or mistakes, and the reader should seek professional advice on any subject matter addressed.
- ✔ Any comments or comment responses are the opinion of their authors.

Depending on the sensitive nature of the blog itself, the disclaimer might approach the following points:

- ✔ Content contained in posts may change over time; links may be dated; the content may not be valid.
- ✔ The author's opinions are not intended to malign any religion, ethnic group, club, organization, company, or individual.
- ✔ Links from the blog site can change, and the end of a link might not be the intended link of the author.
- ✔ Content on the blog site (such as videos, photos, PowerPoint or other presentations, or documents) are believed to be covered under Fair Use.
- ✔ Content is drafted in and intended for a specific language (say, English).
- ✔ If your company has a copyright or privacy policy, include a link to each policy.

If your blog posts include paid endorsements from third parties, you have to disclose that. In October 2009, the FTC issued its Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising (www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/10/endortest.shtm), and those rules went into effect on December 1, 2009.

The key to these rules is that a blogger must clearly and conspicuously disclose any paid endorsement in blog posts. The rules provide several examples of what is or isn't a paid endorsement. In one example, a student operates a private blog site where he reviews video games. A game company provides the student with a free copy of a video game and asks him to write a review. The fact that he was given a free video game with the direction of writing the review is considered by the FTC to be a paid endorsement, which must be clearly and conspicuously disclosed in the site.

For some sites that regularly endorse certain products or companies, adding the endorsement disclaimer to the general disclaimer might make sense. Otherwise, if the endorsement is being made in only one or a few posts, include the endorsement disclaimer in each individual post itself.

What you need to know about privacy

Privacy law, a fast-emerging area of law, is one of the hottest legal subjects in international Internet law as well as a large concern for bloggers. To complicate things, every country approaches privacy issues very differently. Some countries, like the United States, approach personal data as generally public information unless the data is of a protected class that requires heightened protection. Other countries, such as those of the European Union (EU), treat personally identifiable data as private and belonging to the individual. In those countries, certain privacy protections must be provided in the blog site.

In the United States, the general rule is that for information related to children, health, or finances, details should be avoided. Some of the federal laws protecting these types of information include

- ✔ **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA):** COPPA applies to any online collection of personal information by *minors* (younger than 13 years of age) in the United States. Many blog sites contain in their disclaimer that the site is not intended for children 13 years of age and younger and that individuals between 13 and 18 must obtain parental consent before accessing the site.
- ✔ **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA):** Title II of HIPAA provides protections related to health care information of individuals. HIPAA is intended for health care providers and insurance companies. Blog sites from these companies must adhere to the strict requirements of this act.
- ✔ **Financial Services Modernization Act, also known as Graham-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA):** GLBA applies to financial, securities, and insurance companies, and protects financial information of individuals. Like HIPAA, GLBA provides strict rules related to the treatment of this type of information.

If your blog site is related to health care or the financial or insurance services fields, consult with an attorney. For children's information, you are safe to just avoid it. If your site is intended for children, COPPA requires certain disclaimers and consent provisions for parents. Again, consult with an attorney on the specific requirements.

If your blog site collects data from individuals in other countries, certain countries require you to provide adequate security protections and opt-out options for users. The EU, for example, enacted its privacy directive in 1998. In response, the U.S. Department of Commerce negotiated a Safe Harbor framework, which allows U.S. companies to comply with the EU directive provisions. For more information, see www.export.gov/safeharbor.

Many blog sites contain privacy statements to address how the site owner will collect, store, and use information obtained from users. That said, most blog site owners avoid requesting or collecting any personal information about its users (except possibly on comments, where users opt-in to providing information).

The key for any privacy policy is disclosure. Disclose if you will be collecting any personal data. Disclose how you intend to use, or not use, the data collected. Disclose the types of other information that may be collected.

Understanding Creative Commons and Copyrights

Creative Commons (www.creativecommons.org) is a nonprofit organization that provides anyone a standard means of granting copyright permissions to their creative work.

With a Creative Commons license, you can keep your copyright but allow others to copy and distribute your work provided they give you credit — and they agree to the conditions you specify.

Writing your blog's Terms of Service

Terms of Service and Terms of Use are interchangeable phrases that shield the blog from the audience. The analogy could be drawn that if the disclaimer and privacy statements are the shield for the blogger and the company owning the blog site, the Terms of Use are the dagger. The Terms of Use provide rules by which any user of the blog site will abide and what remedies the site owner may have against any user who breaches the Terms of Use.

Terms of Use are often quite detailed and are usually a link from the bottom of each blog site page. Key areas to address in your Terms of Use include the following:

- ✓ A user has a limited license to access the site and use content for limited purposes. To be granted the license, the user has to meet certain eligibility bars. Often eligibility will refer to age and intended use of the content.

- ✔ Information on the site is copyrighted by the site owner and subject to copyright laws.
- ✔ Restate the disclaimer terms in the Terms of Use. You may also include standard warranty disclaimers if you're endorsing products or services on in your blog posts.
- ✔ If the site requires or has the option for registration, offer directions on how to register.
- ✔ Provide a link to the privacy statement.
- ✔ Provide details on user conduct. This is possibly the most important part of the Terms of Use. This relates more to blog sites that offer open comments and dialog fields, but certain terms will apply to all users. For example, state that users may not
 - Use the site to abuse, harass, threaten, impersonate, or intimidate other users.
 - Contribute any content that is infringing, libelous, defamatory, obscene, pornographic, abusive, or offensive or that you know to be false, misleading, or untrue.
 - Contribute any content that violates any law or right of any third party or use the site for any illegal or unauthorized purpose.
 - Create or submit unwanted e-mail (spam) to any other user or any URL.
 - Use the site to support multilevel marketing schemes or off-topic content.
 - With the exception of feeds, use any robot, spider, scraper, or other automated means to access the site for any purpose without the blog site owner's express written permission.
 - Take any action that imposes an unreasonable or disproportionately large load on the blog site infrastructure.
 - Bypass any measures used to prevent or restrict access to the site.
 - State that you can remove any content or deactivate any user account at any time.
 - Provide a user content section that states that the user is granting a perpetual license to the site owner for any content provided by the user on the site.
 - Issue a blanket indemnity by the user against you for any violation of your Terms of Use by the user which causes harm or damage to a third party.
 - Provide company contact information and copyright policy information if the company has one in place.

Chapter 7

Working with Your Blogging Team

In This Chapter

- ▶ Building a balanced blogging team
 - ▶ Communicating your blogging strategy with your team
 - ▶ Rewarding results with your blogging team
-

Reaching your blogging goals is possible only if your bloggers work as a team and execute your blogging strategy well. Imagine your blogging team as a football team with coaches, trainers, offense, defense . . . and maybe even some cheerleaders!

Most companies don't have the resources to fully man a team dedicated solely to blogging, so you'll have to negotiate with employees' time. As well, because blogging isn't a primary duty of your employees, you'll need to train and motivate them.

There's no trophy waiting for your company when they blog well, but over time, you will see that you're building authority in your industry, acquiring leads, retaining customers, and genuinely seeing a large impact. You need persistence, a great strategy, and a lot of time, though — especially if you're starting from scratch.

Deciding Who Should Blog in Your Organization

Many companies tend to want their internal leadership to write their blogs. Leaders within your organization are more often likely to promote the company externally, network with other professionals, speak publicly, or even write for periodicals. As such, leaders are fantastic candidates for your blog — a natural fit.

However, because companies are interested in the capability of blogs to put a face to their logo and brand, more often, they look to customer service-oriented individuals within the organization to blog. By doing a little digging, companies often discover internal writing talent they didn't even realize existed.

Choosing the best bloggers

If your company has hired the best talent, built the best products, and you know it, it's time to put your talent in the spotlight. Companies often ignore gifted employees; the irony is that allowing them to shine improves employee commitment and confidence, leading to improved customer retention. Corporate blogging allows companies to showcase their leaders' talents, as well as allow those gifted employees to shine. The audience of your blog suggests who your bloggers should be, including any of the following:

- ✔ **Leadership:** Providing information to stockholders and employees is best done by leaders within your organization. Your president or CEO need not be the actual writer, though. You can have a third-person blog that speaks to the overall strategy of the organization by quoting the leadership.
- ✔ **Sales and marketing:** Providing inbound marketing leads to your organization can be best achieved by allowing your marketing and sales staffs to blog. Your marketing department understands how to leverage your product in the industry. And your sales staff knows the questions prospects commonly ask — and the answers they're looking for.

Marketing departments make great administrators and moderators for your program as well. Press releases, product whitepapers, downloads, upgrades, events, Webinars, and even company philanthropic work should be communicated through the blog. Key to incorporating this content on the blog, though, is rewriting the message to ensure it's both personalized and compelling for your audience.
- ✔ **Public relations:** There aren't many people better capable of effectively using blogging than public relations professionals. Public relations professionals have long practiced the art of communicating and measuring the impact of media marketing in the marketplace. A blog is a fantastic medium for your public relations and marketing personnel to deploy news and information about your company, products, and services. Blogs are also incredibly powerful crisis management tools as well; your public relations (PR) team can communicate directly to the audience rather than being filtered, edited, or ignored by traditional media.
- ✔ **Customer service:** Providing customer service and a knowledge base of frequently asked questions can be accomplished by your customer service and account management teams. To help achieve buy-in, stress that

improved communication through a blog will ultimately reduce their workload by providing an invaluable knowledge base to customers.

- ✔ **Human resources:** Seeking human resources for your organization can be done effectively through a blog. Because blogs are timely and search engine-friendly, posting a job position on a blog is fantastic. Word will travel quickly through your readers, and you'll be amazed at the qualified candidates you can acquire. As well, your human resource team can blog about the culture of the organization, ensuring that those seeking jobs with your organization already realize how they may fit.
- ✔ **Just about anyone:** Providing a human face to your company can be accomplished through letting anyone within your corporation write about the customers they serve, the industry they serve in, or the product they're selling.

Blogging should be fun for the whole team! If your team doesn't get excited about the work they do each day, and they don't care about shouting about it from the tallest mountains, then you may have the wrong team!

Recruiting bloggers: You'll be surprised at who gets the results

Imagine providing one of your Tier 1 customer service representatives with a blog, only to find that his writing style is snarky and fun, and provides clients with a chuckle each time they read the blog. What a fantastic way for your organization to find and retain customers!

Writing is a talent that some people have and some people don't. Some find it torturous to sit at a keyboard and publish a blog post. They fret about the message and the language used. Their palms get sweaty, and they get a stomachache just thinking about it. Don't make these folks blog.

Still, you can find other opportunities for folks like this to support the blog. Maybe the nonwriterly types are more than happy to take photos of events or even narrate a video or two. This is content that your corporate blog can use to increase the value of the strategy.

Here are some tips on creating the best blogging team you can:

- ✔ **Recruit bloggers from throughout your organization and set expectations with them up front that your blog is a performance-based strategy.** If they don't perform, it need not affect their compensation or job requirements, but they could be replaced.

- ✔ **Don't drag your feet firing a bloggers from the team.** Bad content can really turn off readers and do more damage than good. Having said that, let a blogger gain enough experience over time to produce consistent results. Every blogger will make a few errors out of the gate. The great thing about a blog is that the next post will bury the last.
- ✔ **Recruit a lot of bloggers.** Of course, you want to produce quality content as quickly as possible, but you also want a wide variety of writers who speak with different points of view to attract different readers and audiences. Your blogging audience will be attracted to specific bloggers and topics.



Your best bloggers might not be the most obvious bloggers.

Marketing with your bloggers

Aligning your blogs, your bloggers, and your content will ensure that you're getting the right message to the right audience. Don't be tempted to limit your blogging strategy to your marketing team alone. Marketers already control the messaging of the Web site, the press releases, the marketing material, Webinars, and most other external communications.

If you're a marketer, you might not want to read this next sentence. The secret of blogs is that often, they don't contain the typical marketing terminology that a marketer loves to write. Sorry marketers!

Okay, not *all* marketers. Megan Glover, Marketing Director at Compendium, understands how to write for the blog versus writing for Web sites, case studies, and whitepapers. On the Compendium Web site, Megan writes, "Business blogging is a vital search marketing tool that's helping drive online demand and convert new business."

On the other hand, on a different blog post, Megan writes, "If my performance was measured on blog comments and RSS . . . I'd be fired." Instead, she states that her performance is best measured in leads and closed business.

That's a great example of two messages that are very similar but have different tones, audiences, and expectations. Megan and her marketing team (Meghan Peters and Mikey Mioduski) understand the technology they're using and the audiences they're targeting. They develop content strategies, design blogs, and landing pages to affect their targets, and they always are on top of who needs to be writing the next blog post.

Setting expectations with your blogging team

Many companies hit the ground running when they launch their blogging strategy. They set up some blogging software, send out logins, and tell their team to start typing. Although this approach isn't uncommon, it might not be the best way for your company to dip its toes into social media.

Setting up-front expectations with your blogging team is a great way to launch your blogging strategy. No, you don't need to drive everyone crazy by making them read this book and testing them on every chapter (although that sounds like a great idea!). Simply spending an hour or two with your team and going over some basics will help you avoid some obstacles on the way. Some ideas for this discussion include the following:

- ✔ **Discuss all the legal issues.** Your employees need to understand the liabilities of the company for slander, bad behavior in the social media space, invasions of privacy, and copyright infringement. If you're a public company or a healthcare company, very specific limitations exist as to what you can say, when you can say it, and where! Even if you already have counsel on staff, it's recommended to bring in a firm or attorney who specializes with respect to businesses, blogging, and social media. The legal issues associated with online content are changing on almost a daily basis.
- ✔ **Review the goals of your blogging strategy.** If your goal is search engine optimization (SEO), review the keywords and strategy that you're going to target. Encourage your employees to own and promote their content to get the word out. If the goal is authority, be sure to let your subject matter experts know that you want them to be leaders within the industry. If the goal is customer service, brainstorm on what the most useful topics will be to write about.
- ✔ **Set expectations on your bloggers' roles within the overall strategy, how often they will be required to post, and what rewards are associated with it.** Avoid negative reinforcement when it comes to blogging. An unhappy blogger can have a negative impact on your strategy.
- ✔ **Review the applications involved and the technologies involved, and demonstrate the best ways to use the tools you have.** If you're deploying additional SEO plug-ins for WordPress (for example, the All in One SEO Pack plug-in), teach the team how to use it. If you're using a system like Compendium, teach the team how to monitor the keyword strength meter to write optimal content.

After your team is clear on these issues, roll out a schedule to review and reward bloggers for their performance. If you're having difficulty motivating your team, be sure to share the results of their actions and the impact on the company. Your bloggers need to recognize the impact of their work as well as be rewarded for it.

This discussion should be the first in a series of regular strategy meetings. Here are some tips for holding great strategy meetings in the future:

- ✓ **Send out invitations and an agenda prior to each meeting.**
- ✓ **Review the action items from the previous meeting as well as the goals and metrics.**
- ✓ **Develop an action plan of who is required to blog, what they are going to blog about, and when the blog posts are required by.**
- ✓ **Distribute rewards and have fun.** The marketing team at Compendium hands out personalized rewards to the top three bloggers each month and three dunce caps to the folks who blogged least. It's innocent fun (and no one wishes to wear the dunce cap at the meeting).

Planning Your Content Strategy

Blogs provide recent, frequent, and relevant content to your audience, so it's essential to have content relevant to your goals and audience.

As your blog begins to convert traffic into customers, you'll want to grow readership of the blog to also grow the number of visitors who convert from readers to customers. Writing great content helps, but your best chance of growing traffic is to acquire attention from search engines.

Writing a blog post per week gives you 52 posts with which you can attract traffic within a year. Make sure that each blog post targets a few keyword combinations. Do some simple math — assembling a great blogging team to write two posts a day can mean more than 500 blog posts in the same year — more than 10 times the opportunity to attract traffic.



Blogging is a momentum-based strategy; when you post regularly, you continue to grow traffic. If you stop or pause, however, you'll lose some of that momentum and will have to work hard to get back the audience you lost. This is why planning and execution is so important with a blogging strategy.

Readers get used to the pace at which your blog publishes new posts. That is, your followers will begin to sense how periodically you're posting new content. If you're posting more than once a day, often, people will visit more

than once a day. Don't disappoint them! Have plenty of content queued up and ready to publish for those days that your team is swamped and doesn't have time to blog.

Planning topics, owners, and timelines

In its simplest form, a blog is a publishing platform. Just like you would develop an editorial calendar to publish content, you should do the same with your blog. *Who*, *what*, and *when* are the key action items for planning.

- ✓ **Who:** Who will be writing the blog post or posts?
- ✓ **What:** What will they be writing about? What are the keywords to concentrate on? What are your goals? Will you be writing about specific products, services, and events?
- ✓ **When:** When will they be writing? How often?

Get agreement from your team and put your action plan in writing. Hold your team accountable by keeping score of who is succeeding and who is not keeping their blogging responsibilities. Problematic bloggers who don't find time will probably continue to plague you; unless their content is outstanding, you might want to replace them with someone who will execute.

Align your overall blogging calendar with your company goals. As you plan out your next year at work, your blog should reflect that strategy as well. Product releases, sales, events, and other known opportunities should all be written into your blogging calendar.

Assign the right bloggers to their topics of authority. It's okay to have some overlap, but explain to the blogger the benefit of his expertise as well as the long-term goal associated with having that person blog.



Publish your calendar internally and meet with your team regularly to motivate, reward, and monitor how your blogging strategy is progressing. Share progress with your team members so they know they're making a difference.

Developing backup content strategies

Every company works through periods where resources are scarce. These are times when your blogging is at great risk. Blogging is a momentum strategy: The content must be written regularly for you to see results growing. Preparing for these periods with no resources is essential.

Every company has a ton of content lying around overlooked for publication on a blog. These are the times to push them:

- ✔ **PowerPoint presentations:** Each slide in a PowerPoint presentation can make a great blog post. Gathering a sales presentation and writing a paragraph or two with each slide can get you 10 posts or more!
- ✔ **Speeches:** If your company has recorded speeches, posting them to your blog is a great strategy, and it takes but a few minutes.
- ✔ **Whitepapers:** Writing a blog post with an overview of a whitepaper is a great method for capturing lead data and getting a post out quickly.
- ✔ **Customer testimonials:** The voice of your customer is the most powerful voice you can put on your blog. Resurrect old customer testimonials and share them on your blog. If you can add some additional detail and even a picture of your customer (you can settle on a logo), that's a powerful blog post that didn't take much time.
- ✔ **Industry news:** As your blog becomes more popular in the industry, sharing industry news is an effective way of writing relevant content that's applicable to your audience with minimal resources.
- ✔ **Guest bloggers:** Having a handful of industry professionals who can write posts for you will expose your blog to a larger audience and can fill in gaps when you lack the resources to post.

Having backup content strategies is essential when you develop your blogging strategy. Be sure to have backup content ready to publish or backup bloggers who can write when you need them most.

Planning content for weekends and vacations

Businesses that serve other businesses tend to see a drop in traffic over weekends and during typical vacation periods and holidays. On the other hand, consumer sites sometimes see a traffic increase on hours and days outside typical office hours. Take advantage of other companies not publishing content and continue to schedule or publish posts on weekends and holidays.

The majority of business blogs drop all writing on these days. However, this is an opportunity for your company to get some great traffic. Although traffic might be down during these periods, the lack of any competitive articles can be a boon to your blog's readership.

All modern blogging platforms have means of scheduling blog posts for future publishing dates and times. This allows your team to write posts during the week but schedule their publishing on the weekend. Take advantage of scheduled blog posts and post content throughout.



If your company participates in external events on weekends or holidays, that's great content for providing the human side of your organization. For the most visibility, write the content in advance so it's published in the morning of the day. If you're one of the many businesses that donate gifts during the holiday season, be sure to blog about the success of the program — and even let folks know how they can help, too.

Scheduling posts can be accomplished by employees who are on vacation as well. A short note — with some content — letting your readers know that you're out of the office shows how sincere you are to your customers.

Don't forget to communicate your holiday hours of operation to readers. This will set expectations with sales prospects as to when they can expect a response to their requests. As well, you can supply emergency contact information for those customers who need assistance while your office is closed.

The following steps show you how to schedule a blog post using WordPress:

- 1. Click the Edit link in the Publish pane next to the words Publish Immediately. (See Figure 7-1.)**
- 2. Enter the date and time you wish to publish the post.**
- 3. When your post is ready, click Publish.**

The post will not be visible until the date and time selected has passed.

Here's how to schedule a blog post with Compendium:

- 1. Select the Schedule for Future Release check box on the Create New Post tab. (See Figure 7-2.)**
- 2. Enter the date and time you wish to publish the post.**
- 3. When your post is ready, click Submit this Post.**

The post will not be visible until your administrator has approved the post and the date and time selected is passed.

Figure 7-1:
Schedule a
WordPress
blog post
to publish
later.

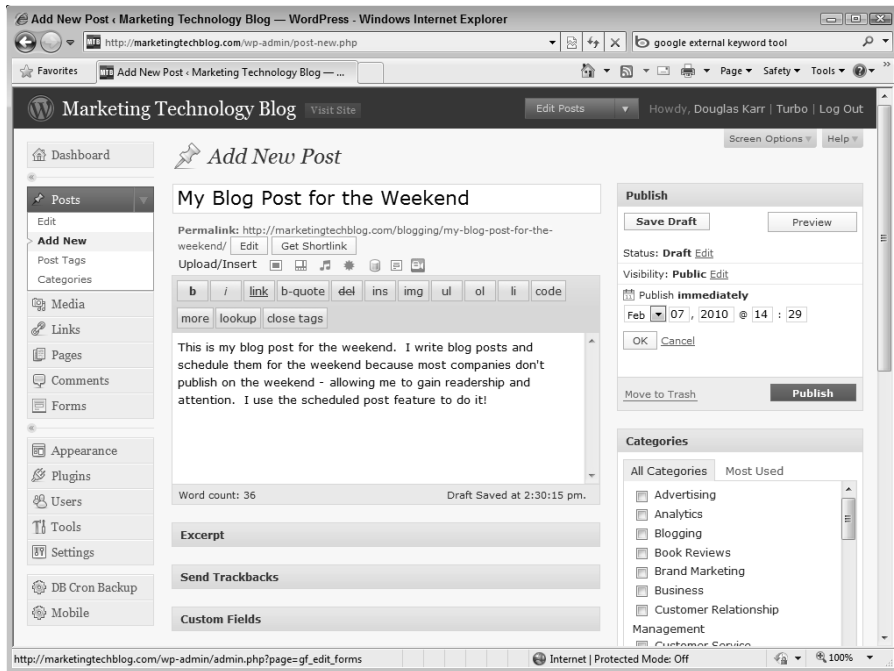
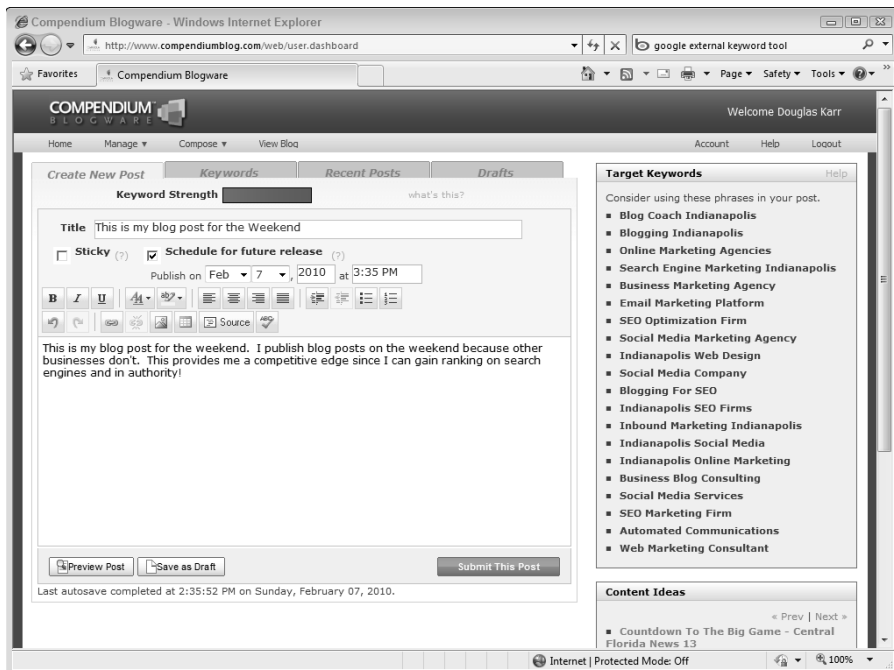


Figure 7-2:
Schedule a Compen-
dium blog
post to pub-
lish later.



Developing an Education Program for Your Bloggers

Search engine optimization, keywords, whitespace, image usage, writing post titles, analytics, Webmaster data, ranking . . . there are thousands of tips and tricks that bloggers can use to improve their blog's visibility. As a result, your company might wish to enlist trainers and professionals to improve your blogging program. Do some research by utilizing search engines for local search engine optimization training, or content writing for search engines. An afternoon of training can make a substantial impact in the quality of the content your bloggers are producing.

If you don't find local resources, companies like Compendium offer free Webinars on corporate blogging, search engine optimization, and inbound marketing strategies. Also check out Corporate Blogging Tips (www.corporatebloggingtips.com) for events, Webinars, e-mail newsletters, and other ways to get the latest tips on corporate blogging.

If your company doesn't have the resources to train internally, you might also wish to have your bloggers attend regional and national events on blogging, social media, and SEO. The popularity of these topics has extended their reach to virtually every city.

Nationally, a number of conferences are available, including the following:

- ✔ **Blog World & New Media Expo** (www.blogworldexpo.com) is held each fall in Las Vegas.
- ✔ **South by Southwest** (www.sxsw.com) is a music, film, and interactive media conference held in Austin, Texas each spring.
- ✔ **SOBCon** (www.sobevent.com) is a social media conference held each year in Chicago.
- ✔ **Web 2.0 Summit** (www.web2summit.com) is held each winter in San Francisco.
- ✔ **WordCamp** (central.wordcamp.org) is a conference specific to WordPress and is held regionally throughout the world.

Of course, you can also follow a number of blogs that are consistently trying to educate bloggers on improving their writing and overall marketing strategies.

- ✔ **Marketing Technology Blog** (www.marketingtechblog.com): This blog provides practical marketing advice across all marketing technologies with corporate blogging being a category.

- ✓ **Social Media Explorer** (www.socialmediaexplorer.com): Jason Falls' blog targets marketers who wish to leverage social media to improve business results, including corporate blogging.
- ✓ **copyblogger** (www.copyblogger.com): Brian Clark's blog is one the best on producing content that gets business results.
- ✓ **ProBlogger** (www.problogger.com): Darren Rowse founded ProBlogger to help bloggers add income streams to their blogs. This blog targets publishing blogs but has tons of advice to incorporate into corporate blogs as well.
- ✓ **BlogBloke** (www.blogbloke.com): As long as blogging has been around, BlogBloke's been providing bloggers with useful tips on blogging and social media.

Your team can also review presentations that have recently been held on blogging and social media technologies from SlideShare (www.slideshare.net), a site where professionals share their presentations online. (See Figure 7-3.)

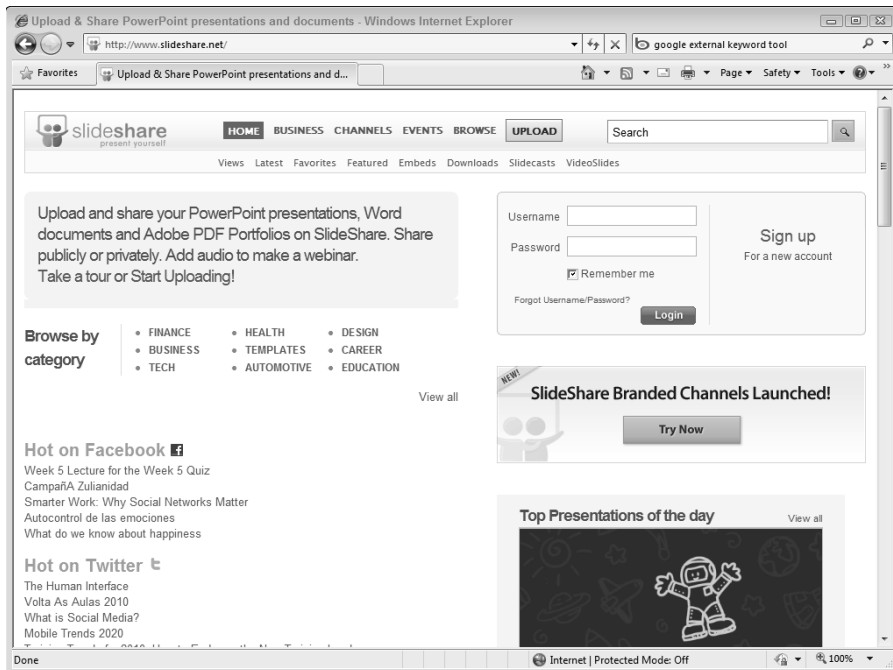


Figure 7-3:
Viewing
presenta-
tions on
SlideShare.

Informing your bloggers of their responsibilities

With many companies, your bloggers need to understand what information they cannot publish as much as what they can. Public companies are bound by federal communications regulations, healthcare companies are bound by privacy regulations, and your company may have intellectual property that is always hands-off when it comes to blogging.

Having your public relations team and your company's legal representatives speak to your bloggers is essential before they ever begin writing their first post. Your bloggers must realize they are responsible and will be held accountable for what they publish online. Just like your company has expectations for an employee when they attend a public event, your company must set expectations for the blog.

The benefits to the blogger are fantastic. By empowering the employee to blog and represent your company, you're making them indispensable to your organization and letting the rest of the world know it.

When your company publishes any information to the Internet, you must protect your company in a number of ways, including the necessary privacy statements, disclaimers, and Terms of Service. Those are notifications to readers, but there are also legalities that your bloggers must be aware of.

The Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/10/endortest.shtml) works for consumers to “prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices and to provide information to help spot, stop, and avoid them.” Ensuring that your blog is clearly identified as a corporate blog is essential. Your bloggers should always identify themselves as representatives of your company and also always keep in mind that their goal is to inform — and, ultimately — sell products and services.

Your blog must protect the privacy of individuals within your organization or customers within your client-base. If you work in the healthcare industry, there are specific requirements on patients' rights and accountability. You can find these requirements at www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy.

Within the content provided, your bloggers must understand copyright law as well as infringement and permissions boundaries when referencing other sites and images, or quoting content. Corporate blogging is “for commercial use,” and your company is liable to pay penalties and fines for infringing on other sites' copyrights.

Your company needs to communicate intellectual property rules and how much information the bloggers can divulge on technology, products, services, competitive advantages, and the vision of your company. For companies with these concerns, employee guidelines will typically cover social media as well.

Developing blogging policies for your team

Writing a full-blown manual on blogging policies might not be the best way to motivate blogging as a strategy within your organization. Most major corporations have guidelines for blogging that are concise and offer additional resources for questions or concerns.

One example of a great blogging policy is the one from Yahoo! and Jeremy Zawodney, which you can find here: <http://govsocmed.pbworks.com/f/yahoo-blog-guidelines.pdf>.

Writing employee guidelines for social media

Employee guidelines extend beyond the blog into the entire realm of social media (if your company is using them), including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social networking platforms. What are the best guidelines for these platforms? Try these:

- ✔ Be transparent about the company or organization you work for. You should always disclaim any vested interests you have.
- ✔ Never represent yourself or the organization your work for in a false or misleading way. All statements must be true and not misleading; all claims must be substantiated.
- ✔ Post meaningful, respectful comments — no spam or offensive remarks.
- ✔ Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal
- ✔ Don't violate your organization's privacy, confidentiality, or legal guidelines for external commercial speech.
- ✔ Stick to your area of expertise, but feel free to provide your own individual perspective on non-confidential activities at your organization.
- ✔ When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
- ✔ If you must write about the competition, make sure you behave diplomatically, have the facts straight, and have the appropriate permissions.
- ✔ Never comment on anything related to legal matters, litigation, or any parties your organization may be in litigation with.

Providing transparency while protecting intellectual property

When your bloggers doubt whether to write about a specific topic that may be intellectual property (IP) that should not be released, provide them a contact within the organization to validate first.



Intellectual property comprises data, information, plans, or strategies that a company owns that is typically protected and not released to the general public. There may be aspects of your company that you don't want the general public — or worse, the competition — to be aware of. Ensure that these off-limit topics are communicated clearly to your bloggers.

Setting the vision for your bloggers

The best way to motivate employees is to identify measurable goals that lead to a long-term goal. Sometimes, the long-term goal is big and audacious. Helping bloggers to understand the ultimate goal of the blog is key. A sample vision statement for your bloggers might be

The [company] blog will be the number one resource for information and best practices regarding [industry]. Our blog will lead to speaking engagements for our employees with subject matter expertise and further our ability to acquire leads through the Internet by 400% as well as doubling our conversion rate to 16% while lowering our cost per lead to \$35.

Your vision should be a combination of big (number 1 resource) and measurable goals that your team can monitor each month and celebrate when met.

Balancing autonomy, individualism, and expectations

Many companies enlist a copyeditor to make significant edits to employees' blog posts prior to publishing. Although silly grammatical and spelling errors should be avoided at all costs, rewriting the voice of an employee can demotivate your bloggers as well as remove the personality of the blogger from the post.

Good copy editors are great allies in ensuring that your voice is heard and your blogging goals are achieved. They will ensure that the content is well-written, compelling, and portrays the blogger and company how they wish. As a test, your company may wish to have a copy editor editing alternative posts on your blog. Measure the impact of the blog posts that were edited versus those that were not — it may be well worth the investment to hire or subcontract a copy editor for your corporate blog.

As important as grammar and spelling is, a blog's transparency and humanity may outweigh the rules of English. Be sure to provide your bloggers with autonomy, the freedom to write "outside the box," and let them add their own personalities. You'll find that diversity in the message and the team leads to diversity in your audience — attracting attention and business from all over.

Monitoring Your Bloggers' Performance

A blogger's performance isn't simply measured by the number of posts they write each week. It's also measured in the number of visitors, and ultimately, the amount of business generated by the blog.

Balancing content versus traffic and conversions

Your blog is a content farm, sprouting seeds of content that will eventually blossom into business. You might be tempted to sacrifice quality over quantity with your blog — opting into a greater volume of long-tail keyword terms and traffic rather than writing compelling content that sells.

Corporate blogs that sacrifice quality for quantity also sacrifice sales from relevant, qualified buyers. If an enterprise prospect views your blog and believes it to be nothing short of a content farm for search engine acquisition, you can lose their respect and their sale — before they ever contacted your sales team.

Don't choose between more content and less quality. More content with better quality will result in greater sales.

Using analytics to monitor specific bloggers

Analytics packages weren't designed to track authors, but they can accept additional data elements that are published on a page or added manually in the tracking code that you paste within your blogging template.

Enterprise analytics platforms like Webtrends allow you to track additional variables in a page, but Google Analytics is a bit more finicky.

To track multiple WordPress authors with Google Analytics, do the following:

1. Add an additional profile to an existing domain in Google Analytics and call it Authors. (See Figure 7-4.)

This profile will specifically track authors.

2. Add an Include Filter to the new Author Profile by choosing Analytics Settings → Profile Settings → Filters Applied to Profile → Add Filter. (See Figure 7-5.)

This ensures that only the views applicable to an author will be captured in this profile. Name the filter Authors and follow the example in Figure 7-10 to include traffic to subdirectories that begin with “/by-author/”. This filter added to the Authors profile ensures that all the analytics data can be segmented by author name.

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics interface for creating a new website profile. The browser window title is "Create New Website Profile - Google Analytics - Windows Internet Explorer". The address bar shows the URL "https://www.google.com/analytics/settings/add_profile?scid=12231996&et=reset&hl=en-US". The page content includes the Google Analytics logo, user information "adsense@douglaskarr.com", and navigation links. The main heading is "Create New Website Profile". Below this, there are two radio button options: "Add a Profile for a new domain" (unselected) and "Add a Profile for an existing domain" (selected). Under the selected option, there are fields for "Select Domain" (http://marketingtechblog.com), "Profile Name" (Authors), "Time zone country or territory" (United States), and "Time zone" ((GMT-05:00) Eastern Time). At the bottom, there are "Cancel" and "Finish" buttons. A sidebar on the right titled "Common Questions" contains several links for help.

Figure 7-4:
Track authors in Google Analytics.

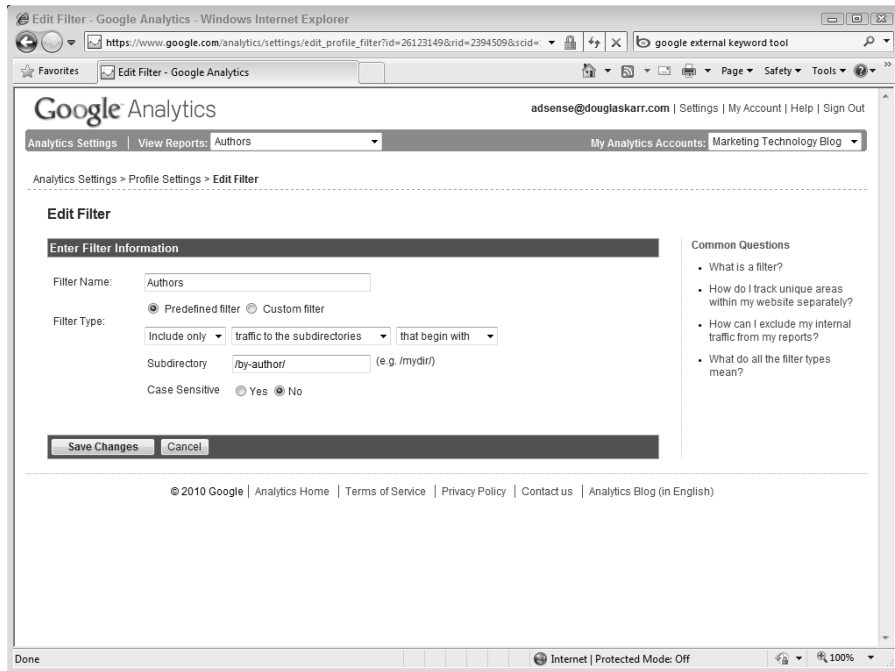


Figure 7-5:
Add a sub-
directory
filter to
include
authors.

3. Close the Authors profile that you just updated and return to your original blog profile in Google. Add an exclusion filter for the same directory on the profile by choosing **Analytics Settings** → **Profile Settings** → **Filters Applied to Profile** → **Add Filter**.

This ensures the author tracking doesn't happen in the primary profile. That would cause pageview data to be increased and bounce data to become inaccurate.

4. Beneath your current Google Analytics script in your footer, add the following code underneath the `trackPageview`:

```
<?php if (have_posts()) : while (have_posts()) : the_post(); ?>
var authorTracker = _gat._getTracker("UA-XXXXXX-X");
authorTracker._trackPageview("/by-author/<? echo the_author(); ?>");
<?php endwhile; else: ?>
<?php endif; ?>
```

5. Be sure to replace the `UA-XXXXXX-X` in the code above with your account number that's in your page's Google Analytics script.

Now when you want to verify the performance of your bloggers, you can simply monitor this profile. You can monitor the number of visitors, pageviews, top posts, and bounce rates associated with each of your

bloggers. This is also a great way of deeming which bloggers deserve rewards and credit associated with your blog.

If you'd like to take it up a notch, add some goals and conversions so you can actually track revenue by blogger.

Dealing with poor blogging performance

Blogging is a forgiving strategy. You can write a post that stinks one week and then a fantastic post the next day and all will be forgiven. That said, a blog post that's sub-par can cause interested prospects to leave and not return. Consistently blogging poorly will cause a decline in readership, popularity, and ultimately, business.

Keeping an eye on your bloggers and ensuring they maintain a high level of quality along with the quantity of posts they write is essential. Here are a few problems to keep an eye out for:

- ✓ **Poor quality content:** Work on methods for improving keywords, compelling post titles, use of media, use of bullet points, and recommending actions for readers to take inside of the content.
- ✓ **Lack of content:** Provide a content creation calendar with content ideas to encourage additional blogging.
- ✓ **Low search engine traffic:** Help your blogger utilize keywords effectively; write great post titles and compelling meta descriptions that searchers will want to click through on.
- ✓ **Low conversions:** Educate bloggers that they need to provide a path to engagement in their posts that invites readers to engage with the company by contacting them, downloading a whitepaper, registering for a Webinar, attending an event, or even simply e-mailing them.
- ✓ **Low time on site or high bounce rates:** Review Chapter 9 with your bloggers on writing content that is readable.

Motivating and Rewarding Your Bloggers

You don't have to give your bloggers payouts to ensure your team is motivated and blogging well. Employee motivation can take several forms other than monetary gifts. Providing your blogger with some attention within or outside of the company, providing gifts, and letting them travel and represent the company are potential options.

Moving a blogger from behind the keyboard to in front of the podium

Conferences are typically a great venue for driving leads into your company. Your bloggers will be acquiring authority and might get offers to speak at regional and national industry events. Take advantage of these events to leverage your bloggers' talent to acquire additional business.

Many bloggers are comfortable behind the keyboard but not in front of the podium. Be sure that your blogger is comfortable with public speaking before you volunteer her for that next international conference. Providing a few lessons with a speech coach can be a great investment for your blogger and your company.

Developing a performance-based rewards program for your blog

Review these three main metrics when evaluating performance rewards:

- ✔ **Content creation:** The frequency and quantity of quality blog posts your bloggers are producing.
- ✔ **Conversation:** The ability of your blogger to gain notoriety, build a following, and ultimately build authority within your industry. Reward your bloggers when their posts are picked up and noticed by professionals in the blogosphere.
- ✔ **Conversion:** Measuring the flow of traffic and the call to action conversions that take place off a specific blogger's content is often the most valuable measurement to the organization.

Depending on what your organization's goals are for the corporate blogging program, the performance rewards should be tied to these goals. If it's about being found in search, then perhaps quantity of content is the most important thing for you. If creating credibility and becoming an industry leader is your goal, then conversation is the most important to you.

Recognizing bloggers without breaking the bank

You don't have to spend tons of cash to get your bloggers engaged and creating content. Identify what your bloggers would like to attain through blogging for the organization and try to provide it when goals are reached.

Tying blogging to revenue is a key strategy for blogging so that you can also provide some monetary reward. It need not be money, knick-knacks and gifts can go a long way. Providing small incentives such as company branded items, a traveling blogging trophy, and giving time off (or special privileges, such as an extra day of casual dress) goes a long way.

Meghan Manning, Marketing Manager for Compendium, has had custom ties, mugs, stickers, and mouse pads created with the blogger's photograph or company logo. During monthly company meetings, Meghan distributes the prizes to the best bloggers. Meghan also hands out three dunce caps to the bloggers who performed the worst, and who must wear the hats throughout the company meeting.

The culture that Meghan, and her director, Meghan Glover, have developed for the company is both fun and competitive — but most of all it drives blog posts, views, and conversions.



Often times, you'll find your team in a blogging *slump* where no one is creating new content. At times like these, spontaneous blogging contests are a fantastic means of lifting everyone's spirits and getting the team back on track. Gift cards for a night out or a few prizes for first, second, and third prize can get a ton of great content out quickly.

Team contests also work well. Ordering lunch if everyone on the team posts by a specific date/time is a great way to motivate everyone and create some peer pressure for the team to commit. If everyone is rushed and busy, bringing in donuts for a blogging breakfast may give everyone an opportunity to blog . . . just don't forget to moderate posts written in a sugar rush.

