Part IV

Expanding Blog Posts and Promoting Content

The 5th Wave   By Rich Tennant

In this part . . .

Writing content is part of a corporate blogging program — finding, promoting and engaging other influential bloggers and their audiences helps you accelerate the growth of your blog's authority, grow your readership, and build business results.

How to blog without writing is the focus of Chapter 10, equipping you with tools and tactics that allow you to maximize your blog content while minimizing your time writing.

Chapter 11 shows step-by-step instructions for promoting your blog and engaging the blogosphere. You find out about the benefits of syndicating your content with RSS, integrating your blog into social media to expand relationships, and promoting your blog via social bookmarking.

Chapter 10

How to Blog without Writing

*B*logging is about setting expectations and delivering on them. To capture the audience attention, you must regularly publish relevant content. And to capture search engine attention, you must frequently publish.

After months of blogging, you'll begin to see sustained growth in the number of readers, the number of people referring to you, and the number of visitors from search engines. If you stop or even pause for a week or two, though, you'll find that your stats will drop — much faster than you gained them.

That's why blogging is a long-term strategy and one of momentum. The advantage of blogging is that after a month of blogging, you continue to grow your audience beyond that month. After a year of blogging, you'll have a substantial audience. Year two builds on the foundation of year one, year three on year two, and on and on.

As you continue to blog, your audience grows, your ability to be found grows, your authority grows, and your sales will grow as well. If you're tempted to take a break, don't! Instead, harness other content, bloggers, and resources to supplement your content so your blog will continue to grow.

Spotlighting Other Experts with a Guest Blogging Program

Guest blogging is a great tactic for sustaining momentum, getting great content, and growing your blog. First, though, you have to find good guest bloggers. With more than hundreds of millions of blogs out there, finding bloggers

isn't difficult, but narrowing down the choices to just those bloggers who can make an impact can be difficult.

Many companies don't want to use guest bloggers because many of the bloggers in the industry might work for competition. However, if you do your research, you'll find a ton of bloggers with very high authority who have no allegiance to a specific company, product, or service. Also, finding a blogger who provides industry insight instead of simply promoting your blog is a fantastic means of proving your transparency and honesty to your audience.

Slingshot SEO (`www.slingshotseo.com`; see Figure 10-1) is a company well known for its ability to analyze search engine algorithms and to get its customers ranked in number one positions throughout the Internet. The Slingshot SEO statisticians and experts are uncanny in their ability to decipher changes in search algorithms in almost real-time. How do they do it? Many people would like to know. However, these experts don't blog.

Slingshot SEO is so good at what it does that much of its clientele comes from word of mouth and by other search engine optimization (SEO) experts finding out who was beating them. My blog, The Marketing Technology Blog, tries to keep up on search engine information, so getting the inside scoop from experts like Jeremy Dearringer or Kevin Bailey (co-founders of Slingshot SEO), is the Holy Grail.

Figure 10-1:
A guest post from an industry expert.

Jeremy admits that he doesn't like blogging, though. We invited him to blog at The Marketing Technology Blog, but he didn't have time and didn't want to. After we saw Jeremy give a presentation on the quality of inbound links and their impact on rankings, we sent him an e-mail asking him to address the issue. Jeremy quickly responded and wrote ten link temptations to avoid. The administrator of The Marketing Technology Blog replied, thanked him, and asked permission to use the e-mail as a blog post. Jeremy enthusiastically agreed, and the post was published.

The content of this post was fantastic, and it was well received by the readers of The Marketing Technology Blog. It didn't stop there, though. Jeremy was also very proud of the post and distributed it to experts around the search engine industry.
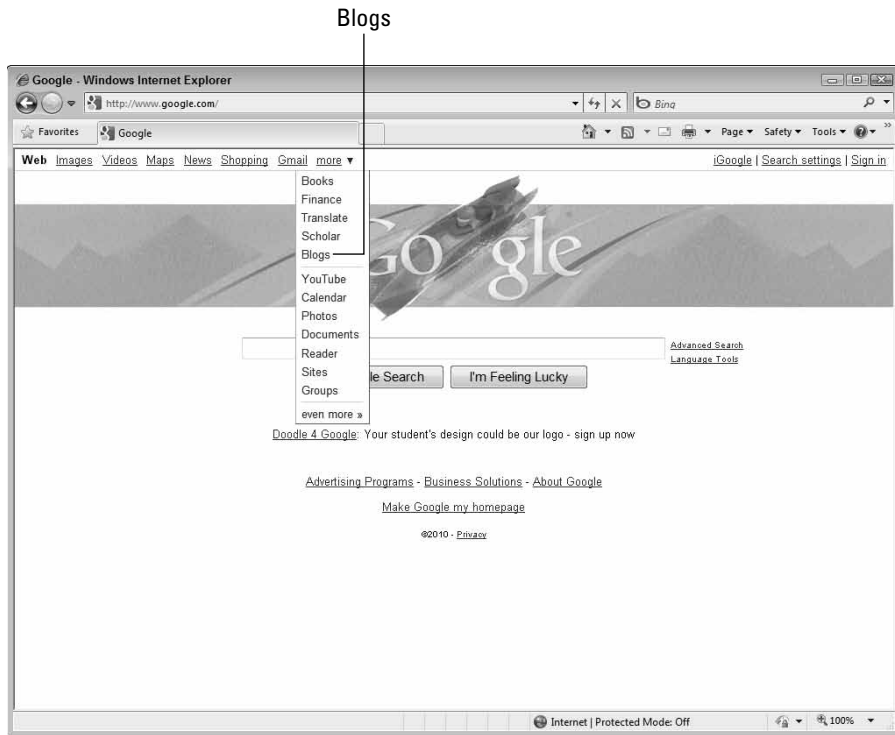
The readership of the blog increased by hundreds of new visitors in a single day, not simply because of the content but because of the exposure to additional audiences through the blog. Each of your guest bloggers will bring their own audiences to your blog. Some of those visitors will stay. And some of those visitors will turn into customers.

Finding industry bloggers to guest write on your blog

Here are a few places where you can find the leading bloggers in your industry:

✔ **Google Blog Search:** Google has a robust blog search that will return blogs with high authority for specific searches that you can follow and use to contact the blogger. You can select Blogs from the options at Google or visit Google Blog Search directly at `http://blogsearch.google.com`. (See Figure 10-2.)

Although this search provides the most relevant blog *posts* for a specific topic, it might not always provide the most authoritative bloggers. It will provide you with other blogs that rank well on specific topics, though. It's also a great way to discover other blogs that speak to the topics relevant to your company. Google Blog Search also offers a feed so you can subscribe to keywords that you're interested in to get the latest blog posts being published out on the Internet.

Blogs

✔ **PostRank:** PostRank (`www.postrank.com`) has skyrocketed in popularity and has become a popular resource for tracking your blog's influence, discovering other industry blogs, and connecting with other bloggers. (See Figure 10-3.) PostRank doesn't just track your blog's rank: It also uses a proprietary algorithm that monitors your blog's influence by category and keyword by tracking conversations that mention your blog.

✔ **BlogCatalog:** BlogCatalog (`www.blogcatalog.com`) is a kind of social network specifically aimed at finding and following blogs and bloggers. It's a community for discussing, sharing, and browsing blogs. (See Figure 10-4.) BlogCatalog doesn't have a ranking mechanism for capturing the most influential bloggers, but it will provide you with a network of active bloggers.

✔ **BlogRank:** BlogRank (`www.invesp.com/blog-rank`) is a great tool that identifies and ranks top blogs by a series of variables, including the number of feed subscribers, the rankings from Compete (a site that profiles domains and profiles visitors) and from Alexa (a site that ranks and tracks domains), Yahoo!'s now-defunct back-linking counts, and Google PageRank. The combination is provided a score and ranked accordingly. (See Figure 10-5.)

Figure 10-3: Use PostRank to track your blog's influence.

Figure 10-4: Use BlogCatalog to see active blogger networks.

✔ **Technorati:** Technorati (`http://technorati.com`), which has been around for quite a while, used to be the premiere resource for tracking blogs. Although it's no longer the best tracker, it's improved its quality, ranking, and site organization, and is still a great resource. Be sure to click the Blog button on the search bar to search for blogs rather than posts on a given topic. (See Figure 10-6.)

Hundreds of blog cataloguing and directory sites promise to get you more visitors and grow your traffic. Beware that the majority of these sites are actually developed to build their own traffic and authority rather than yours. If you find a site that requires you to post an external link or a linked image that points back to its site, let it go. You can fill your sidebar up with a ton of these links and never get a visitor — and the only thing you're doing is promoting that site.

As you're seeking these bloggers, you'll find that other bloggers and Web sites will also be targeting you. Don't be tempted into link-swapping unless the site linking to you has outstanding authority and recognition and you truly wish to put your reputation on the line by promoting it as well.

After you find a blog or blogger that you'd like to target, drop a nice note via that blog/blogger's contact form or look for an e-mail address for you to write them.
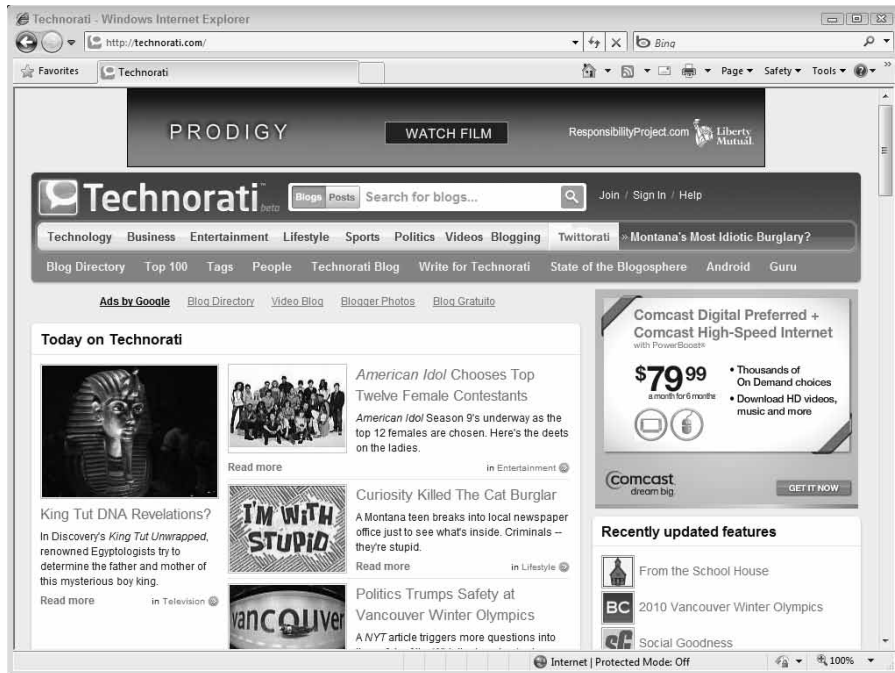
And when you write the blogger, be honest! Let him know that you have a corporate blog for which you're trying to gain exposure and that you'd love for him to write a guest post on a specific topic. Bloggers will often take the opportunity to post on other blogs because it exposes them to new audiences. Don't ask the blogger to review your product or service, though, because the last thing most bloggers want to do is promote a product or service with which they have no affiliation. As you get to know one another, your prospective guest blogger might take interest in your company and what you're selling, but let him do that at his pace, not yours. Get pushy, and you're going to lose him.

Trading posts with other blogs and requesting permission to guest blog

Guest posting on industry blogs and trading posts with other relevant blogs is a great way of expanding your blog's reach. If you can write an effective post on another blog with authority and a large following in your industry, you will lead those readers back to your blog.

Having an authoritative blogger write a post on your blog provides valuable content for your readers (that you didn't have to write). As well, guest bloggers tend to promote their posts to their network. It's a win-win for both blogs.

Contact the blog and provide samples of your posts. Offer to provide a high-quality post on a relevant topic when you contact them. Entice them to write by offering the opportunity for them to write on your blog as well. Be sure to provide content that's neutral in nature — not sales or advertising information. The last thing another blog is going to do is allow you to spam their audience!

Soliciting industry experts to reach their audience

Unlike casual bloggers, industry experts are in a unique position to seek content about new companies, products, and services. They will often be very receptive to writing fresh content, but you have to find them. You can use some of the techniques discussed earlier to target bloggers, or you can work through public relations firms and e-mail list providers.

Over recent years, public relations firms like Vocus (`www.vocus.com`; see Figure 10-7) have accumulated substantial e-mail lists of bloggers. They often send out blanket, unsolicited e-mails to the lists with information on the companies they're trying to promote. This might sound like spam, but they do offer links for unsubscribing. Most of these e-mails offer free books or products, trials, interviewing the CEO, and other goodies, though. Good bloggers often take advantage of these!

Figure 10-7:
PR firms often have robust e-mail lists.

WARNING!

Be sure to step very lightly when intruding on bloggers' inboxes, though. Don't buy a list and them dump e-mails: Validate that your offering is relevant to each blogger on the list and what they write about from day to day. No one likes spam, and bloggers are no different. If you practice this for long, you might find yourself on a list of PR firms who spam bloggers. You can easily find yourself in a position of defending your brand rather than promoting it online.

REMEMBER

If one thing drives the blogosphere crazy, it's the scent of someone being insincere or lying altogether. Don't make the mistake of trying to manipulate your audience. After all, you're outnumbered by a few hundred million out there. Recovering your company or your brand can prove impossible if you're caught red-handed. Don't do it.

Promoting Your Customer's Voice for Maximum Impact

Visitors to a corporate blog recognize that the writer has an agenda. They want to dig deep and find the good and the bad with your company. They'll confront you on statistics, question your positioning, and keep you honest.

One of the most effective voices that you can put on your blog is your customer's voice. Customer testimonials are a fantastic means of adding credibility to your content and providing first-hand posts that have impact to your audience. Visitors who might not believe you are much more likely to believe a customer.

Writing effective customer testimonial blog posts

Customer testimonial posts can be written entirely by the customer, of course, but you can also add the customer's voice by promoting quotes from customer posts, interviews with customers, or even e-mails from customers. Don't be tempted to hand-pick the quotes or tweak the messaging in your favor, however. Visitors can smell a fake five-star rating a mile away.

Visitors want transparency and want to read the four-star rating. They want to understand what roadblocks or slips customers had and how you recovered from them. No one expects perfection anymore. This is key to why many corporate blogs succeed, and why others fail. "*Mea culpa*" blog posts attract a lot of attention — and a lot of customers!

For each customer testimonial blog post, you should do the following:

✔ **Obtain the customer's permission to post.** Be sure to show the customer the actual post you'll be publishing.

✔ **If possible, include an actual photo of the customer (the person, not the company).** Customers appreciate the spotlight, too!

✔ **Include a link to the customer's site or a way for visitors to get in touch with them.** This way, your visitors can assure themselves that it's an authentic testimonial.

✔ **Use quotes around actual customer statements.** In HTML, use the blockquote element, as in this example:

```
<blockquote>DK New Media was ahead of time, under budget, and delivered a
            superior product!</blockquote>
```

Block quotes can be highly customized by using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). You can find some examples at `http://css-tricks.com/ examples/Blockquotes` — see Figure 10-8. Colored backgrounds, indentations, specific fonts, and wrapping the block quotes in images will bring a lot of attention to the voice of your customers.

Figure 10-8:
View styled block quotes at CSS Tricks.

Automating customer testimonials directly into blog posts

Customer testimonials need not be difficult to manage or create. Modern blogging systems typically have features that allow people to generate content and push that content directly to your company blog. Within Compendium Blogware, this is called Web to Post, a form that you can publish on an internal page on the blog where readers are free to submit their own blog posts and even add a few images. After the post is submitted, the administrator is notified and can immediately approve or decline the post for publishing on the blog.

Lydia's Uniforms is an e-commerce site for purchasing nursing scrubs online. To attract search engine traffic and provide a human touch to their site, Lydia's maintains a blog with nursing news and information that gets a lot of traffic — and sales. Lydia's supplements the blog content with customer stories, likening the posts to reality television for nurses.

Customers can write their story, enter their contact information, and even upload an image of themselves in beautiful scrubs that they probably purchased from the site. (See Figure 10-9.)

Figure 10-9: Customers can post testimonials.

To add a WordPress form to post to a blog, follow these steps:

1. **Purchase Gravity Forms plug-in from `www.gravityforms.com`, licenses are very affordable at $39 for a single site, or $99 for multiple sites.**

2. **Upload the plug-in to your `wp-plugins` directory.**

3. **Login to WordPress and navigate to Admin⇨Plugins⇨Installed.**

4. **Click the Inactive link.**

5. **Click Activate on the Gravity Forms plug-in.**

6. **When prompted to add a key you received when purchasing the plug-in, enter the key. Choose Admin⇨Forms⇨Settings in the Support License Key field.**

7. **Choose Forms⇨New Form.**

8. **In the Add Fields sidebar, select Post Fields and then click Title, Body, Image, and Category.**

9. **Select Advanced Fields, and then click Name and E-mail.**

10. **Complete setting up the form and any notifications you wish to receive.**

11. **Navigate to Pages⇨Add New.**

    Within your text editor, you see a Form icon.

12. **Click the icon and select the form you'd like to embed.**

13. **Publish the new page to your site. (See Figure 10-10.)**

TECHNICAL STUFF

Compendium's Web To Post and Gravity Forms post mechanism operate internal to your blog. Blogging platforms also have methods to post content that is published external to the blog. The majority of blogging platforms have an application programming interface (API) that allows you to publish content from third-party resources. WordPress has an extensible markup language remote procedure call mechanism (XML-RPC) that allows you to use third-party blogging software like Windows Live Writer or publish from other publication sites. Using the API, you can automatically publish links that you bookmark in Del.icio.us, photos you upload to Flickr, or questions and answers you've responded to in ChaCha.me.

Promoting vendors and partners to build your authority

Just as customers appreciate the spotlight and provide your blog with authenticity, so do blog posts written by vendors and partners. Your company doesn't work alone, and you're probably dependent upon a few vendors or specific suppliers to ensure you deliver on your promises.
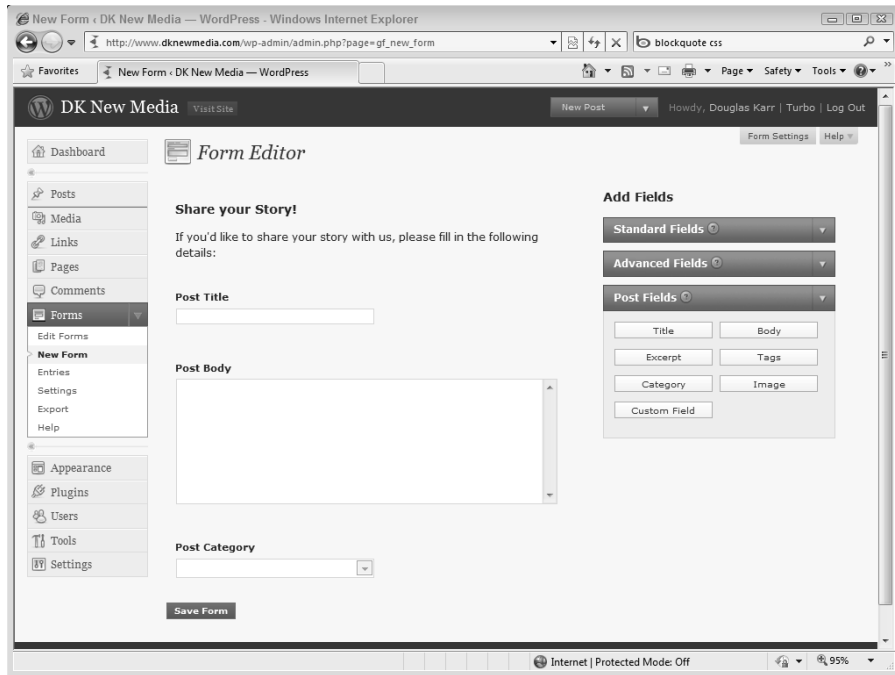
Request guest blog posts from time to time from your vendors. They'll look out for you because they depend on your company's success as well! Make sure that the blog posts aren't too pushy on sales or too stiff with marketing jargon. If you have a tough time getting good content, simply interview the client in person or via e-mail — although you should always ask permission before posting this material.

Be sure to provide a link to their company. In this case, an image in the post with a photo of the representative is okay. If it's a well-known brand, you might want to include an image of the brand as well.

Keeping Your Content Alive with Comments

People often forget about the posts they've published and continue to look forward to new content to get the business they need. Although fresh content is necessary, don't forget that you've invested in past blog posts — and there are ways of reviving it.

Adding a simple comment to a page, for instance, updates the page's content. That update often triggers the search engines to come back and revisit and

re-index the page anew. Respond to comments on your blog within new comments and keep the ball rolling.

There doesn't appear to be evidence that merely having a lot of comments draws additional search engine attention, but blog posts with a lot of comments tend to weigh high in search engine rankings, so it clearly can't hurt.

Using comments as a measure of engagement

In the early days of blogging, bloggers didn't have strong tools to measure success. Because they weren't actually selling anything and they were simply publishing content, they often measured comments as an indicator of visitor engagement.

This is not the same with business blogs. Although comments might be triggered by controversial blog posts, they aren't relevant to sales. One of 100 or 1 of 1,000 visitors will comment on a blog post, and they're typically not the type of visitor who is going to buy from you.

Visitors comment on blog posts to complain, add their message to the conversation, or get attention. Many times, you'll find that comments to your blog are generated by industry professionals. These folks aren't going to purchase from you, but they could have an impact on sales in the long run.

In other words, don't use comments as an indicator of your blog's engagement or success. As a corporate blog, your blog should ultimately be measured in acquisition and retention numbers, which probably don't have any correlation with comments.

Moderating comments to add value and avoid spam

Comments should always be moderated. Unmoderated comments produce horrendous amounts of spam on your blog and reduce its impact. Comments should enhance and add value to the conversation you've started.

Here are a few ways to protect yourself from comment spam:

- ✔ **Incorporate a comment spam-blocking technology, such as Akismet or TypePad AntiSpam.** These companies maintain databases of addresses, commentors, and comments that have been reported as spam and they are automatically blocked from being published on your blog.

> - *Akismet:* `http://akismet.com`
>
> - *TypePad AntiSpam:* `http://antispam.typepad.com`
>
> ✔ **Incorporate a challenge question or CAPTCHA-type form.** *CAPTCHA forms* are those distorted words or phrases you see all over the Web. Where these are present, you must type in the distorted phrase verbatim to prove that you're a human and not an automated service. This stops automated scripting systems from posting comments to your blog.
>
> ✔ **Moderate all comments and check your spam folders daily.** Sometimes Akismet or TypePad erroneously pushes a genuine comment to spam.
>
> ✔ **Incorporate e-mail verification.** Only some blogs offer this service, but because spammers often use bad e-mail addresses, this is a great way to block bad comments.

Some blogs have taken it a step further, requiring commentors to register with the blog. Taking steps this drastic could reduce your comments to nothing and make your site look like it's simply an empty blog built to spam search engines. Remember that comments aren't just good for enhancing the conversation: They're often good for search.

The easiest means of staying on top of incoming comments is to turn on comment notification so your administrator is immediately aware of comments and can approve and respond to them. In WordPress, this can be enabled in Settings⇨Discussion. Enable the Before a Comment Appears an Administrator Must Always Approve the Comment option. Commenting system JS-Kit Echo also enables you to approve commentors indefinitely.

Negative comments are often deleted by companies, but this isn't always wise. After all, negative comments can become opportunities to respond and defend your brand. Of course, negative comments that are simply false shouldn't be published, but be sure to always warn the person who wrote it first. By e-mailing the commentor directly and letting his know that his comment isn't suitable for publishing, you'll be able to defend the action later if he decides to go public with it.

Deciding whether a third-party comment service is right for your blog

Third-party comment services like Echo, Disqus, and IntenseDebate have taken comment systems to another level. (See Figure 10-11.) Although they maintain your comment database and keep it up-to-date, these synchronized systems also help to promote your blog by collecting comments from social media sites and publishing to social media sites.
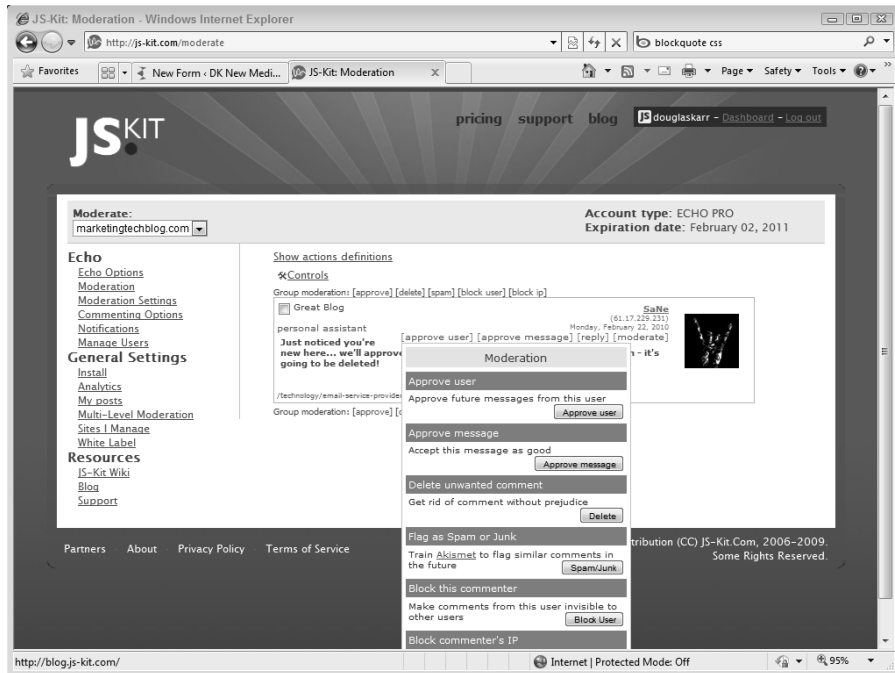
Figure 10-11:
Use third-
party
comment
moderation.

TIP

Third-party commenting systems operate from a site outside of your blog and then simply display the comments within your blog. If the third-party commenting system does not save the comments to your blog's database, then you could lose all comments if you decide to leave the commenting service or if they go out of business. Comments are valuable user generated content (UGC). When selecting a third-party comment service, be sure that the service synchronizes comments between your blog and theirs. If they don't synchronize and they go out of business, you're going to lose a lot of content.

Encouraging employees to comment

Writing the first comment is often the most difficult, so encourage your employees to subscribe to your blogs and add to the conversation. Reward employees who take the time to respond to comments. Comments can provide additional detail that thwarts customer service calls as well.

Keep an eye on employee comments, and you also might just find your next blogger in your organization. People tend to move up the ladder in social media, and critics often turn into creators. Take advantage and solicit great comments from employees with invitations to write more.

Incorporating a Multimedia Strategy to Add Personality

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video must be worth millions. The majority of blogs are written, but the irony is that users of the Web don't actually read much. Visitors to your blog will skim more than they read: headlines, subheadings, and bolded print to obtain the information they want. A combination of whitespace and text will improve reader cognition, but there's more to a blog than text.

The world of the Web is pretty text-rich. Visitors don't remember words, though, and very few people have photographic memories where they remember what they read. Most people easily process and remember images, though. Associating your content with strong imagery will help visitors understand and retain the message that you've written.

The three types of learning are

- ✓ **Visual:** Remembering what you see
- ✓ **Audible:** Remembering what you hear
- ✓ **Kinesthetic:** Remembering what you interact with

As you develop the content strategy for your blog, it's imperative that you incorporate all three strategies into it. Many bloggers believe that writing alone covers the majority of the population. That presumption might well be true, but on a corporate blog, it might not reach the decision-maker.

Leveraging audio technologies for audible learners

Blogging platforms publish text and images. Video blogs publish video. Podcasts publish audio. With the popularity of the iPhone, iPod, and other music players on the market, subscribing to podcasts has become quite popular. Podcasting is a very specific approach to attracting audible learners. In the early days, podcasting required quite a bit of technology and the ability for the podcaster to mix and convert their own sound files as well as incorporate players on their blog to publish the audio.

Now, podcasting can be done simply and effortlessly. Paul Dunay converts phone interviews into podcasts for his blog, Buzz Marketing for Technology, which is aimed at business-to-business technology marketers. Paul uses a system called Veotag (`www.veotag.com`) with which he can easily record and then segment the podcast into chapters, making it easy to listen to. (See Figure 10-12.)
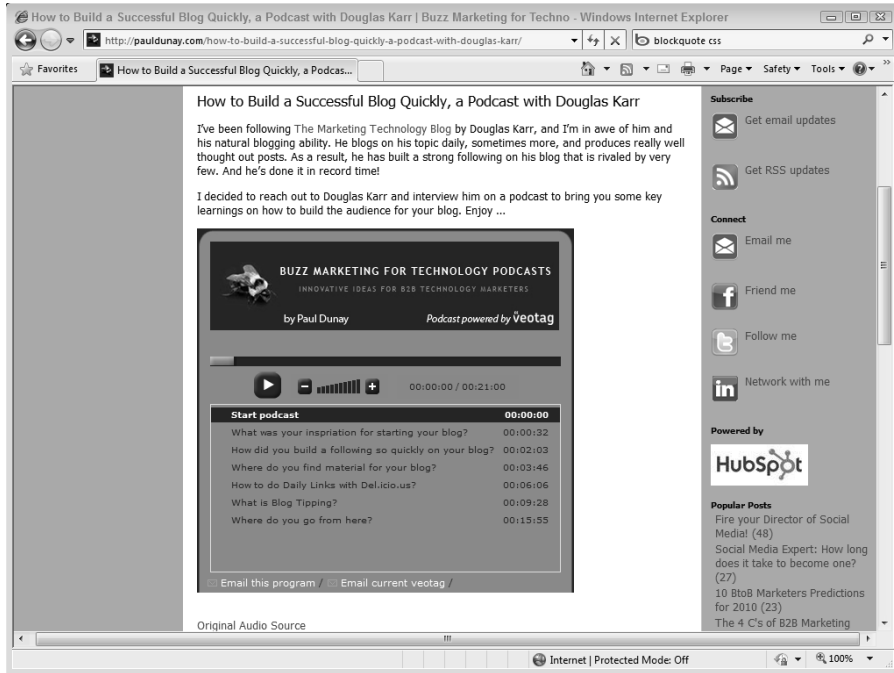
Figure 10-12:
Use pod-
casting for
audible
learners.

A product like Veotag really simplifies the process, but it's not absolutely necessary. Barbara Jones from the Stellar Thoughts blog (`http://stellartrng.com/blog/`) does interviews with Customer Relationship Management professionals using Skype and then mixes the audio by using Audacity, a free software for recording and editing,

Additional podcasting services are available, such as Podbean.com (`www.podbean.com`) and PubClip (`www.pubclip.com`), that provide simple tools for recording and publishing your podcasts by phone, online, conference calls, or even using iPhone applications. These services are highly recommended for those of you without the time or resources to learn how to mix and publish audio files.

If you're more inclined to do this yourself, using an affordable compact microphone from Blue Microphones and a copy of GarageBand (`www.apple.com/ilife/garageband`) will have you up and running in a matter of minutes.

If you decide to podcast, registering your podcast with iTunes is a must. You can find the official information about registering at

```
www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/specs.html
```

But in general, to submit your podcast to the iTunes Store, follow these steps:

1. **Launch iTunes.**

2. **Choose iTunes Store➪Podcasts.**

3. **In the Learn More box, click Submit a Podcast. (See Figure 10-13.)**

4. **Enter your Podcast Feed URL and then click Continue.**

5. **Sign in to iTunes.**

6. **Review your Podcast.**

   You should see your artwork and information. If it's not correct, return to your podcasting application and make changes.

   A verification message is sent to your e-mail address.

   Podcasts aren't immediately published. Keep an eye on your inbox, and you'll get notified when your podcast is published.
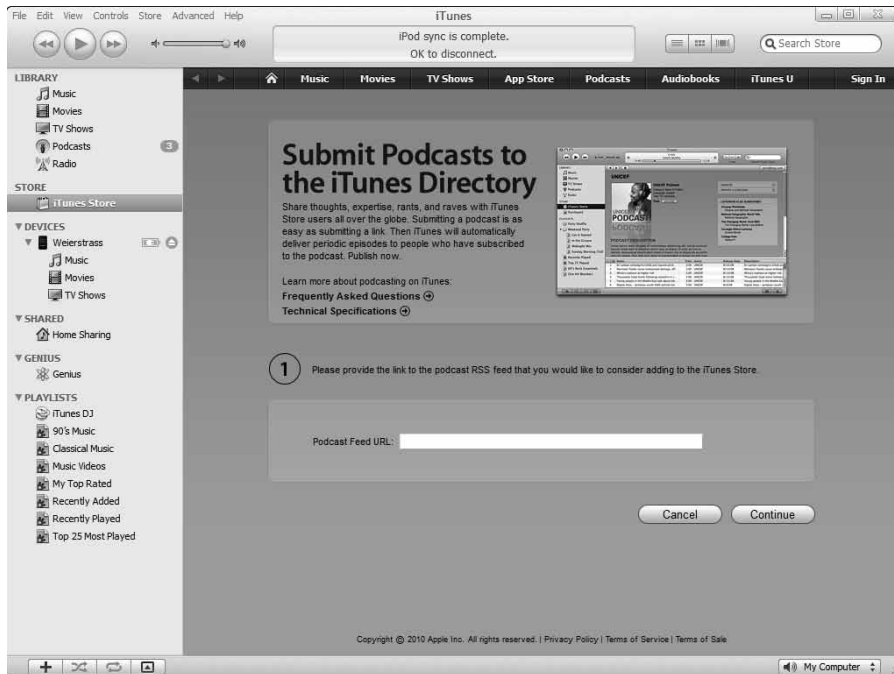
Figure 10-13:
Register your podcast with Apple iTunes.

Incorporating video for increased engagement

With the price of bandwidth and video equipment dropping, more and more blogs are turning to video to develop compelling, authentic, and sincere messages for their audiences. Video is an extremely powerful tool because

it's simple to consume and provides both audio and visuals to help us retain the information.

Unpolished, noncommercialized videos provide us with a human touch that print and the Web cannot provide. Every corporate blog should have at least one video that introduces you, your staff, and your marketing message to the public.

If you don't have time to great a Flip MinoHD (`www.theflip.com`) to record high-definition video and mix it using iMovie (`www.apple.com/ilife/imovie`) or Windows Live Movie Maker (`http://windowslive.com/desktop/moviemaker`), opt for a video company or agency to assist you. Cantaloupe (`http://cantaloupe.tv`) is an agency and video hosting provider with a subscription model for companies to create video stories for their company or brand. (See Figure 10-14.) Cantaloupe even provides hosting technology that allows you to place a link in a banner over the video for your viewer to click.

The value of these videos is astonishing. Clients have been able to double and triple conversion rates simply by embedding a short video about the company, product, or service.

Figure 10-14: Incorporate video.

Rocky Walls is a videographer from TwelveStars Media (`www.12stars media.blogspot.com`) specializing in social media and Internet video. Rocky supplies the following advice for amateur videographers:

- ✔ **Use keywords and tags when posting your video to YouTube or other video sites.** These sites are highly indexed by search engines and videos are still rather scarce, so you have a great chance of being found.

- ✔ **Use a compelling description of your video.** Don't simply embed a video as a blog post; be sure to set expectations on what the viewer will learn after watching your video.

- ✔ **Share the video.** Everyone loves a video, so be sure to share it in e-mail, by posting the link in Facebook, and in other social media engines.

- ✔ **Make the video worth watching.** Provide something for the viewer to walk away with that they didn't have before — even if it's simply a good chuckle.

- ✔ **Make your video unique.** Don't follow a formula. This is your opportunity to apply your personality and your company's culture to your video.

Hosting options for audio and video

Like with blogging platforms, not all audio and video hosting platforms are created the same. Bandwidth for audio and video must be outstanding, or your listeners or viewers will give up and leave. Although YouTube may have the most videos and viewers online, the exposure still might not lead to conversions.

Hosting your videos on your own server might not be a good idea because the cost of bandwidth is so high. It's affordable and much more reliable to publish your media files on third-party hosting sites. Video hosting platforms have the necessary bandwidth and the distribution network, and they are optimized for viewing large, streaming videos. These platforms also permit video search — which continues to grow in popularity. Videos often have a lot less competition as well, making it easier for you to be found through video searches.

If you're a large corporation, consider using a digital asset management company, such as Widen (`www.widen.com`), to host only your media. (Widen also offers robust analytics, conversion capabilities, and distribution channels; see Figure 10-15.)

Mid-range solutions include Streamotor (`http://www.streamotor.com`) and Backlight (`www.cantaloupe.tv/backlight`), which are service that provide high definition and embedded advertisements directly in your video. (See Figure 10-16.)
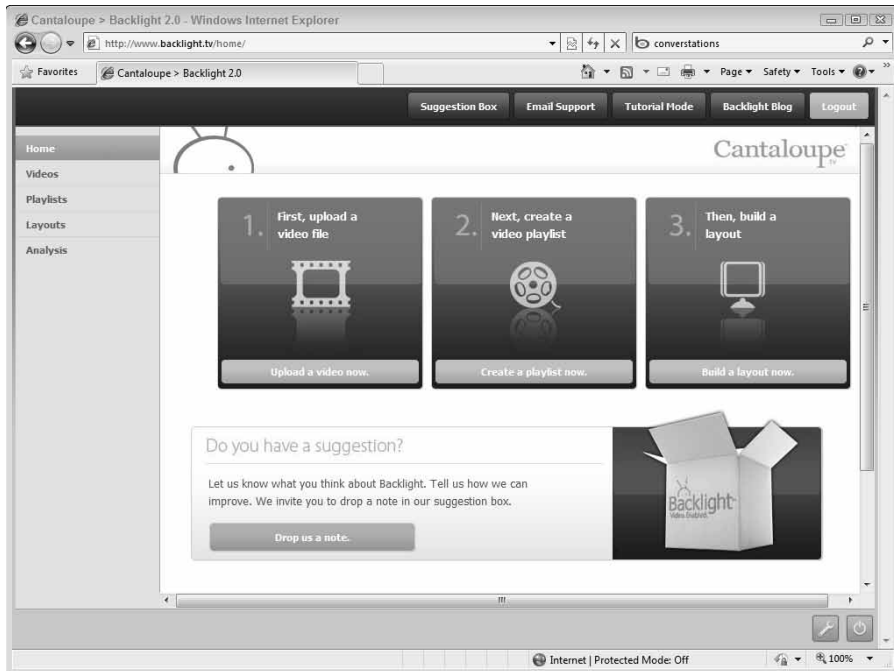
Low-cost solutions are available as well, such as Viddler's business offering at `http://b2b.viddler.com`. (See Figure 10-17.)

WARNING!

Beware of free video and audio hosting. Although many of these services are great for personal use, their terms of service, disclaimers, and service level agreements might prove unsuitable for your company. As an example, many video hosting sites have terms that require that you agree to their using your content or even owning it. Proceed with caution!

Another great medium for publishing content to your blog is SlideShare. SlideShare converts PowerPoint presentations into an interactive format that can be embedded easily in a blog post. (See Figure 10-18.) SlideShare also offers a lead acquisition form that you can add into any presentation.
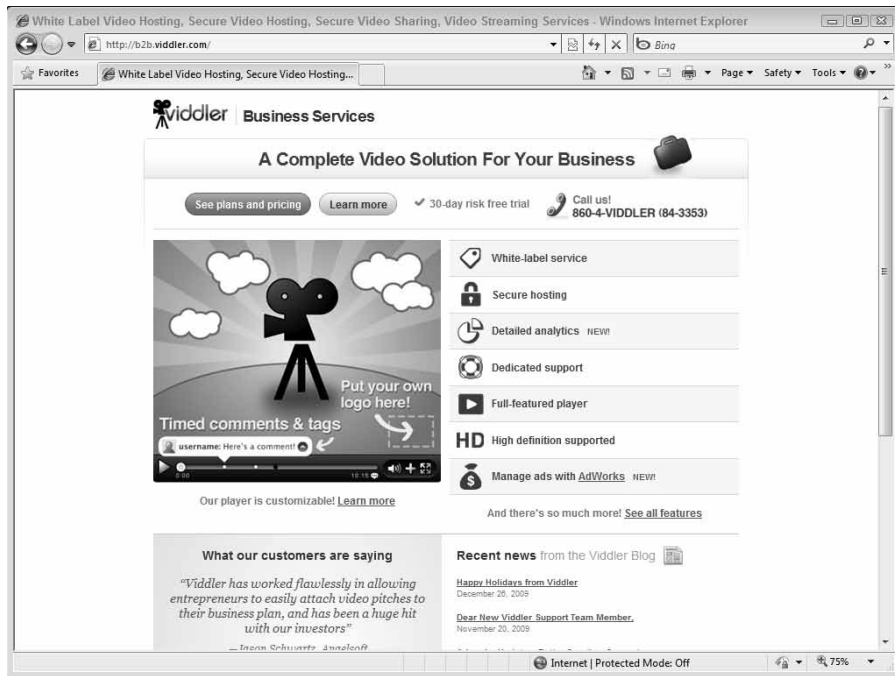
Figure 10-17: Viddler business video offering.

To promote your presentations on your blog with SlideShare, follow these steps:

1. **Sign up for a SlideShare account at SlideShare.net.**

2. **Login and click the Upload button.**

3. **Click Browse and select Files.**

4. **Select the PowerPoint presentation you wish to upload.**

5. **Add a title, description, and tags.**

6. **Once uploaded, copy the embed code and paste it into a new blog post.**

7. **Publish the post.**

TIP

For best results on SlideShare, remove any animation from your presentation and add text to each slide that summarizes it. You can even add a lead generation form within your presentation using SlideShare's business solution at `http://slideshare.net/business`.

Figure 10-18:
SlideShare
allows you
to embed
a player
directly in
your blog
posts.

Chapter 11

Marketing and Promoting Your Blog

*1*f a tree falls in the forest and there's nobody there to hear it, does it make a sound? If you write a blog post and there's no one there to read it, is it helping your company? No, unfortunately not.

Simply put, if you want to accelerate the growth of your blog beyond search and word of mouth, you must promote the blog, its content, and its value beyond your blogging platform.

Blogging platforms were developed with promotion in mind, though! For example, blogging platforms have feeds that are readable by other applications and tools using Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Syndication makes it possible to publish your blog post, but also integrate and extend the content through dozens of other distribution channels.

This is important. The prospects who might be interested in your content may never make an effort to visit your blog. However, they may be participating in Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social networks. By syndicating your content into those networks, it allows you to bring your relevant message to them — where they want to see it!

This chapter discusses RSS syndication and a few other means of getting your blog noticed.

Using RSS to Syndicate Content

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a standard format for publishing content within an eXtensible Markup Language (XML) feed. XML is a data format that is easily accessed by programming languages. Whereas HyperText Markup Language (HTML) is designed for browsers to display your content properly, eXtensible Markup Language is designed to transfer data between programs and Web sites. Feeds have standards (Atom, RSS, RSS 2.0) that dictate how the content within the feed is written. This allows applications and developers to read your feed and present it, using any language on any platform.

Blogging platforms publish your content both in pages and in feeds. This allows third-party applications to access your feed, including feed readers like Google Reader (`www.google.com/reader`) or by other applications. Feed readers allow visitors to your site to subscribe by adding your feed to their reader. The reader then collects and keeps track of the sites they read without ever needing to visit the site!

Your feed makes your blog's content readily available to other sites, applications, feed readers, and anywhere else where the content can come in handy. Your blog's content can be published indirectly to Twitter, Facebook, your own Web site, and other applications throughout the Web.

If your company has a development team or you have the budget, the possibilities are endless for syndicating your blog content. A number of iPhone applications allow you to build a custom application from your feed. Additionally, you can integrate with virtually any platform on the market that has an API and a means for developing.

Syndicating content to your corporate home page

Search engines love fresh content, and they often return to pages that change frequently. However, many corporate home pages are static and seldom refreshed with new content. You can help your home page get indexed more often — and for a greater volume of keywords — by syndicating your content from your blog to your home page.

Flexware Innovation, a software development firm, specializes in writing applications for manufacturing firms in life sciences, automotive, and other industries. There isn't a huge demand for this niche service, so Flexware Innovation targets keywords specific to its industry to get inbound leads for its company.

Their home page (`www.flexwareinnovation.com`) is minimalistic (see Figure 11-1) and branded to provide visitors with a feeling that Flexware is a company on the cusp of developing these solutions, so real estate for

content is scarce. By syndicating the blog content to the right sidebar, though, Flexware's content on its home page changes on a regular basis and targets terms with minimal effort. They simply write a blog post and it appears. The programming to do this uses code called "aggregators," which is described later in this chapter.

Keeping static pages fresh with syndicated excerpts

Web site pages that aren't updated often can feel more engaging and relevant to readers when they pull in syndicated content from other locations. A great example is Visit Tampa Bay.

With several events occurring at venues every day in Tampa Bay, there's no way for the visitors bureau to easily update their Web site daily to keep up. Therefore, Visit Tampa Bay uses two approaches: an events calendar and a sidebar with the latest blog posts and short descriptions. (See Figure 11-2.)

The blog posts in the left sidebar provide readers with additional content that offers the human touch, but it's also syndicated to the page to provide search engines with the food they need to keep coming back.
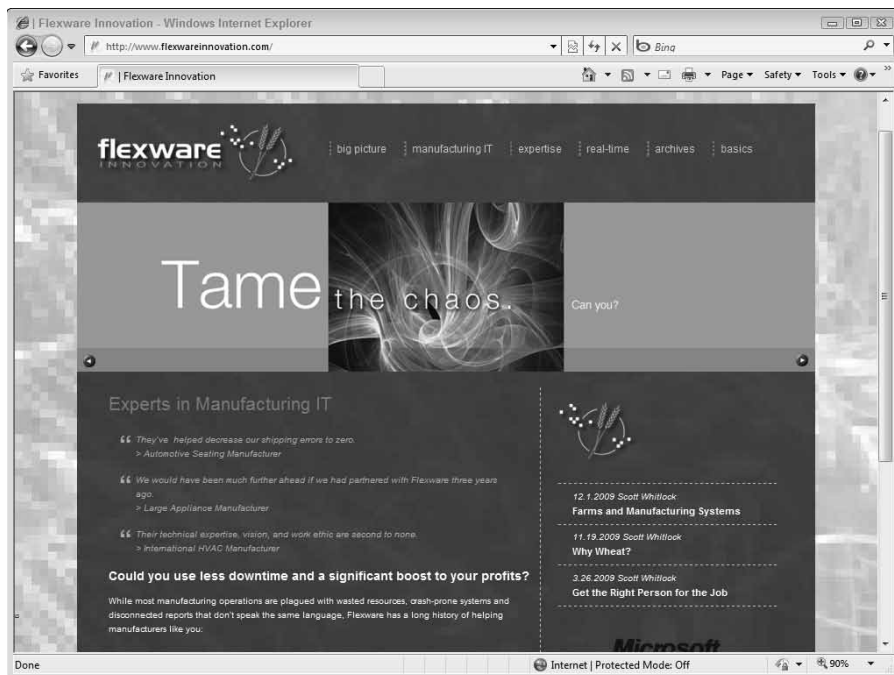
Figure 11-1:
Blog post titles on Flexware Innovation's home page.
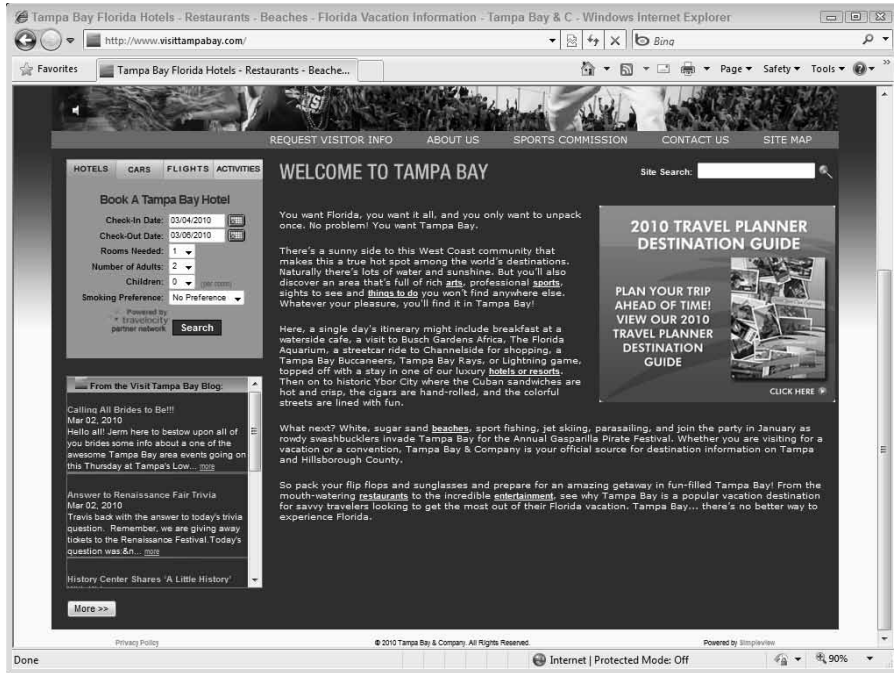
Figure 11-2:
Visit
Tampa
Bay's
syndicated
blog on the
home page.

The feed provides such information as the blog post title, the date the blog post was published, and the content. Some feeds provide additional details, such as the author, too. When the developers integrate the feed into the home page, they can strip out images or HTML, shorten the content to a specific length, or simply post only the title. There's a lot of flexibility.

If you have great developers, it's even more compelling to strip out an image from the post and display it with a link to the post. Remember, images are worth a thousand words!

Aggregating RSS into server-side pages

Syndication is the process of making your content accessible. *Aggregation* is the opposite, it's the process of requesting that content and displaying it. *Server side* means the content is combined and presented directly from your Web server. When your browser requests the page — or a search crawler requests the page — the content is presented.

However, sometimes a Web page has content that is presented *client side*. That is, content or code (typically JavaScript or Flash) is loaded by your browser locally. Twitter widgets (`http://twitter.com/goodies/widgets`), for example, can be embedded in your Web page. When a user

opens your page, the browser actually goes out and gets the latest Tweets, not the Web server where the page is hosted. YouTube videos are actually Flash files and they also only load when visitors open the Web page on which their code resides. (See Figure 11-3.)

Many applications offer *widgets,* which are code snippets that go out, capture, and present the code. These script tags are actually executed locally at your desktop on your browser, not at the server. Typically, these are denoted by script tags like this one:

```
<script src="http://widgets.twimg.com/j/2/widget.js"> </
        script>
```

REMEMBER

To be easily found by search engines, content should be syndicated server side. That is, the content is presented directly to search engine crawlers. Search engine crawlers are advancing and beginning to read into Adobe Flash files and even JavaScript, but it's still not foolproof. If you wish to syndicate content and have it seen by search engines, rendering it server side is a must.

Feeds are so common that free code snippets that consume and display feeds are available for virtually every language and platform.

Figure 11-3:
An example of a client-side widget from Twitter.

Getting Engaged in the Blogosphere to Attract Attention

When you walk into a busy room, no one is aware that you are present until you have either announced yourself or begin to introduce yourself around the room. The blogosphere isn't much different, although it is a much bigger room! Announcing or introducing yourself is a key strategy within the blogosphere. Bloggers share and reciprocate, and they appreciate debate and alternative viewpoints (at least most do). Using PostRank, BlogCatalog, or Technorati, you can find other blogs of similar interest and begin commenting on those blogs.

It's easy to get engaged. Commenting on peers' blogs, promoting your blog, adding your blog in every social media profile, and joining social networks that are relevant to your business can help you to not only introduce your blog but also expand its audience.

Social media and social networks help, too. Follow your industry peers on Twitter or Facebook and try to connect on LinkedIn. If you can't connect directly on LinkedIn, join a LinkedIn Group that they belong to. Because you are unable to connect directly in LinkedIn without the other person's expressed permission, the next best tactic is to join relevant groups that they belong to. Participate in those groups and promote relevant blog posts to engage the group and lead them back to your blog.

To identify a member's groups on LinkedIn, follow these steps:

1. **If you haven't already, join LinkedIn and completely fill in your profile. Be sure to include a profile photo — people don't like to connect with blank avatars.**

2. **In the Search bar, ensure People is selected and type the name of the person you want to connect with.**

3. **If you scroll down the person's profile, you'll find groups that they've joined. In the right sidebar, you'll also find their activity. Many bloggers will join a group but may be inactive. Try to join groups where the bloggers are active.**

4. **Participate in the group by starting discussions, asking questions, or providing feedback. The group will soon notice your expertise as a peer and follow you home to your blog.**

Using a feed reader to organize and follow industry blogs

Feed readers are an effective way to subscribe to a blog without having to visit it every day. After you identify bloggers to learn from and connect with, add their feeds to your feed reader. If you don't have a feed reader, a few free ones are simple to use.

If you want a desktop application, Newsgator.com has a Mac and a PC version. Simply install the application and subscribe to the blogs feed. If you want a Web application, Google has the most well-known feed reader — Google Reader, which you can find at `www.google.com/reader`. (See Figure 11-4.)

After you add subscriptions in Google Reader, the reader organizes all the content in reverse chronological order (the latest posts are first). To navigate, simply click the "Next item" button or press "j" on your keyboard (it's a shortcut, "k" goes back one item) to proceed to the next post. Readers are an effective means of scanning or reading content from many sites in a single interface.

Figure 11-4:
Reading feed subscriptions in Google Reader.

Interacting with other blogs through guest posting and comments

Don't be shy about requesting the opportunity to do a guest post on another blog. Bloggers are always scouring for new content and many appreciate the opportunity to allow a different voice to their blog. Keep an eye on the blogs that you're reading; after you have a collection of great posts to point to, send a note to the blogger through her contact form and ask permission to post. Remember, the post isn't an opportunity to throw a sales pitch out to her audience; it's an opportunity to build credibility and cross-traffic.

A great way to sell without selling is to share a success story about a client or customer. Providing a story that is relevant to another blog's readers while promoting the success or happiness of your clients or customers is a great way to promote your brand or company without actually selling.

It's not often that a blogger reaches out to request a guest post, so be brazen and target a few bloggers. Share some posts with them that you've done so they can see the quality of your work and whether it's a fit for them.

Commenting regularly on a colleague's blog with solid content that adds to the conversation will get their attention. You may even wish to write a blog post that answers, debates, or adds to a blog post that they've written. If you meet their standards, you'll have an influential follower.

Reciprocation is a key strategy when blogging. Bloggers feel compelled to return attention. Of course, some of the selfish ones never reciprocate (don't be one!), but the majority do go out of their way to mention you. The currency of blogging is mentioning another blogger with a keyword-ridden anchor tag:

```
Today I was reading Jeff Lefevere's (he has the <a
        href="http://goodgrape.com" title="Good
        Grape">best wine blog</a>) and it reminded
        me...
```

Using `best wine blog` within the anchor tag provides Jeff some authority for that keyword term. Chances are that he'll rank a little bit higher or really lock in his rank because of the mention. Highly competitive keywords may take a few hundred more of these — but bloggers appreciate every one they receive. A great methodology is to target blogs that have a good rank, add them to your feed reader, and then read them each morning. Set a goal for yourself or your staff to comment on a few each morning. You'll be amazed at the traffic you begin to attract to your blog. After you get a mention or two — you're in!

When you comment, be sure to add to the conversation — don't simply self-promote. If you self-promote and include links to your blog, you could find yourself on a list of spammers and all your content could be blocked across many blogs. Many blogs use the same anti-spam applications, such as Akismet and SixApart AntiSpam.

Respectful dissent to attract and build readership

Nothing draws more attention than controversy. Respectfully opposing a blogger's position on an opinion article can provide you the spotlight faster than you might think. Be polite and always complimentary to the blogger's opinion, though. Just as you have an opinion based on your experience, so does the blogger with whom you disagree. This is also known as *contrarian blogging*. (Check out www.blogbloke.com/art-of-contrarian-blogging for more.)

If other readers agree with your position, or at least see your point of view, you may just win over some readers and find your blog getting some new traffic. Every opportunity to provide an alternative viewpoint with an industry blogger helps create interaction and truly demonstrates your understanding and experience in the industry.

Responding effectively to negative criticism

Marketing has changed significantly over the years, but marketing departments have not. Marketing used to simply manage the look and feel of your corporate brand, as well as execute advertising campaigns to drive sales. The new marketing department is now engaged with clients in social media, and the conversation is often one-to-one instead of one-to-many.

Your marketing team is not as formally trained in objection management as your sales professionals might be. Marketers deal directly with objections and criticisms all within the public eye. It's not a bad idea to get your marketing team to attend some sales training on how to deal with this.

Negative criticism is an incredible opportunity for your company. As more and more companies are criticized, rated, and reviewed online, consumers and prospects finally recognize that companies are not perfect. Consumers no longer demand perfection — they actually want to see what happens when your company is faced with its own imperfections, too.

Some effective means of resolving negative criticism online can actually grow sales:

✔ **Moderate user-generated content such as comments.** If the comment will damage your company or brand, don't allow it to go public; contact the person who reported the issue immediately. Do everything possible to resolve the issue offline and explain the repercussions to your company if the issue is made public.

✔ **Respond immediately and respectfully.** Always take the lead in being an advocate who cares about your customers. Even a response that you're investigating the issue provides evidence that your company cares and reacts. Resolving the problem publicly may draw a lot of attention to your company, your product, or your service. Everyone wants to work with companies who care, respond, and respect one another.

   Think outside the box when you respond. Don't respond politically or by showing animosity to the person. Take the high road and you'll ultimately be recognized for it.

✔ **If the criticism is factually accurate and not an opinion, admit it immediately and respond with an offering that can help resolve the issue.** For example, if it's a complaint about a bug in your software, resolve the issue by responding that the problem has been identified, when it will be resolved, and how you'll communicate that to the customer.

   You may even wish to invite them to call or e-mail you about the specifics. Once resolved, you may want to send them a gift or a hand-written thank-you note for helping you identify and correct problems within your company.

✔ **If the criticism is inaccurate or an opinion, acknowledge the person's frustration and request additional information.** Take conversations like this off-line. Keep any arguments or debates absolutely factual. If you've been misrepresented in any way, be sure to inform your audience. Many times, your customers are simply frustrated and seeking attention. If you provide them positive attention, not only will they stop flaming you online, they may actually promote you.

Integrating Your Blog into Other Social Media to Expand Your Readership

Although you may wish that all your traffic landed directly at your home page, the truth is that most does not. Aside from search engines, social media is where many people interact online nowadays. Although you might hate Twitter and think it's somewhat of a joke, you can be assured Twitter is much loved by many of your prospects, and you ignore it at your peril.

Your prospects may be frequently interacting on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, or any number of other social media channels. You want to interact with prospects where they are rather than waiting for them to come to you. If your prospects are frequently on Facebook or Twitter, they may never find you, so you need to be there for them. Lucky for you, blogging platforms offer feeds and your content can be syndicated throughout any number of platforms easily.

Thanks to Twitter's huge popularity and wide adoption, all the other platforms have followed suit and adopted the standard status update, a means of communicating a short message that is accepted through mobile text messaging, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, FriendFeed, Ning, Plaxo, and virtually every new social media platform.

Using URL shorteners

A status update on Twitter is one-hundred and forty characters. Selected by the founders of Twitter, "The 140 character limit originated so tweets could be sent as mobile text messages which have a limit of 160 characters. Minus 20 characters for author attribution, that gives users just enough room." It just so happens that 140 characters is also convenient to display the title of a blog post and add a shortened Web address that readers can click to read the entire article. Twitter is perfect for "tweeting" your blog posts, and tools like URL shorteners and Twitterfeed make it even easier!

TECHNICAL STUFF A uniform resource locator (URL) shortener is a service that converts a long Web address into a short redirected URL. Popular shorteners are TinyURL, DwarfURL, is.gd, tr.im, and bit.ly. bit.ly has become dominant because you can track how many readers click the shortened address that you distribute.

TIP Shorteners aren't just for status updates; they're also very useful for sending Web addresses via e-mail messages. Long Web addresses often get chopped up and don't work well when sent through e-mail because different e-mail clients render messages differently. If you want to send a blog post to a friend by e-mail, shorten the address using a shortener.

To shorten a Web address with bit.ly, follow these steps (see Figure 11-5):

1. **Sign up and log in to bit.ly. By signing up, you can track your links to see how often they are clicked.**

   ```
   http://bit.ly
   ```

2. **Enter the Web address of the article you wish to distribute.**

3. **Click Shorten.**

4. **Click copy to capture your bit.ly link and paste the new link in an e-mail or your status message.**

5. **(Optional) You can also customize the link and use your own wording in the shared link, so**

```
http://bit.ly/b1Cgpt
```

can be customized by entering a custom name in the Custom Name field, such as:

```
http://bit.ly/corporateblogging
```

Most applications for automating your posts to social media status updates include automated shortening. Some blogging platforms, like WordPress, have even built URL shortening buttons directly into the latest versions of their software.

URL Shorteners work using redirects, which Google has confirmed does not pass 100 percent of search engine authority. Don't get so excited over URL shorteners that you use them every time you publish a link on the Web. They're great for tools like Twitter, Facebook, and other status updates that have character limitations, or e-mail where long URLs often get cut off — but not elsewhere.

Syndicating your blog in Twitter

You can syndicate your blog a number of ways so that new post titles and links are automatically posted to your corporate Twitter account. Perhaps the best known and original service is Twitterfeed. (See Figure 11-6.) Twitterfeed checks your feed as often as you like, finds new posts, and sends them as status updates in Twitter.

The service offers many customizations and options, such as setting the shortener service you want, setting the order to tweet the posts, and appending text before or after the Tweet. Here are a few recommendations:

✔ **Include only the title rather than the title and description.** When you include the title and description, the tweet will take the full 140 characters. You want to leave some room if someone wishes to retweet your post and add comments or a name.

✔ **Use bit.ly:** Use bit.ly as your shortener so that you can see how often the links have been clicked.

✔ **Add a post prefix:** If you want to distinguish these automated tweets, you can add a post prefix, such as *New blog post*.

✔ **Use hashtags:** Many people search Twitter for news on specific keywords. If you have specific keywords that you're targeting with your corporate blog (and you should!), add a couple using hashtags. For example, #blogging #seo.
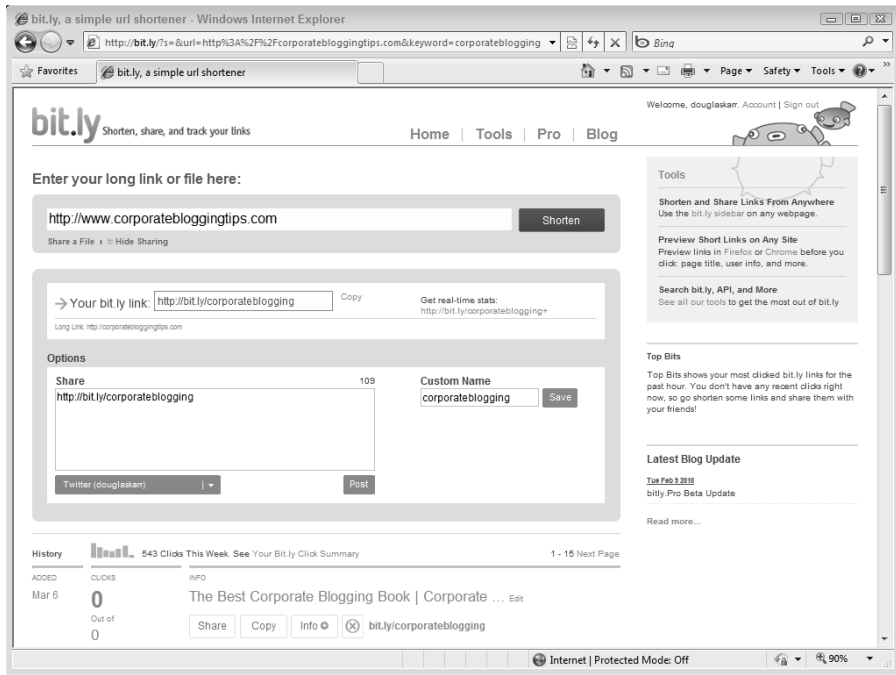
Figure 11-5:
Shortening a Web address with bit.ly.

Figure 11-6:
Twitterfeed syndicates your blog to Twitter.

A *hashtag* allows you to tag your tweets by designating them with just one character, the pound sign (#). Because space is at a premium in a tweet, you don't want to waste it with extra characters, such as tag:, by surrounding the tags with brackets, or by writing your tweets in all capital letters. (Writing a tweet in all capital letters doesn't add characters, but it is considered shouting.)

You tag things by placing a # in front of whatever keywords you're using. You can find Twitter hashtags for cities, states, countries, current events, brands, sports teams, or anything else you can think of. Hashtags are a great way to create groupings and generate popularity around a particular keyword or topic.

The # symbol also carries a lot of meaning. It's basically a message to Twitterers that you're talking about this topic, and if they want to talk about it with you, they should use this hashtag in all their tweets; otherwise, you may not know they've tweeted about it (if you are not following them). It may be hard to believe you can put all that info in one little #, but you can.

Be sure to select a few overwhelmingly popular hashtags when automating your blog post titles to Twitter. They make your tweets easy to find and attract relevant traffic to your corporate blog.

Syndicating your blog in LinkedIn and Plaxo

LinkedIn dominates the business-related social media landscape. If you wish to attract customers from a specific industry or want to keep your network informed, LinkedIn is an ideal place to syndicate your blog. LinkedIn allows for syndication directly from WordPress, too. The Plaxo business network also allows for this functionality.

To syndicate your WordPress blog in LinkedIn, follow these steps:

1. **Sign up for LinkedIn and complete your profile.**

2. **Go to the LinkedIn Applications page at `www.linkedin.com/apps`.** (See Figure 11-7.)

3. **Click WordPress.**

4. **Add the application to your profile.**

5. **Add your blog's feed address in the WordPress Blog URL path.**

Add the Twitter app to synchronize your Twitter status updates to LinkedIn. It won't display an excerpt of your blog posts to your LinkedIn profile, but it will synchronize your latest Twitter status updates to your LinkedIn status updates.

SlideShare (`www.slideshare.net/business`) is a fantastic LinkedIn appli-cation that synchronizes any PowerPoint presentations that you've uploaded to SlideShare and displays them on your LinkedIn profile. SlideShare can display presentations in your blog posts, too, and has a great feature where businesses can add a form onto their presentation to collect contact informa-tion from viewers who are interested in contacting your company.

Integrating your blog into Facebook profiles and Fan Pages

Although Facebook may be free, the need to create content to attract an audience is not. This challenge is not unique to Facebook; it affects all forms of social media and social networking. Be aware that you need a strong content creation engine, but be sure your content flows from one form of social media to your other forms of social media. In other words, if you have a company blog, be sure that you synchronize it with your company's Facebook page so that when you post to your blog, the content posts for your Facebook audience to read.

People who become a fan of your Facebook Page recognize that your intent is self-promotion. Be cautious if you're posting your blog to your personal

Facebook profile — your network of friends may not be as forgiving of blatant promotion. Remember, social media is all about bringing the relevant messages to the appropriate audience at the best time.

To use Facebook to import a blog, follow these steps:

1. **Navigate to your Facebook home page.**

2. **Click Settings underneath your Wall status box.**

3. **In the Stories Posted by You section, select Blog/RSS.**

4. **In the Public URL field, enter your blog's RSS feed.**

5. **Save your settings.**

   Facebook will publish your RSS feed to your Wall without you having to interact at all. (See Figure 11-8.)

REMEMBER

If you synchronize your blog to publish in Twitter and have Twitter synchronized with Facebook, your blog posts will publish to your Facebook Wall. Don't upset your followers by having duplicate, unnecessary posts to your Facebook Page.
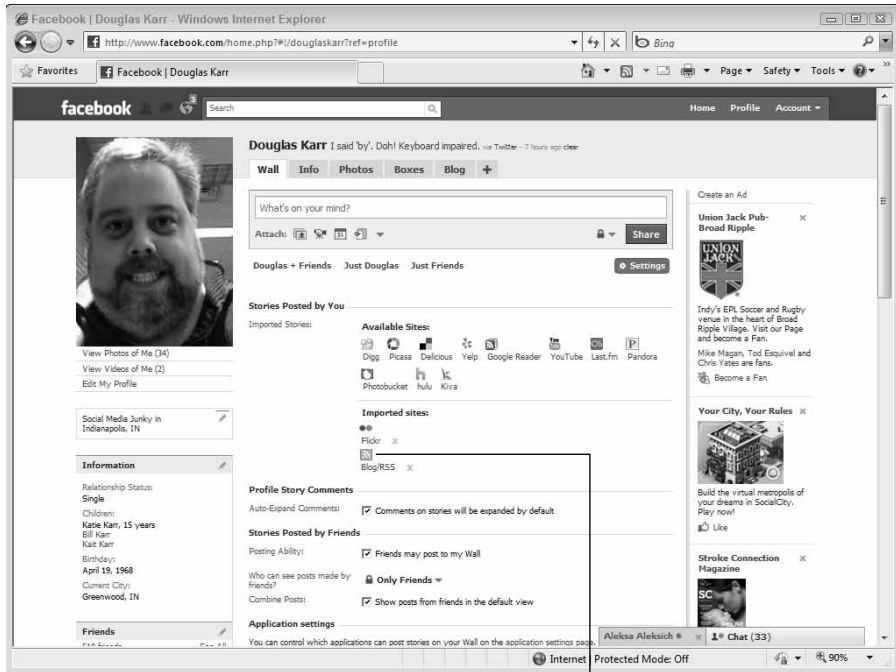
Figure 11-8:
Facebook
adds your
blog's
feed to
Facebook.

Your blog's feed

Promoting Your Posts through Social Bookmarking

A *bookmark* is simply a Web address that you store to view later. Bookmarking is a feature that's used in every browser. While readers browse the Internet, they often bookmark a page so that they can return to it later. Before status updates became the craze, social bookmarking sites were the tool for sharing content throughout the Internet.

Delicious is an online bookmarking system that allows you to sign up and store your bookmarks online, share them with others, and tag them with specific keywords so that you can organize and find them easier. (See Figure 11-9.) Because your bookmarks aren't stored locally with your browser, you can access them from anywhere.

Additional bookmarking sites further incorporate social interaction. These sites include

✔ **Digg (`http://digg.com`):** Digg offers the opportunity to share links and vote on the ones that you find compelling. Digg has been popular for quite a long time but is used by so many people that it's very rare to gain popularity and see traffic from the site.
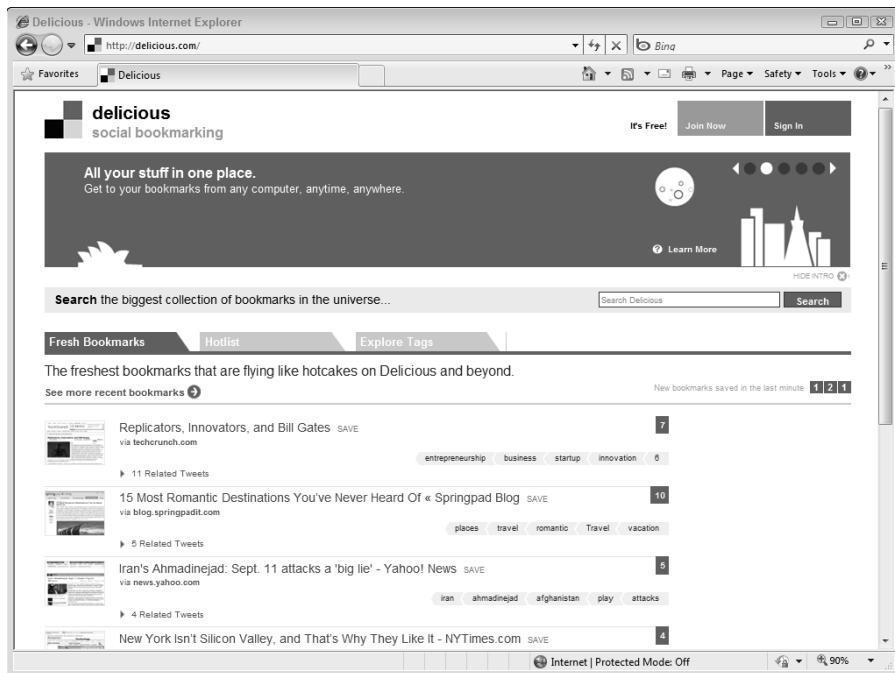
Figure 11-9:
Yahoo!'s bookmarking site, Delicious.

- ✔ **Reddit (`www.reddit.com`):** Reddit is a popular vote up and vote down site for bookmarks that also allows for tagging and categorization of the bookmarks. Because the bookmarks are effectively tagged, there are opportunities to get some traffic.

- ✔ **StumbleUpon (`www.stumbleupon.com`):** StumbleUpon is perhaps the most sophisticated bookmarking engine. When you store bookmarks, the system matches your preferences with others and presents you with links to "stumble upon." As a result, it's a fantastic discovery site. Because links are tagged and categorized, you'll find that this is a great bookmarking site to gain traffic from!

Understanding social bookmarking and its impact on search and traffic

In earlier search engine algorithms, it was rumored that search engines paid close attention to bookmarking sites and increased ranking for sites that were popular or repeatedly used by users on social bookmarking sites.

As a result, many search engine optimization experts consulted with clients to promote content on social bookmarking sites. The practice was dubbed *social bookmarketing* by some in the industry. Social bookmarking sites are still popular throughout the Internet, but have lagged behind the popularity of social media applications like Facebook and Twitter.

Although social bookmarking sites have dropped in popularity, you shouldn't count them out of your efforts. Be sure to measure which paths are providing the most traffic and conversions to your blog.

You want to provide a balance of sharing other sites and promoting your own, too. Always promoting your site decreases your authority, following, and impact. Be sure to promote others within your industry before promoting yourself.

Automated posting to social bookmarking

Here are a few services and integrated plug-ins that offer the opportunity to automatically publish your posts to social bookmarking sites:

- ✔ **Ping.fm (`http://ping.fm`)** is a simple and free service that automates updating social bookmarking, social networks, and social media sites. (See Figure 11-10.)

- ✔ **Socializer 2.0 (`http://ekstreme.com/socializer`)** is a free service that allows you to submit a link to several bookmarking systems.

- ✔ **Auto Social (`http://wp.uberdose.com/2007/11/09/auto-social-wordpress-plugin`)** is a WordPress plug-in from uberdose 2.0 that automatically publishes your WordPress blog posts to Delicious.

Additionally, other services, such as OnlyWire, ShareThis, and AddThis, allow you to place a button in your blog posts that allows users to post your content to their social bookmarking and social media sites.

Guerilla marketing and social bookmarking

If you have a blog post like no other that you believe deserves to get the attention of hundreds, you may want to do a bit of guerilla marketing. That is, you may want to push and promote your site through back-end mechanisms.

With a wide network of fans and friends, you can simply ask all your connections to promote the link. Provide clear intentions to them — that you're hoping their promotion of your site will provide you with some additional attention. If they decide it's worthy, you may get enough retweets, votes on Digg, or thumbs up on StumbleUpon to push your site into the mainstream.

Be careful what you wish for! If you're site isn't made to handle tons of traffic, getting to the top of a site like TweetMeme, Digg, or Alltop can bring your Web server to a halt. Your blog post is of no use if no one can actually visit the site and read it.
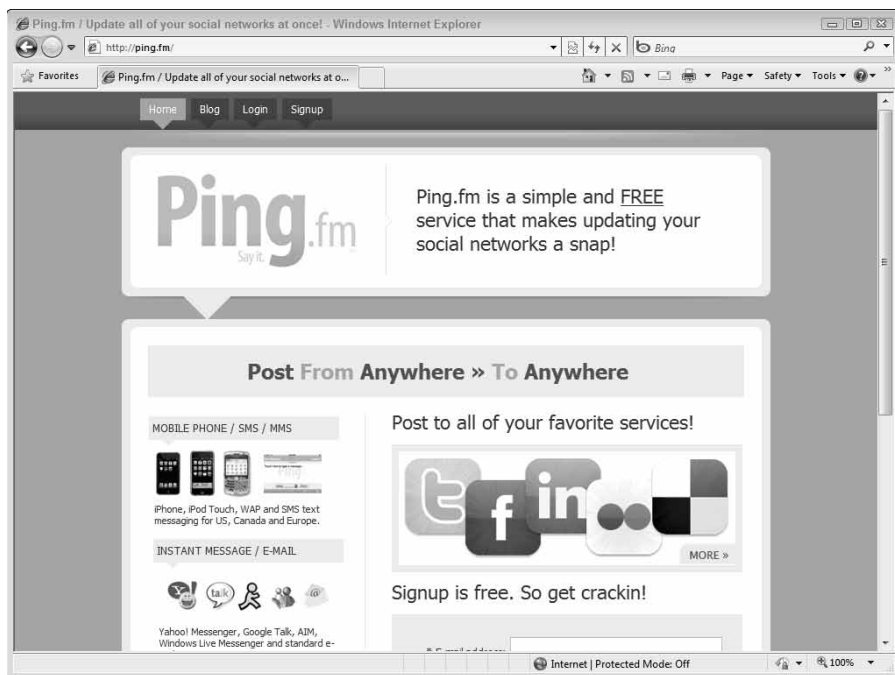
Figure 11-10: Ping.fm is a popular service for updating social sites in a single interface.

If you really want to step to the dark side, several services will promote your links for money. A simple search for *"Buy Retweets"* will get you what you're looking for. When visitors arrive at your blog, your Facebook page, or your Twitter page, they'll be impressed by large numbers of subscribers, fans, or followers. As a result, buying subscribers, fans, followers, and retweets has become quite a lucrative business! It's not in the spirit of transparency, a core ethic of social media, but there's plenty of evidence that unethical behavior in social media can get you a lot of attention — and perhaps business.

The consequence, of course, is that you'll be discovered as a fraud and your authority will disappear. That's a difficult issue to rebound from — it could take years or require a total rebranding. If you decide to take this route (not recommended) and are caught — admit it, apologize, and attempt to move forward.

Combining E-Mail and Blogging for Better Marketing

Unlike a blog, an e-mail is a push technology. Your e-mail subscriber has provided you with permission to push messages into their Inbox. Blogs are also permission-based but at the convenience of the visitor or feed subscriber. The combination of e-mail and blogging is fantastic for promoting any company.

Often, you'll have a message that's timely and needs to be distributed and promoted to your network. An e-mail newsletter can ensure that the right message is delivered to the right subscriber at the right time. If your company, for example, has an event coming up, potential attendees won't be aware of the event unless they visit your blog between now and the day of the event. An e-mail with a reminder that points back to the blog post is a great way to get the word out when you need to.

Additionally, e-mail is an outstanding means of reconnecting with prospects who may have not visited your blog in a while. Multiple touches have been proven effective for increasing conversion rates for companies — e-mail may be the best option you have. An e-mail newsletter can repurpose content and drive traffic back to your blog. Your blog, in turn, can promote your e-mail subscription list and convert a one-time visitor into an ongoing subscriber who is interested in your products or services.

Many people like to have the option of using either an e-mail subscription or a feed subscription to remain in touch with your company. Usually, visitors to your site won't subscribe to a newsletter and your blog; they'll have a favorite means of keeping connected.

This provides an opportunity to add another audience to your blog without a lot of effort. Blog content makes for great e-mail content (and vice versa). Take

advantage of the opportunity to publish content in both places. Some e-mail and blogging applications offer application programming interfaces (APIs), features, or plug-ins to automatically publish from one system to another.

Using advanced e-mail service features to automate content to e-mail

Swapping content between e-mail platforms and blogs doesn't have to be a chore in cut-and-paste frustration. Platforms are becoming more and more sophisticated in their ability to integrate and publish content between them. After all, the content is simply hypertext markup language (HTML).

Many e-mail clients do not support embedded objects, such as video and audio players, in blog posts but do support basic text and images. As a result, publishing your feed as a section of your e-mail newsletter, as excerpts in your e-mail newsletter, or even in its entirety is a great way to publish quality content through two channels without effort.

How to automate RSS to e-mail with MailChimp

MailChimp is a popular e-mail service provider with bloggers. MailChimp has developed a feature called RSS to E-mail that checks your feed daily, publishes new content, and automatically sends it to your subscribers. In other words, you can publish a daily e-mail without ever writing one!

To set up an RSS to e-mail job in MailChimp, follow these steps:

1. **Open or log in to a MailChimp account at `www.mailchimp.com`.**

2. **On the dashboard, click the down arrow on the Create Campaign button and then select RSS-Driven Campaign.**

3. **Enter the feed address of your blog.**

4. **Enter how frequently you want to send the e-mail (Daily, Weekly, or Monthly).**

5. **Enter the time you want to send your e-mail.**

6. **Click Next.**

7. **Select the subscriber list you want to send the campaign to. If you like, you can select a segment of the list.**

8. **Enter the required campaign information.**

9. **If you use Google Analytics, be sure to select Add Google Analytics Tracking to All URLs.**

   This will be visible in Google Analytics as referring traffic from "other" sources and can be identified as specific campaigns within Google Analytics⇨Traffic Sources⇨Campaigns.

10. **Select a design from MailChimp or you can click Templates⇨Start from Scratch to design a new template.**

11. **For additional information on merging your feed, click the RSS Merge Tags information button.**

    MailChimp provides you with a series of substitution strings for merging specific elements of your feed to your automated e-mail.

12. **Enter your plain-text message.**

    Be sure to do this because many e-mail recipients set their clients to read only the text version of e-mails. HTML e-mails typically get better response rates, but providing both an HTML and text e-mail communicates with a wider audience.

13. **Click Popup Preview to preview your e-mail.**

14. **Click Next and the campaign builder appears where you can review and change any settings on the RSS to e-mail campaign.** (See Figure 11-11.)

15. **Before clicking Start RSS Campaign, click Send Test to send an e-mail to yourself.**

    This pulls in your feed and sends an e-mail to your Inbox that you can review. Make any necessary edits.

16. **Click Start RSS Campaign.**

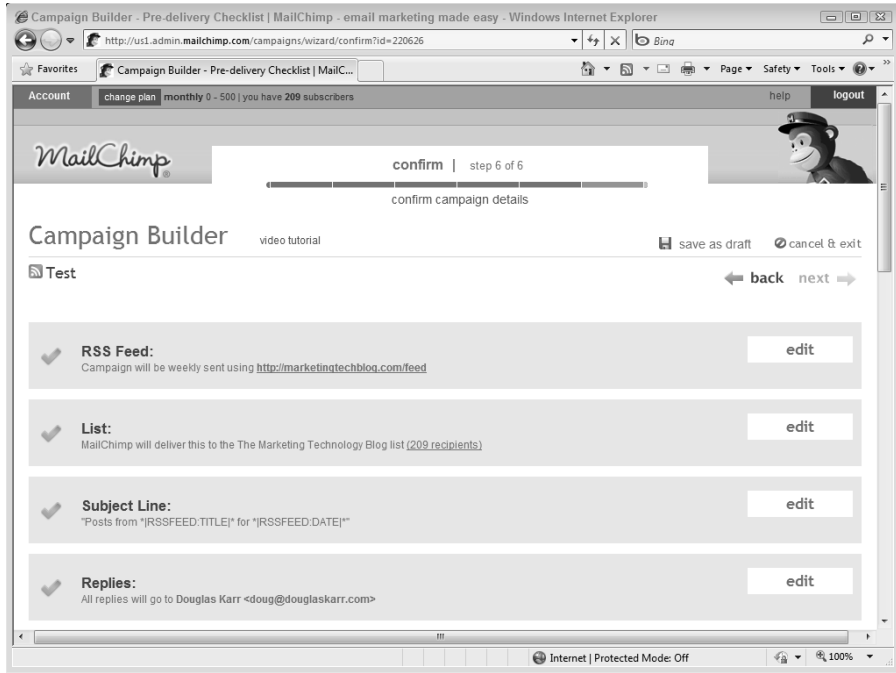   If you don't publish any new content, no e-mail is sent.

If you're using Google Analytics and MailChimp, be sure to download MailChimp's Analytics 360° plug-in. It provides an overview of your e-mail campaigns and your traffic, collected through the Google Analytics and MailChimp application programming interfaces. (See Figure 11-12.)

How to automate RSS to e-mail with ExactTarget

To syndicate content from a feed to e-mail isn't just a feature of boutique e-mail service providers. If you're an enterprise corporation sending out millions of e-mails, your e-mail provider probably has similar functionality through its application programming interface (API) or through features in its application.

ExactTarget (`http://e-mail.exacttarget.com`) is an outstanding e-mail service provider serving some of the largest companies in the world, including Microsoft, Bank of America, and Papa John's. ExactTarget has a programmable script component and a user interface component for retrieving external content (called HTTPGet).

Using a feed aggregator, you can develop a robust, dynamic page on your Web site that publishes content you would like to see in an e-mail. You can then point your HTTPGet address to the external page. At the time of send, ExactTarget's engine retrieves the external content and embeds it in the e-mail where you specify!

This provides an awesome opportunity for your company to reduce the resources needed in writing a comprehensive newsletter each day or week. If you develop a template that retrieves the external blog content, you can simply leave a content area reserved for specific news or feed in your blog content and event calendar — anything you'd like.

Because blog posts can get a bit lengthy, you may want to simply publish excerpts in your e-mail rather than the entire post. You may also even wish to strip out videos and images — all possible with minimal development.

Driving e-mail readers to your blog

Although different channels, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, press releases, traditional media, voice, and search engines capture attention and provide your company with inbound leads. Each medium must be leveraged for its strengths and many of them must work in tandem to provide the best benefit.

For example, your e-mail program is a fantastic, permission-based means of pushing relevant and timely messages to your subscribers. However, e-mail doesn't have the opportunity to capture search engine traffic. Blogs, on the other hand, are effective for capturing search traffic. Therefore, developing campaigns that incorporate blogging and e-mail are a fantastic way of pairing resources to increase campaign conversions.

If prospects are reading your e-mail each week and see an excerpt from a blog post they wish to read, they can click a link and land on your blog to read more. From your blog, you can have an effective call-to-action (CTA) that brings them to an effective landing page. Each link in the e-mail is tracked with campaign tracking, so you can see the traffic and conversions produced by pushing your blog posts to e-mail.

If you're a Webtrends client, the Webtrends tag builder (`http://tag builder.webtrends.com`) is an effective means of tagging your e-mail traffic and capturing data. Webtrends also integrates with many e-mail service providers so you can observe this traffic independent of your other referring sources.

If you're a Google Analytics client, Google also offers a tool to add campaign codes to your links. You can find it at `www.google.com/support/google analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=55578`.

Promoting e-mail subscriptions on your blog

Understanding the value of an e-mail subscriber is a critical component to your company's online marketing strategy. If you send an e-mail once a week, have 25,000 subscribers, and acquire five hundred thousand dollars a year in new business from e-mail subscriptions, you realize that every e-mail is worth about ten thousand dollars and every subscriber is worth twenty dollars.

Growing your e-mail subscriber list is a difficult task. With the advantages of search engine optimization and blogging, you should promote your e-mail subscriptions directly on your blog. Because search engine–acquired visitors often have high bounce rates and seldom return, an e-mail subscription may be just the right medicine to keep in touch with relevant visitors.

Understanding that each subscriber is worth twenty dollars also helps you to appraise your blog. If your blog does nothing but add e-mail subscribers, you can track the subscribers acquired through the blog to set a value on your blogging program. If you acquire 2,500 new subscribers, that's another fifty thousand dollars in business. If you're writing a single blog post each day, that blog post is worth a couple hundred dollars.

Don't simply rely on a call-to-action (CTA) in your sidebar to promote subscriptions to your e-mail newsletter; promote the opportunity to subscribe within your blog posts!

How to automate RSS to e-mail with FeedBurner

FeedBurner is a feed analytics provider that has been around for a few years, is owned by Google, and has integrated Google's tools. Not surprisingly, the first feature was integrating AdSense into your feed.

Aside from providing subscriber counts, FeedBurner also provides a number of tools to optimize and publicize your feed. One way is through e-mail subscriptions. The only disadvantage of the FeedBurner e-mail is that it doesn't allow for many formatting options. If you want more, use MailChimp's RSS to E-mail feature or develop your own template through an e-mail service provider like ExactTarget.

If you don't have the option of integrating a professional outbound e-mail newsletter with your blog, FeedBurner does a nice job. Take advantage of the service. If you decide to graduate to a more robust e-mail service later, FeedBurner does allow you to export your e-mail subscribers so you may import them to another service later.

To add an e-mail subscription for your blog by using FeedBurner (see Figure 11-13), follow these steps:

1. **Register with or log in to FeedBurner at `http://feedburner.google.com`.**

2. **When your feed details are properly set, click Publicize⇨E-mail Subscriptions.**

3. **Click Activate.**

   FeedBurner provides you with sample form code to paste in your sidebar (or in a text widget in the sidebar) for acquiring subscribers. You can also download a plug-in for TypePad or Blogger.

   If you don't wish to provide a form, you can also copy a link for readers to click that you can promote.

4. **Click Save.**

   Each day that your feed updates with new posts, an e-mail is sent out via FeedBurner to your subscribers.
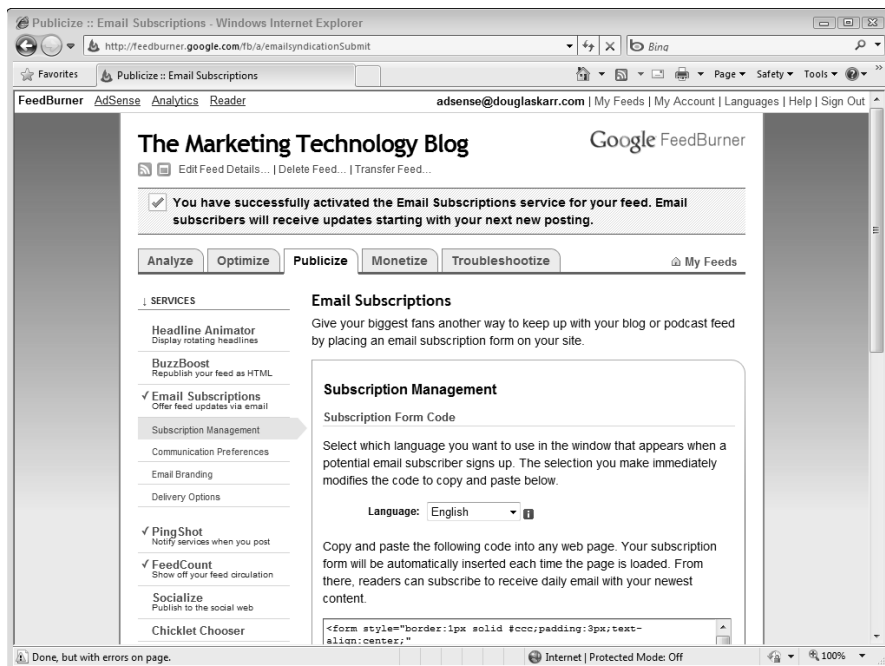
Figure 11-13:
Activating
e-mail
subscrip-
tions within
FeedBurner.