

# BLOGGING BASICS

Web Log. That's a pretty self-explanatory phrase. A log is contemporary (meaning written down as it is happening or shortly thereafter) account of something, be it an epic voyage, a college education or maybe just the daily life of someone who can't help writing down their thoughts and feelings. Put it on the Web and you have a Web Log or "blog." But, blogs don't stop there: news, special events and even the latest deal on a computer can be had via a blog feed.

## 1. History Lesson

As with most overused phrases, Web Log was contracted to Weblog. It wasn't long before someone had fun with the term and broke it down into a sentence, "We blog." From then on "to blog" was a verb and "a blog" was a popular thing to have. Now that we have a name for it, what is it, and where did blogging come from?



The urge to post your personal history far predates the Internet-based blog. Paintings on cave walls were the first and included every form of graphic depiction and writing to this day. Probably the first network published personal account with a large following was [John Carmack's](#) journal. Carmack is the programmer who wrote the video game Doom and he embedded his log in his Finger file. A "Finger" file was sort of an electronic business card back in the days of mainframe computers. John took the Finger file to the extreme as he related his story with continuing updates. He has since converted to a blog, as has much of the world.

## 2. Exploring Blogs



One way to enjoy reading blogs is to surf the Web looking for the ones that interest you. To get started, you'll want to use a [Blog Directory](#) or [Blog Search](#). Even [Google has a special blog search function](#). The directory is a listing of blog sites by

category or geographic location. You can zero in on the sites that interest you or just surf around the categories to see what pops up. The blog search allows you to type in words or phrases and generates a custom list of blog sites to explore.

### 3. Keeping up Automatically

The fascination with blogs stems from the frequent updates that operate somewhat like the serial short (cliffhanger) that preceded the main feature at the movie house of old. Often, the theater patrons came back the next week to see the serial no matter what feature was playing.



There is something new almost every time you check a blog out; the problem is you have to go check them out to see if there is an update. Well, computer geeks being what they are, willing to work very hard to develop a time-saving gimmick or gadget, they came up with the News Aggregator or Blog Reader. I have my reader set to go get updates every 30 minutes.

### 4. Scan the Headlines



So, every half hour the reader gets all the updates. The reader does not download all the blog entries when it updates, it only picks up the title and a sentence or two of description of the new article. I can quickly scan the titles for something of interest, and if the title stops my eyes, I can read the description before clicking on the item. The reader then opens a Web browser window with the blog entry in it. When I close the browser window, I'm back at the list of titles and descriptions, ready to find the next exciting nugget of information.

Often, the blog entry is really a teaser to draw readers in. Once the readers are viewing the blog entry, they are presented with links to other areas of the Web site. This is a good way to

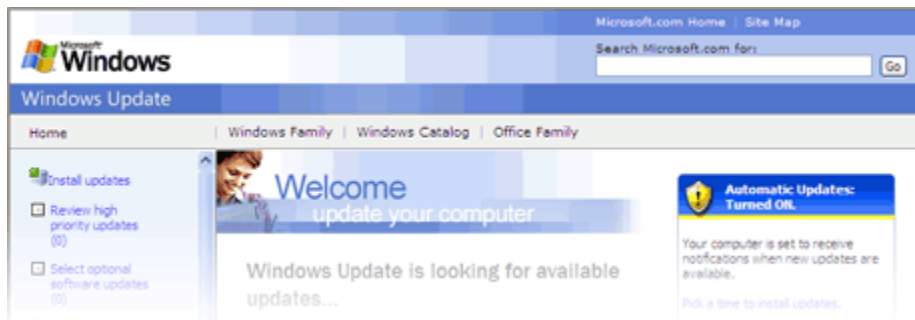
build traffic on your Web site with frequent updates to events as they unfold.

## 5. A Blog Reader for Beginners



There are many great RSS readers for every operating system, but if you're a Windows XP user just getting started at blogging, you might try [BlogExpress](#). It's really simple to install, and the presentation of the headlines and descriptions is clean and easy to read. You can download BlogExpress from their Web site for free.

They live off of donations, so if you find that it works out for you, please help them out.



BlogExpress requires that you upgrade to the 1.1 version of the .Net Windows component before installing. There is a link right on the BlogExpress Web page that links to a Microsoft page where the update can be found on one of the menus on the sidebar to the left of the screen.



## 6. Give it a Test Drive

After installation, you are presented with some default news feeds. Chances are you will want to weed out that list and add some blogs and news feeds of your own choosing. This is called “subscribing,” and BlogExpress couldn’t make it easier. Go to the Web page of the blog you want to subscribe to and find the button or link for RSS **RSS** or XML **XML**. Click and drag the button to the BlogExpress file tree in the position where you want it to show up. Click the “Check” button and you have subscribed. Click the “Synchronize All” icon and all the RSS feeds will be checked for new content.

To review the feeds, click on the branch of the tree on the left window that attracts your attention. The right window will fill with the headlines and descriptions. If there is nothing in the right window, it means there have been no updates to that blog, so pick another one. Comb through the headlines until you find one you’ve just got to read and double click the headline.

Clicking the headline will open up a browser window to the blog. This browser is part of BlogExpress, but it acts like a separate program. It's not Internet Explorer, though it looks very similar. Browse the page and possibly any links if that tickles your fancy. One fault I found is that the Go Back arrow (the one on the left) stays green even if you are on the originating page. In other words, you are already backed up as far as you can go. To get back to the main BlogExpress window, close the browser window or otherwise get it out of the way.

## 7. Don't Look Behind the Curtain

Though it seems like the smoke and mirrors in the Wizard in Oz, the technology behind blog readers and news aggregators is pretty simple. It uses much the same infrastructure as the rest of the Web that you are familiar with. The most popular protocol is RSS , which can stand for Rich Site Summary, Really Simple Syndication or several other interpretations, depending on whom you ask. RSS (a version of XML) comes in several revisions, 2.0 being current. There is a second popular protocol called Atom . Many blog readers cover all the variants of RSS and Atom, so it really doesn't matter much to the reader.

The RSS file is pretty straightforward, with some meta tags to clue the blog reader in to the title, the description and the link for the full article. It's only text so it's much simpler than the HTML codes you see in a regular Web page.

Source : <http://www.geeks.com/techtips/2006/techtips-12jan06.htm>