

STARTING YOUR OWN BLOG

Last time we talked about how to read a Web log, better known as a “blog.” It’s basically a Web site that gets updated frequently, usually at least weekly, if not daily or more often. You can even be notified of the updates automatically so you don’t have to visit the site to see if there is anything new. There are personal blogs, news blogs, opinion blogs and even the latest deal blogs. If you haven’t heard, Geeks.com is putting up a blog so you’ll never miss a limited time bargain again.

1. Who Would Want to Blog?

As I mentioned last time, people who would have kept a journal of a trip, an education or even just daily life have replaced the fancy bound book of blank pages with a Web log. Maybe I’m a full-blown exhibitionist because I’ve got a Web site full



Publish
thoughts



Get
feedback



Post
photos

of my photos and little stories about my life with my family. A real Web site takes a lot of commitment, including big bucks for Web authoring software and a monthly fee for the Web hosting.

A blog can satisfy your desire to get your word out without spending hours building a Web site and with no software except your Web browser on your computer. In fact, you can run a blog with no computer at all, but I’ll get into that in a future installment.

2. Where to Host Your Blog



Finding a place to host your blog is easier than you think. Many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) include blog hosting as part of their service. It's become popular only recently, so check with your ISP to see if they have added this feature. If they don't support blogs, you might pester them about how everyone else is doing it. They just might upgrade their service.

Of course, some Web hosting services offer blog hosting for a fee. That seems to be a bit of overkill, since blogs are mostly text-based and don't put that much traffic load on host systems.

If your ISP doesn't offer blog hosting, you can use one of the free blog hosts. There are several free services, so shop around for one that suits your needs. While there are a number to choose from, I decided to use Blogger.com for my blog. They are one of the big ones and they are free. They have lots of blogs on their site so before you jump in yourself, you might want to look around to see what others have done with their blogs. [LiveJournal](#) is also extremely popular.

3. How to Get Started

OK, let's use Blogger.com as an example. Enter the URL www.blogger.com into the address bar of your browser. You could jump right into starting your own blog, but take a look at other blogs to get a sense of what a blog looks like in their system.

I also recommend taking their tour by clicking the "Take a Quick Tour" button. That takes you through a few pages where they explain some of the features they offer, kind of like reading the outside of a box before buying. It's a lot easier to use the features if you know what they are!

4. Fill in the Blanks



Now you are ready to get serious. Click on the "Create Your Blog Now" button and get ready to fill in the blanks.

Most of it is pretty simple with questions like your user name and password that you can make up. The user name cannot have spaces or punctuation in it.

I used my real name for my Display Name, but you can also use an alias if you'd prefer to remain more anonymous. Don't forget to check the box to agree with the Terms of service. You can't go on without completing that step. I actually read most of the terms, just to be sure.



5. Make Up Your Title

The next requirement is to create a catchy title for your blog. Remember, folks will be scanning long lists of blogs and if your blog title stands out, you are going to get more traffic. I'm not the greatest at this advertising stuff so my blog is simply Roy's Geek Place.

On that same page, you get to make up your very own URL. I just pushed the words of my blog title together and the full URL came out <http://roysgeekplace.blogspot.com>. If you are an advanced user, you can set up your blog to be hosted on your own server, but that's way too much trouble to deal with. I took advantage of their free hosting.



For security purposes, you have to read a word with squiggly letters and type the letters into a box. This keeps automated bots from creating blogs and using up the resources these people have kindly made available.

6. Use a Template for Some Color



Bloggging started out as a simple, text-only thing, usually with a typewriter-like font on a white background. No frills at all. Since most of us are used to staring at a colorful screen with fancy

fonts and graphic renderings for borders, why not let your blog do the same? Many blog hosts offer templates to help give your blog some eye appeal.

A template is sort of a blank form for you to fill out, but in this case it includes colors and positioning of the text on the screen. The easy way is to select one of the templates offered up as part of the blog creation. You can preview the templates that you see in thumbnail format. Just click on one you like to expand it.

You can change the template later if you wish. If there is a template that you like except for one or two features, go for it and go back and change those features later. That will take some HTML coding, but it isn't that hard. I'll have to wait for a future installment to get into that.

7. Spice Your Blog Up with Photos



Did you ever notice that almost all novels have a photo of the author somewhere on the front or back cover or maybe over the author's biography? People seem to be more comfortable when they know what the author looks like. Blogs are no different. Many bloggers post a photo of themselves on their blog.

It's easy to get a headshot of yourself with a digital camera. It's best to get someone to take the photo for you, but you can do it with a tripod and the self-timer, or even just balance the camera where it points at your face. Don't try to take a picture of yourself in a mirror-all you'll get is a photo of the flash going off.

Don't worry about trying to crop the photo close around your face. Do that with your photo editing software. While you are at it, knock down the resolution to something like 200 by 300. That's plenty for a headshot on a blog page. In fact, make sure the photo fits in the blog host's size restriction. I have to stay below 50 Kilobytes at my blog host site.

Each blog host is different, but usually you can upload the photo from your computer or point the blog host to a copy of it on the Web and the blog host will steal it for your blog. Of course, there are those who don't want their own face and will snatch someone else's from their Web site; whatever floats your boat.

8. Group Blogs

Like many people, my family is now spread out from the East coast to the West. We call each other on the telephone occasionally, but the majority of communication is via e-mail. That gets complicated because sometimes family members don't copy the original message, but only make comments so it's hard to follow the ongoing exchange. Also, one member might rattle on about several subjects and the comments might come back as a separate message. It's hard to put the thoughts back together.



I think we are going to jump on the blog bandwagon and set up an extended family blog. That way we can each interject comments and questions almost like a discussion around the dinner table. The idea of a group blog works for almost any group, including teams of people working on a common project separated by distance or even different shifts at work.

Source : <http://www.geeks.com/techtips/2006/techtips-19jan06.htm>