

# Publishing with Movable Type

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**T**he World Wide Web is a dynamic medium, but you wouldn't know it from looking at millions of Web sites. Most Web pages are published once and never touched again, static documents that can remain online in their unchanged form for years, like a digital version of a fly caught in amber.

In Internet time, a Web site that hasn't changed in months is already a fossil. Once the site has been found and indexed by search engines such as Google, it will attract some visitors and may even be saved occasionally as a browser bookmark, but it won't become popular. A good Web site must be habit-forming to find an audience, but the only way to cultivate that habit is to reward repeat visitors with new material.

The biggest reason a Web site never changes is because the process of changing it is too hard. Most Web publishers create their work in a manner similar to writing a letter in a word processor. Pages are created, formatting is applied, and they are published to a Web server. When a change needs to be made, it must be done by hand one page at a time, a task that gets exponentially more difficult as a Web site grows in size.

Even the hardest-working or best-intentioned Web publisher leaves behind a pile of static Web pages that desperately need to be updated. I fall into neither of those virtuous categories — at least 1,000 of the 3,800 pages on my personal Web site contain outdated information, an old version of my site design that needs to be freshened up, bad formatting, or some other stale content that deeply aggravates my inner pedant.

The way to solve the aging-page problem forever is to stop editing Web pages by hand and start using a content-management system (CMS), software that simplifies

## CHAPTER



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and automates as much of the Web publishing process as possible. A good CMS speeds up the creation, publication, and maintenance of Web sites and can often make the process vastly more enjoyable. Some of these programs even can produce Web pages on their own with no help from you — such as a discussion forum where visitors can post public messages to each other.

One of the most promising content-management systems to come along in recent years is Movable Type.

# Joining the Content-Management Revolution

For most of the Web's existence, content-management systems were strictly for big businesses and other large enterprises. They had price tags with three, four, or even five zeroes and were too complex for any mom-and-pop publisher to even think about using.

Today, a Web publisher can choose from dozens of affordably priced or even free content-management systems that are designed for everyday users.

Movable Type is a content-management system that streamlines the process of publishing a *weblog*, an online journal that is updated frequently and organized by date. It's also well suited for other forms of Web content such as digital photos and news articles.

The software's developer, Six Apart Ltd., calls its flagship product a “personal publishing system,” offering it for download at the software's official Web site (<http://www.movabletype.org>).

## Delivering Web Content with Movable Type

Even if you are actively using Movable Type and are comfortable with its basic features, there are undoubtedly some things you don't know about it yet. The software hides a lot of capabilities underneath a deceptively simple user interface.

This chapter takes a comprehensive look at what Movable Type is, how you can use it to manage your creative output on the Web, and why you should be glad you bought a 500-page book that documents the program in obsessive detail.

Movable Type was developed by the husband-and-wife team of Ben and Mena Trott, a pair of high-school sweethearts in their mid-20s whose Six Apart company takes its name from the number of days between their birthdates. I share this piece of trivia because I can't help myself — the story of how the Trotts

created and popularized their software is one of the most charming human-interest stories in Web publishing. Movable Type users speak of “Ben and Mena” as if they were Brad and Jennifer, Ashton and Demi, or some other celebrity couple so impossibly famous that no last names are necessary.

The software that Ben and Mena created is distinguished from other weblog publishing programs primarily in two ways:

- ♦ Movable Type can run on your own Web server or Web hosting account, unlike a centrally hosted service such as Blogger or Manila. Because it operates on a server under your control, your Web site data is available to you at all times in any form you need. You can easily back everything up on a regular basis (always a good idea) and import or export weblog entries and other Web content.
- ♦ Movable Type doesn’t require special authoring software, unlike a desktop-based publishing tool such as Radio UserLand or CityDesk. You can use any Web browser to work on your site, even over the Internet. No particular operating system is required — as long as you have an Internet-connected computer and can load your site in a Web browser, you can work on it from anywhere.

The two halves of Movable Type combine to form a client/server Web application.

On the server side, the software is implemented as a set of Perl scripts and supporting Perl libraries that can be run by any Web server that supports the Common Gateway Interface (in other words, just about every Web server in existence).

On the client side, the software can be used with any Web browser that has JavaScript capabilities. All of the popular browsers support this scripting language, including Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Opera, and Safari, although some people turn the feature off to avoid pop-up ads, security exploits, and other grief.

This JavaScript requirement also applies to visitors to your Web site. Some of the features you can offer on your weblog, such as visitor comments, are implemented with the scripting language and cannot function without it.

Requirements to use Movable Type are pretty slim: a Web server with Perl version 5.004\_04 or later, an FTP server, a database, and at least 27 megabytes of hard disk space (2 for the software and another 25 to leave room for your weblog data, photos, and other content).

Movable Type employs Structured Query Language (SQL) to store and retrieve content in a database for presentation on the Web. The software is designed to work equally well with different database programs. At the time of this writing, several relational databases can be used for storage: Berkeley DB, MySQL, PostgreSQL, and SQLite. For version 3.0 of the software, Six Apart officially recommends either Berkeley DB or MySQL.

## 4 Movable Type 3 Bible, Desktop Edition



This book focuses entirely on Movable Type, so if you don't have these other programs running, you might need to find supplementary help elsewhere. These Web sites are the places to start.

### Web browsers:

<http://www.microsoft.com/ie>  
<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox>  
<http://www.apple.com/safari>  
<http://www.opera.com>

### Database programs:

<http://www.sleepycat.com> (Berkeley DB)  
<http://www.mysql.com>  
<http://www.postgresql.org>  
<http://www.sqlite.org>

### Other software:

<http://www.perl.com>

## Acquiring the Software

Six Apart prices Movable Type from \$70 to \$100 for noncommercial use and from \$200 to \$1,300 for commercial use, which depends on how many users work on your weblogs. The company's Web site provides the software, online documentation, a directory of Movable Type resources, and an active user support community (<http://www.movabletype.org>).

Ben and Mena Trott began developing Movable Type in 2001 with the modest goal of creating a content-management system solely for Mena's personal weblog. At the time, weblogging was still a relatively new phenomenon. Most publishers created their sites by hand or by using one of the first weblog-specific publishing programs that became available: Blogger, created by Pyra Labs, now a part of Google; Manila, from UserLand Software; and Greymatter, an open-source program by Noah Grey.

The Trotts quickly decided that Movable Type should turn pro, releasing it publicly for the first time on Oct. 8, 2001. Since then, their company and its flagship product have become one of the rarest creatures in post-boom Silicon Valley: a successful Internet startup.

Table 1-1 presents the most popular weblog publishing software that runs on an individual Web server, according to a June 2004 weblog census conducted by the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education.

**Table 1-1**  
**Most Widely Used Standalone Weblog Tools†**

<i>Software</i>	<i>Installed Servers</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Movable Type	42,311	74.83
b2	4,035	7.14
PHP-Nuke	3,105	5.49
Microsoft Visual Studio	2,067	3.66
Postnuke	1,913	3.38
PMachine	1,318	2.33
Greymatter	754	1.33
Nucleus	489	0.86
Pivot	348	0.62
Others	205	0.36

† Source: National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education, <http://www.blogcensus.net>.

As the numbers in Table 1-1 attest, Movable Type has become the most successful weblog publishing software in its category. In addition to the 42,000 Movable Type users who showed up in the weblog census, the software has been downloaded more than 500,000 times.

In April 2003, the Japanese venture capital firm Neoteny invested in Six Apart, enabling the five-person startup to hire more employees and launch a hosting service called TypePad (<http://www.typepad.com>).

TypePad offers Movable Type publishing to people who want Six Apart to take care of the server side of the software, freeing themselves from the need to install the program, keep up with upgrades, or find suitable Web hosting. Some features for advanced users are absent, such as plug-ins and custom server configuration, and a few new things have been added. All that's required to begin publishing with TypePad are a Web browser and a monthly subscription priced from \$5 to \$15.

## Exploring the Movable Type Software

Because Movable Type runs on a Web server and functions like a Web site, you might think of it strictly in those terms. You don't have to install anything on your personal computer to use the software (assuming you already have a browser, of course).

On the server, you must either install Movable Type or join the TypePad commercial hosting service.

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When Movable Type is installed on a Web server, the software can be accessed like any other Web site hosted by that server. Figure 1-1 shows a Movable Type installation being put to work in the Mozilla Firefox browser.



**Figure 1-1:** Editing a weblog with Movable Type.

The page shown in Figure 1-1 is a weblog's main editing page, which includes links to edit recent entries. You can get around the software by using the sidebar menu buttons and the Main Menu link, which appear on every page in the software's browser-based interface.

Movable Type can be controlled with any JavaScript-enabled Web browser, as long as its scripting feature has not been turned off. To double-check this setting in your browser:

- ◆ On Mozilla and Netscape Navigator, choose Edit ⇨ Preferences. Expand the Advanced category, and then choose Scripts & Plug-ins. An Enable JavaScript checkbox appears.
- ◆ On Internet Explorer, choose Tools ⇨ Options, bring the Security tab to the front, click Custom Level, and then look for the Scripting heading in the Settings list box. The Active Scripting checkbox tops the list.
- ◆ On Opera, choose File ⇨ Preferences, and select Multimedia from the list box. You'll see the Enable JavaScript checkbox.

A single installation of Movable Type can support multiple weblogs written by one or more authors. Although you have full access to the software and all of its features, your collaborators can be given much more restricted capabilities through a system of permissions.

## Sharing the Workload with Other Authors

Movable Type was designed to support collaboration. Any Web site published with the software can be a team effort, regardless of whether you're working with people separated by an office or an ocean.

The software's collaborative features are highly configurable. Authors of your weblogs operate entirely under your control—they can't do anything to a site without permission.

After you create a user account and password for an author, you can add the user to one or more weblogs and define the specific tasks he or she is allowed to perform. Figure 1-2 shows permissions being set up for a new user.

The screenshot shows a web interface for configuring user permissions. At the top, there is a dropdown menu labeled 'Select an author to edit:' with 'cmoewe' selected, and an 'Edit' button next to it. Below this is a link 'View complete list of authors' and a note: 'Delete, view, and edit authors via a complete list of authors in the system.' The main section is titled 'General Permissions' and contains two checkboxes: 'User can create new weblogs' and 'User can view activity log', both of which are currently unchecked. Below this is a section for a specific weblog, 'Orlando Vacationer', with a list of permissions. On the left, 'Post' and 'Upload File' are checked, while 'Edit All Posts', 'Edit Templates', and 'Edit Authors & Permissions' are unchecked. On the right, 'Configure Weblog' is unchecked, while 'Rebuild Files', 'Send Notifications', 'Edit Categories', and 'Edit Address Book' are also unchecked. A 'Save' button is located at the bottom right of the form.

**Figure 1-2:** Defining what a user is permitted to do in Movable Type.

Each user can be assigned two big general permissions and 10 smaller ones for each weblog. The biggies are the capability to create new weblogs and view the software's activity log, two capabilities that you might want to keep strictly for yourself.

The other permissions apply to a specific weblog. They determine whether the author can contribute weblog entries and files, edit posts written by other authors, change the site's design, and make other changes. In Figure 1-2, my father-in-law Clint Moewe is being permitted to add new entries to the Orlando Vacationer weblog, upload files such as digital photos, and republish the entire site. We belong to a family of Disney World fiends, so I wanted to give him an opportunity to contribute to the site.

These permissions can vary from weblog to weblog — an author can have the full range of capabilities on one weblog and be a more limited contributor to another.

Once authors have been set up for a weblog, they can write and edit weblog entries with an editing form on a Web page. Because this page and all other parts of the Movable Type user interface are accessible over the Web, an author must provide the correct username and password before accessing any of its pages.

## Writing for a Weblog

Although it can be adapted for other uses, Movable Type is designed for the creation of weblogs and other content that is updated frequently and arranged by date.

The part of the program you'll use most often is the weblog entry form, which collects the information that constitutes a single entry. The following three fields are the most important:

- ◆ **Title:** A headline for the weblog entry, which can be used to display a list of recent entries
- ◆ **Entry:** The text of the entry
- ◆ **Category:** The category in which to place the entry

The weblog entry form can be customized to collect other kinds of information. In Figure 1-3, the form is being used to draft a new entry.

The screenshot shows the 'Create New Entry' form in Movable Type. On the left is a sidebar with navigation links: Post, NEW ENTRY, ENTRIES, UPLOAD FILE, COMMENTS, TRACKBACKS, Manage, TEMPLATES, CATEGORIES, NOTIFICATIONS, COMMENTERS, WEBLOG CONFIG, Utilities, SEARCH, IMPORT / EXPORT, REBUILD SITE, and VIEW SITE. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: Main Menu > Orlando Vacationer > Entries > New Entry. Below this is the 'Create New Entry' form. It has a 'Title' field with the text 'Disney takes on Muppets, Bear' and a 'Post Status' dropdown menu set to 'Draft'. Below these is the 'Entry Body' field, which contains the following text: 'Disney has purchased the Muppets and Bear in the Big Blue House from Jim Henson productions after years of effort to acquire them, according to <a href="http://www.eonline.com/News/Items/0,1,13516,00.html?news">E! Online</a>: <blockquote>The purchase has been a long time coming. Disney came close to acquiring Kermit and pals back in 1990, but the deal, then valued at \$150 million, fell apart after Jim Henson passed away.</blockquote> The article doesn't mention that two attractions at Disney World MGM Studios feature these characters: the MuppetVision 3-D movie and Playhouse Disney live show.'

**Figure 1-3:** Composing a new entry in a weblog.

As a general rule, there are no rules governing the length and composition of weblog entries. The structure of your site's content is entirely up to you: Some bloggers pen short news-style links offered as headlines with little or no



descriptive text. Others write longer, diary-style creations or magazine-length articles.

Movable Type handles this variety of approach through the use of two optional fields on the editing form:

- ♦ **Extended Entry:** A place for the rest of a particularly long entry
- ♦ **Excerpt:** A short excerpt of the entry

The Entry and Extended Entry fields are intended to work in tandem with each other. When they are used, the first part of the entry should be put in the Entry field and the remaining text belongs in the Extended Entry field.

The decision of when an entry is long enough to merit using both of these fields is up to its author. Splitting an entry into two fields provides more flexibility in how it can be presented on a weblog, because you can display the introductory part of the entry separately from the full text and format it differently on a Web page. Keeping the entry in a single field gives you less to think about.

The Excerpt field offers a place for a succinct summary of the entry, such as its first paragraph. If the field is left blank, it defaults to the first 40 words of an entry.

## Filing Weblog Entries in Categories

Entries in a Movable Type weblog can be organized into one or more user-created categories, a feature that makes it easy to create a topic-based archive of the site.

Using categories, a weblog can be subdivided into smaller weblogs, organized around different subjects, and arranged in other inventive ways. One popular use among Movable Type bloggers is to create a category that contains short, headline-only links and present it as a sidebar to a larger weblog.

Each weblog entry can have one primary category, which is selected from a drop-down menu atop the weblog editing form (refer to Figure 1-3), and one or more additional categories. Filing an entry in multiple categories causes it to show up in several places on the weblog. A subsequent change to the entry will be reflected in all of those places.

## Publishing with Movable Type

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, a content-management system makes it easier and more enjoyable to produce Web content by letting a computer handle all of the grunt work. The power of managing content with software becomes apparent when your first weblog entry is published with Movable Type.

When an entry is published, Movable Type saves it in a database and plugs its data into one or more templates, producing output files that can be viewed immediately on the Web.

Templates establish the appearance and layout of the Web pages and other files that make up a site.

Movable Type templates can be used to produce any kind of text-based data. The software's 16 built-in templates produce HTML Web pages, Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and several useful XML formats.

Each template holds two kinds of content:

- ◆ Static text that will appear without modification in the output file
- ◆ Movable Type tags that will be replaced with some kind of dynamically generated content

Each Movable Type tag looks like an HTML or XML tag—a name placed within a less-than character (<) and greater-than character (>), as in this simple example from a Web page template:

```
<h1><MTBlogName></h1>
```

MTBlogName is a Movable Type tag that represents a weblog's name. When it appears in a template, it will be replaced by the name in the file produced from that template. For example, on a weblog named Orlando Vacationer, the following HTML is produced as output:

```
<h1>Orlando Vacationer</h1>
```

Like HTML and XML tags, a Movable Type tag can contain one or more attributes. Each attribute is a name followed by an equals sign (=) and a value. Multiple attributes are separated by spaces. Each attribute customizes the behavior of a tag in some way. Here's a tag that appears on an HTML page and makes use of an attribute named `format`:

```
<p>Posted on <MTEndate format="%B %e, %Y %I:%M %p">
```

The MTEndate tag holds the date an entry was written. This date can be displayed in hundreds of ways by using the `format` attribute with a set of format specifiers. The preceding example produces the following output:

```
<p>Posted on July 02, 2004 04:39 PM
```

The format specifiers indicate the placement and style of each part of a date and time. In the example, %B stands for the full month name, %e for the day of the month, %Y for the four-digit year, and so on. The syntax is borrowed from `strftime`, a popular utility for displaying dates.

A template can make use of more than 130 tags in a standard installation of Movable Type. If you download and install any plug-ins that enhance the functionality of the software, even more tags become available to you.

Listing 1-1 contains a Web page template that displays the last three entries from a weblog on a plain Web page with no graphics and no frills. This kind of

template can be used to offer a version of your weblog that's tailored toward people using a cell phone or personal digital assistant.

### Listing 1-1: A Web Page Template

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head>
  <title><MTBlogName></title>
</head>
<body>
<h1><MTBlogName></h1>
<MTEntries lastn="3">
<div>
  <h3 class="title"><MTEntryTitle></h3>
  <MTEntryBody>
  <MTEntryIfExtended>
    <span class="extended">
      <a href="<MTEntryPermalink>#more">Continue reading
        "<MTEntryTitle>"</a>
    </span><br>
  </MTEntryIfExtended>
  <a href="<MTEntryPermalink>"><MTEntryDate format="%X"></a>
</div>
</MTEntries>
</body>
</html>
```

In Listing 1-1, the Movable Type tags have names that begin with MT. All other tags are ordinary HTML tags.

When the template is used to create a Web page, the Movable Type tags are replaced with the output they produce. Everything else will appear exactly as it does in the listing.

A Web page produced with this template is shown in Listing 1-2.

### Listing 1-2: A Web Page Produced from a Template

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head>
  <title>Orlando Vacationer</title>
</head>
<body>
<h1>Orlando Vacationer</h1>
<div>
  <h3 class="title">Disney takes on Muppets, Bear</h3>
  Disney has purchased the Muppets and Bear in the Big Blue House
```

*Continued*

### Listing 1-2 (*continued*)

```
from Jim Henson Productions after years of effort to acquire them,
according to <a href="http://www.eonline.com/News/Items/0,1,13516,00.
html?tnews">E! Online</a>.

    <a href="http://orlandovacationer.com/archives/000098.html">February
    20, 2004 11:21 AM</a>
</div>
<div>
    <h3 class="title">Killer whale born at SeaWorld Orlando</h3>
    Kalina, an 18-year-old killer whale at SeaWorld Orlando, gave birth
    to her fourth calf Monday at the park's research and breeding
    facility, Shamu Stadium.

    <a href="http://orlandovacationer.com/archives/
    000097.html">February 11, 2004 09:39 AM</a>

</div>
<div>
    <h3 class="title">Disney cuts pass program for disabled</h3>
    Disney World, along with other Disney theme parks, has <a href=
    "http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/petition/linejump.asp">curtailed
    a "special needs pass" program</a> that allowed guests with
    disabilities to skip to the head of lines at each ride.

    <a href="http://orlandovacationer.com/archives/
    000095.html">February 7, 2004 08:04 AM</a>
</div>

</body>
</html>
```

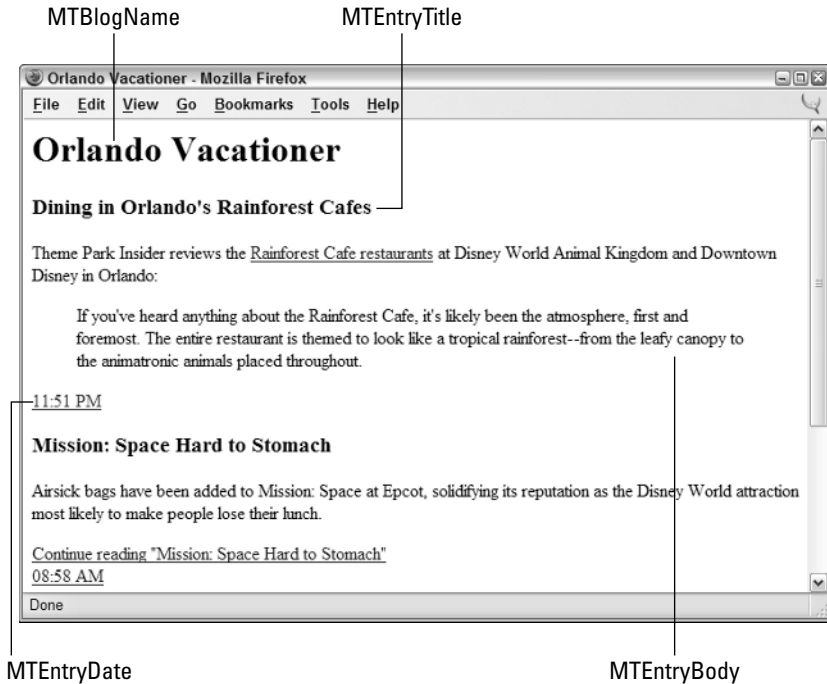
---

Comparing the two listings provides a taste of how templates and static text come together to form a Web page, which brings us to Figure 1-4, a view of the example page in a Web browser.

Once you have created a page or file template in Movable Type, it will produce rendered output each time you write an entry or rebuild an entire weblog.

A template-driven Web design makes the static elements of each page stand out from the material that will change — weblog entries, headlines, and data pulled from software settings and the database.

You can create a template for each different way you want to present entries from your weblog. In addition to HTML, XHTML, and CSS, templates can produce output in any XML format. Movable Type supports RSS 1.0, RSS 2.0, and Atom, three syndication formats that enable a weblog to be read with client software called a *newsreader*.



**Figure 1-4:** Generating a Web page from a template.

Listing 1-3 contains a template that contains the last 15 weblog entries formatted as an RSS 2.0 file.

### Listing 1-3: An RSS 2.0 Template

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<rss version="2.0">
<channel>
  <title><MTBlogName remove_html="1" encode_xml="1"></title>
  <link><MTBlogURL></link>
  <description><MTBlogDescription remove_html="1"
encode_xml="1"></description>
  <MTEndries lastn="15">
    <item>
      <title><MTEntryTitle remove_html="1" encode_xml="1"></title>
      <link><MTEntryLink encode_xml="1"></link>
      <description><MTEntryBody remove_html="1"
encode_xml="1"></description>
    </item>
  </MTEndries>
</channel>
</rss>
```

The template in Listing 1-3 includes some of the same Movable Type tags used earlier in the Web page template. As new presentation and data formats come into vogue, supporting them with Movable Type requires only a template for each new format.

Earlier, I described the dilemma of keeping a large Web site current and error-free when it is being maintained by hand. If Web publishers were rated on a scale from Goofus (always does wrong) to Gallant (always does right), most of us would be much closer to Goofus, producing pages that grow staler by the day. Movable Type makes it easy to be Gallant. Changing the design of an entire site requires only that a few templates be edited, whether the site contains a dozen pages or a thousand, and republishing the entire site can be accomplished with a single click of the mouse.

Movable Type's template feature supports a clear division of labor between Web designers and programmers working on the same site. Designers work with the formats they know — HTML, CSS, XHTML. Programmers deliver their work as custom Movable Type tags supported by plug-ins, and then tell designers how to use the tags.

### Publishing Photos, Graphics, and Other Files

Movable Type weblogs can incorporate digital photos, graphics, audio, and video files. Some users are making use of this functionality to create *moblogs*, multimedia weblogs that incorporate photos, video, and text prepared on cell phones and other mobile devices.

Using the Upload File feature of the software's browser-based interface, files on your computer can be uploaded to the Web server hosting the weblog and then stored in the weblog's root directory, archives directory, or any of their subdirectories.

Once a file has been uploaded, Movable Type can route it to a weblog entry by providing the HTML formatting necessary to present the file. This makes the most sense for digital photos and other images, but will work for any file format. Images can be displayed as part of a weblog entry or in a separate pop-up window.

A weblog or one of its categories can consist of text, images, or a mixture of both.

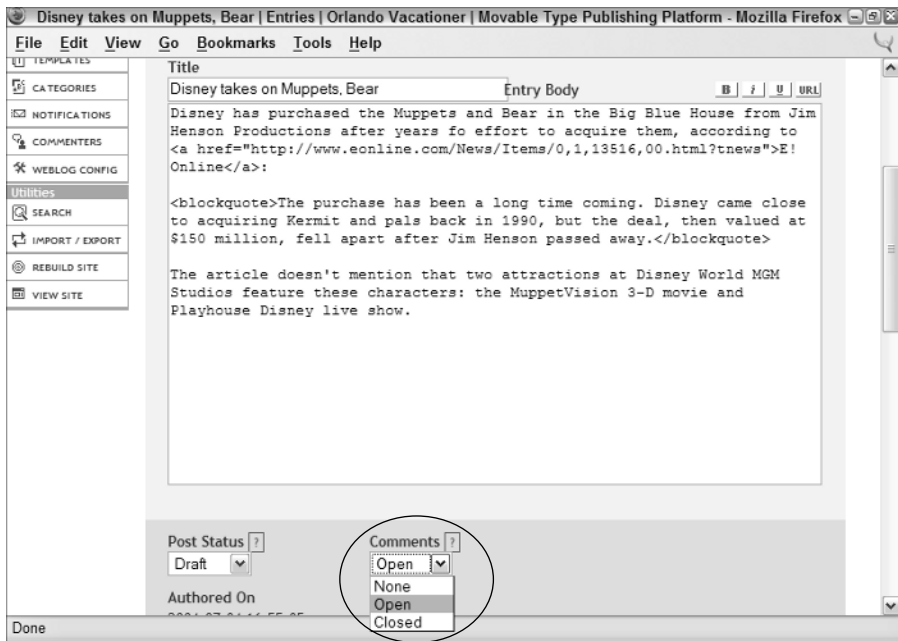


Although you can upload files with Movable Type's Web browser interface, there's no way to use it to delete files later. Instead, to get rid of files that are no longer needed, you must connect to the Web server hosting the weblog with an FTP client or a shell account using telnet or SSH, and then delete the file manually. This applies only to Movable Type; TypePad offers file deletion.

## Writing for an Audience

One of the best ways to build a following for a weblog is to spark conversation between author and audience. Movable Type sites are equipped to do this through the comments and trackback features.

Each weblog entry can receive public comments written by visitors, a feature that turns a popular weblog into a boisterous online community. This is at your discretion: You can specify that entries take no comments or be closed to new comments when a discussion is winding down. This preference is set for each entry using the Allow Comments drop-down menu at the bottom of the editing form, as shown in Figure 1-5.



**Figure 1-5:** Deciding whether to allow comments for a weblog entry.

Movable Type's popularity and the comments feature result in a particularly attractive target for net abuse. Some spammers have written software that finds open comment links in Movable Type weblogs and automatically posts links to their sites, product ads, and other unwanted junk.

To address this issue, Movable Type 3.0 includes improved comment-management capabilities and user registration through a central service called TypeKey (<http://www.typekey.com>).



TypeKey is a free user authentication service that can be used by any Movable Type 3.0 weblog. Users register for a TypeKey account and verify their e-mail address, replying to a confirmation message. When they want to make a comment on any participating weblog, they must sign in to TypeKey first.

Weblogs can require TypeKey or make it optional, allowing users who want to make use of the service to sign in. They also can be configured not to use it at all, thereby accepting public comments from all visitors without restriction.

Another feature for collecting feedback to your work is *trackback*, a way of discovering weblog entries on different sites that link to each other. *trackback*, a framework for data exchange between Web sites, was pioneered by Six Apart as a means of fostering communication between weblogs. It supplements comments, providing notification when another site is referring to one of your weblog entries (and vice versa).

You might be familiar with the *referrer* tracking capability of Web servers, which lets you know what incoming links on other Web sites are bringing people to your site. This sounds a lot like *trackback*, but a *referrer* requires two things in order for you to find out about a link:

- ◆ A visitor must use that link to arrive at a page of your site.
- ◆ The visitor's Web browser must not be configured to keep this information private.

*Trackback*, on the other hand, is an immediate notification when someone else links to your weblog.

There are many uses for *trackback*. The most common is to make it easier for weblog publishers to communicate with each other. Instead of visiting someone else's site to leave a comment, you can offer your response in your weblog for the benefit of your own audience. Your correspondents will find out about your response when they view their *trackback* count for that entry, which appears alongside the comment count.

When a weblog entry is published, Movable Type looks at the hyperlinks in the entry and sends what is known as a *trackback ping* in response to each one. A *ping*, in network communication parlance, is a short message to determine whether another machine is online and ready to accept requests.

If there's a *trackback* server on the receiving end of the *ping*, it stores the link to the weblog entry and some (or all) of its text. There's also a way to specify other links to *ping* for *trackback* purposes.

Like comments, *trackback* can be enabled or disabled on a per-entry basis. The Allow Pings checkbox at the bottom of the entry editing form controls this feature.



## Connecting Movable Type to Other Software

Although Movable Type stands alone as a complete publishing system, it can work with external programs that either complement or replace some of its features.

Weblog entries and related data can be imported from other weblog publishing software into a Movable Type weblog. The first step is to export this data in a simple plain-text format.

Six Apart has documented how to create export data for the Blogger, Greymatter, and Newspro programs, and it works with other publishing tools such as Manila and Radio UserLand.

The exported data must be uploaded to the server by using an FTP client or similar means and placed in the directory where Movable Type expects to find it: an `import` subdirectory under the software's main directory.

If the old weblog supported categories and comments, these can be imported with the text, title, and link for each of the entries. If categories were not supported by the old tool, they can be specified quickly using Movable Type's power-editing feature, a means of working on 20 or more weblog entries using the same form (see Figure 1-6).

Title	Category	Date	Author	Status	Delete
Disney takes on Muppe	None	2004-07-04 16:55:05	rcade	Draft	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dining in Orlando's Rai	Orlando	2004-06-28 23:51:10	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mission: Space Hard to	DisneyWorld	2004-06-09 08:58:29	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
A Whole New World	DisneyWorld	2004-05-16 05:28:26	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Killer whale born at Sea	Theme Parks	2004-02-11 09:39:51	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disney cuts pass progr	DisneyWorld	2004-02-10 06:16:03	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guests question Disney	DisneyWorld	2004-02-07 08:04:48	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disney World's Animal	DisneyWorld	2004-01-27 10:18:01	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
JetBlue offers \$69 fare t	Travel and Hotels	2004-01-22 05:12:07	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Orlando loses two smal	Theme Parks	2004-01-17 03:23:49	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pal Mickey's no friend c	DisneyWorld	2004-01-14 10:38:23	rcade	Publish	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Figure 1-6:** Working on multiple weblog entries in power-editing mode.

As shown in Figure 1-6, the title, category, author, and publication status of several weblog entries can be changed without leaving the form. The power-editing form can hold from 5 to 125 entries, or even the entire weblog.

In addition to importing weblog entries, Movable Type can receive data from weblog entries using XML-RPC, an XML format that enables programs to call each other's procedures over the Internet and other networks.

The software supports several application programming interfaces (APIs) that make use of XML-RPC: Blogger, MetaWeblog, and Movable Type's own API. These APIs enable client software to be used to read and write weblog entries, comments, and trackback information.

The most common use for these XML-RPC interfaces is to offer weblog text-editing capabilities that are more sophisticated than the software's browser-based interface.



Movable Type 3.0 adds support for the Atom API, a new application programming interface designed in concert with the Atom syndication format. The Atom API can be used in a similar manner to XML-RPC APIs, reading and writing weblog data from any software that supports the API. Find out more in Chapter 19, "Supporting the Atom Syndication Format and API."

## Installing Movable Type

In order to install Movable Type on a Web server, your account must have permission to set up and run custom CGI scripts. This is a deal-killer with many Web hosting services — many server administrators prohibit this functionality to keep users from opening a security hole, either intentionally or by accident. Therefore, if you are selecting a service specifically for use with Movable Type, check it out thoroughly before joining.

Installing Movable Type's Perl scripts is straightforward, but you also might need to install several Perl modules that are used by the software, as described in the Chapter 2.

## Finding a Host That's Your Type

Six Apart has drafted an e-mail message that Movable Type users can send to a Web hosting service provider:

I am interested in running a weblogging content-management system called Movable Type (<http://www.movabletype.org/>) on my account. This system has the following requirements:

- ◆ The ability to run custom CGI scripts
- ◆ Perl, version 5.004\_04 or later

And either of the following:

Support for the DB\_File Perl module \*OR\* MySQL & the DBD::mysql module

Does my account on your service meet these three requirements?

## Summary

Without fail, Web publishers who begin to use a content-management system kick themselves for not doing so sooner. Smart software takes the pain out of publishing in this dynamic medium, making it easy to produce new content and keep old content fresh. The compulsion to create Web pages by hand in a text editor becomes one of those quaint labor-intensive chores of a bygone era, like the creation of illustrated manuscripts by monks.

Like the printing technique of the same name that was invented by Johann Gutenberg in the 15th century, Movable Type replaces the need for a lot of drudge work, freeing writers to spend more time communicating with their audience.

The personal publishing system created by Ben and Mena — there I go again with their names — provides a solid foundation for one-person publishers and teams to collaborate on weblogs. The software is also well suited for other sites that present fast-changing information organized by date, magazine-style sites, and similar efforts.

This chapter described the general reasons why and how Movable Type has become the most popular server-based software for creating weblogs. The rest of this book delves into the specifics of the software — setting it up, mastering its features, extending its functionality with plug-ins, and building your own software enhancements that make it better.

