

# 1

## Blogging Basics: Break into

### To Do List

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*Find out what a blog is and how it works*

*Get the dish on the benefits of blogging*

*Figure out which type of blog platform is best for you*

*Learn about blogging's potential*

*Give yourself a hand!*

# Blogging without Breaking a Nail

**Y**ou may have read about it in magazines or heard about it on TV. Perhaps your friend does it or your receptionist does it, or maybe even your mom or daughter does it. No, we're not talking about the latest trend in beauty, we're talking about blogging, the hottest thing to hit pop culture since Jennifer Aniston's *Friends* haircut.

In this chapter, we'll go over the basics of what blogging is and how you can benefit from it. If you're familiar with the Internet and blogging in general, feel free to skip ahead; but if you don't know a blog from your bum, read through this chapter to get a feel for the lingo and a grasp on the concept. And away we go!

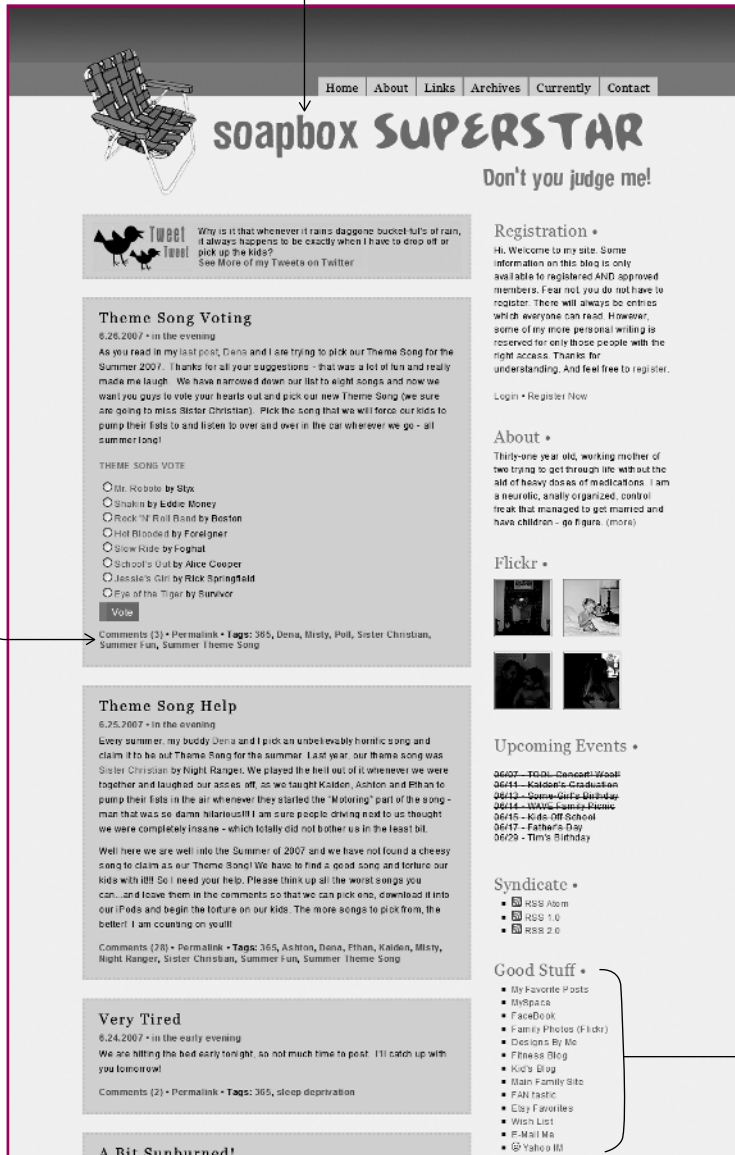
# Blog Anatomy: The Essential Parts

You wouldn't start your first day at Starbucks without knowing what *Venti* means, would you? Nor would you claim to be a hairstylist, but not have a clue what a pair of shears are. The same is true for blogging. We've provided a very handy glossary in the back of this book for you to reference if you run across something you're not familiar with, but along with Figure 1-1 from soapbox.SUPERSTAR ([thescanlons.net/weblog/](http://thescanlons.net/weblog/)), here are some of the common elements of a blog and their definitions:

- **Header:** This is sometimes called a banner, as well. In a traditional blog structure, this is usually found across the top of the blog, displaying the blog name or a graphic.
- **Blog name/blog title:** A blog name or blog title is whatever you've named your blog. This is often represented with text or a graphic treatment. (Learn more about blog names in Chapter 6.)
- **Content area:** The content area, sometimes called the body, is the most essential element to any blog. This is where your blog entries live. There are many variations for how one might display the content area of a blog, but traditionally, you find it on the left or right if you only have one sidebar (described next), or in the middle if your sidebars flank either side.
- **Sidebar:** The sidebar (or sidebars, if you've got more than one) is commonly the area where blog authors display links they enjoy, a short bio, perhaps their Flickr photo stream (more on that in Chapter 18), links to their most recent posts, or archives.
- **Footer:** Not all blogs have an obvious footer, *per se*, but this is the area at the very bottom of your blog where you might list design credits, additional navigational links, copyright information, links to privacy policies, or anything you like.
- **Navigation:** This is how people get around on your blog. Some blogs, as shown on Tenth-Muse.com in Figure 1-2, have a graphic navigation along the top in lieu of a traditional header. Some choose to create simple text navigations in their sidebar or footer. The choice is yours! Navigation most commonly includes a link back to the main page of your blog, a link to some kind of archives, a link to an about or bio page on the blog author, and sometimes a contact link. You're free to include whatever you like in your navigation, but we recommend keeping it simple.

comments link

Blog name



content area

sidebar

Figure 1-1

Header/banner

Graphic navigation

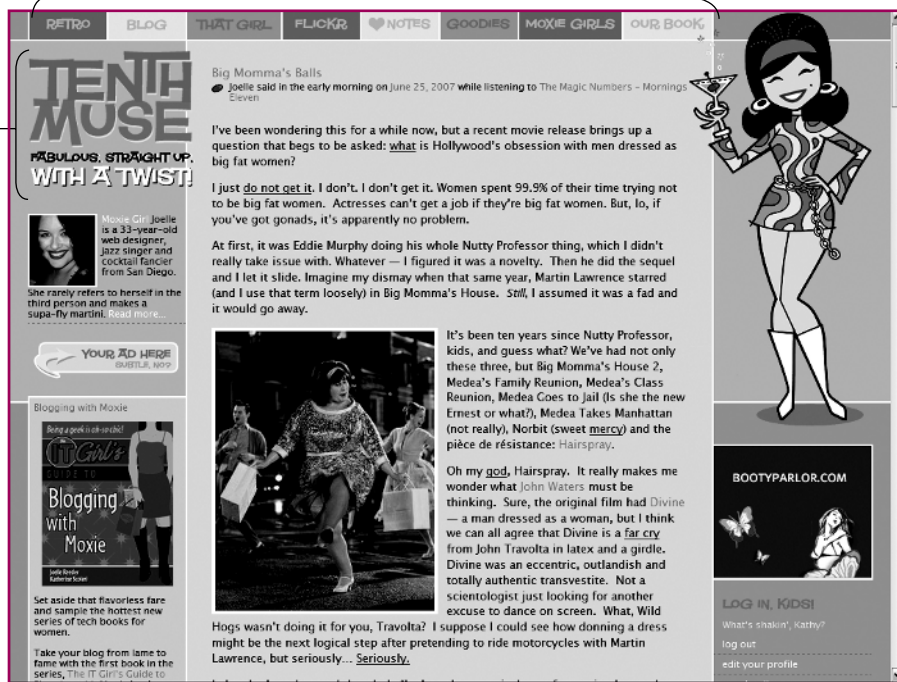


Figure 1-2

- **Blogroll:** A blogroll is a list of links to other blogs that often appears in the sidebar. Occasionally bloggers set up a separate page for their links, so you may find it there.
- **Comments and trackbacks:** We go over these in more detail in Chapter 9, but essentially, these are the areas where visitors to your blog comment and/or notify your blog that they have posted something relating to one of your entries.

## Blogging Doesn't Mean Blah

In the beginning, blogging was relegated primarily to techie types or ubergeeks. But, since new blogging tools and platforms have made it so easy for the technically challenged to share their thoughts, blogging is one of the biggest, fastest-growing trends around. We mean big. Bigger than Paris Hilton's sunglasses — and that's *big*.

Lots of cool people blog! You may not realize that everyone from news anchors like Meredith Vierra ([meredithtoday.village.com](http://meredithtoday.village.com)) to famous comedians like Margaret Cho

([margaretkcho.com/blog/](http://margaretkcho.com/blog/)) have blogs. Following its debut, blogging was primarily done by individuals sharing their personal thoughts and anecdotes. They included everything from statements like “I just had a cheese sandwich” to a complete, detailed, blow-by-blow account of the birth of one’s child, including photos. Ah, good times! Personal blogging certainly has run the gamut.

Since blogging’s burst into the mainstream, it continues to reach everyone from individual to community, from company to celebrity. Even politicians have made their way onto the blogging scene. In fact, political blogs, news blogs, and politicians are partially responsible for the exposure of blogging in traditional media.

Blogs have gained tremendous clout in the world on varying levels. If you have something to say, it just might be heard by the powers that be. You may be thinking, “Who cares if I blog?” Believe us when we say that blogs are now a force to be reckoned with and the power of numbers is on your side, especially when it comes to opinions on politics and current events. While your grass-roots blog campaign to decrease the price of shoes at Saks Fifth Avenue may not make the impact you’re hoping for, if you feel strongly about current issues like the government or the state of affairs in the country, your voice can be heard. You just have to throw your opinion in the mix.

## Home Is Where the Blog Is

You may wonder where you get a blog and even if you had one, where would you keep it? There are two main methods for blogging: hosted blog services and stand-alone blog platforms. Your level of technical know-how really helps determine which of these choices is best for you.



### Women with Moxie

“In order to be irreplaceable, one must always be different.”

—Coco Chanel

A *hosted blog service* is usually owned by a company and offers blogging solutions on its own servers either for free or for a small fee. These services are great for new bloggers looking for instant gratification and are a way to try out blogging without making a financial commitment. Some of the best quick n’ easy hosted blogging services are WordPress.com and Vox, primarily for their fast and simple set-up. With both, you could be blogging in under five minutes. Read more about hosted blogging services in Chapter 5.

A *stand-alone blog platform* requires that you install a downloaded blog software program and then install that program on your own server space, usually rented through a hosting provider. You will need an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) program and a bit of your inner geek in order to accomplish this, but it’s not that challenging if you’re patient and pay attention to the details. Some examples of outstanding stand-alone blog platforms are ExpressionEngine Core, Movable Type, and WordPress.org. Check out Chapter 6 for more information about stand-alone blog platforms.



## The Doc Is In

It's important with either blogging method – hosted or stand-alone – that you read through the documentation and keep it handy. While initial set-up of most blog platforms is fairly simple, you never know when you might need to reference something. If you have a question, always consult your documentation first before seeking other alternate solutions.

## You've Got Potential

Blogs were born from personal journaling, but they've developed into something much bigger than "Here is my grocery list." The possibilities of blogging are pretty boundless as long as you have an imagination and some extra time.

There literally is a way for everyone to utilize a blog in some capacity that benefits her or his life or business. Here's a list of just some of the ways people are using blogs today:

- **Calling all moms!** Mothers and parents all over the world are embracing the beauty of blogs as a way to chronicle the lives of their children, from pregnancy to birth to teen. Remembering everything about your pregnancy, even down to the heartburn, may sound like a chore, but for most, it is an endearing way to keep track of your life during that time. You can wax nostalgic for years to come over the day you posted your first ultrasound photo or reread your birthing experience.
- **Getting hitched!** Everyone knows that Bridezilla wants to keep track of everything that went down in the planning of her wedding. Keep a wedding blog to post news about your upcoming nuptials. Post directions to the hotel, links to your online registry, and a list of local attractions for out-of-towners. Or update the family on time changes, transportation options, and hotel reservation tips. It's one thing to mass email your guest list and quite another to have a spot where your friends and family can all come to get the 411 about your big day.
- **Enhancing business!** Blogs have changed the way professionals handle their business websites. Not only have companies embraced blogging as a way to connect with customers and lure potential clientele, as shown in the Dog Blog! in Figure 1-3, but blogs have morphed into the hippest and easiest way to manage your site's content. Blogging isn't just a hobby anymore; it's a tool. It makes the Internet a more information-rich place that is constantly fresh. Even if its sole purpose is to showcase press releases, your business or company can only benefit from using a blog.
- **You're crafty!** We know those of you with creative flair can think of *something* for which a blog might be useful. Blogs are huge among crafty people. Start a knitting blog and chronicle your latest projects or write tutorials, post sewing





Figure 1-3

patterns, or share instructions on making a tea cozy. Whatever you like to create, using a blog to showcase it can be a lot of fun. By connecting with other people who enjoy creating as much as you do, you could eventually start a group blog with other like-minded crafties. (Learn more about group blogging in Chapter 3.)

- **Podcasting!** Podcasting has become yet another explosive trend that stemmed from blogging, and if you haven't heard of it yet, you most certainly will soon. *Podcasting* is, essentially, blogging with a microphone. It's like being on the radio — only, the coolest part is that *anyone* can do it. You don't have to be a radio deejay or even a professional speaker. You just need Chapter 13 and an idea.
- **Picture this!** Are you an amateur or professional photographer? Make blogging an art by showcasing your views of the world in a photoblog. You can make the Internet your art gallery by cleverly displaying your amazing photography skills or just show us pictures of stuff on your cat — whatever makes your flash bulb flicker!



This is just a short list of basic ideas and samples. You can do or blog just about anything. If you're the type who would prefer to blog for the sake of blogging, by all means, get yourself a domain name and start crackin'. The world needs to hear what you have to say, after all! What is crucial to remember is that blogs in any form are hot, hot, hot, so you better get your butt on the bandwagon or be left in the dust!

Finally, even with all these benefits aside, it's still just a whole lot of fun!

# Relax, Refresh, Reward

As we're here to hold your hand through the fast-moving, exciting new opportunities awaiting you in the blogosphere, we should warn you now: Blogging can be addictive. Once you get the hang of it, you may find yourself composing blog entries in your head while in line at the bank, tinkering incessantly with your layout, and manically checking your comments when your boss isn't looking. All that typing action can leave your cuticles looking worse for the wear.

## Give yourself a hand

To battle the dreaded dry hands, we keep an arsenal of hand creams, lotions, and potions on our desks at all times, in a variety of scents and textures. The small sizes work great as desk-toppers and are usually reasonably priced. So, you don't have to spend a fortune to keep your digits diggable. Here are a few of our favorites for you to try and details on where to get them:

- **True Blue Spa Look Ma, New Hands! from Bath and Body Works:** This fresh-scented hand cream locks in moisture to make your hands feel as though they've been given a hot wax treatment — they're *that* soft. You can pick this up at most Bath & Body Works retail stores or online at [bathandbodyworks.com](http://bathandbodyworks.com). Prices vary from \$5–\$20, depending on the size you choose.
- **Hand Crème with Meadowfoam Seed Oil in Pink Champagne or Buttercream Frosting by Jaqua:** Of all the yummy flavors that Jaqua has to offer, these two are our absolute favorites. If the delectable scent wasn't enough, they make your hands softer than a baby's caboose and don't leave you feeling greasy. This heavenly treat runs about eight bucks, and you can get it at [jaquagirls.com](http://jaquagirls.com) or [bathandbodyworks.com](http://bathandbodyworks.com).
- **High Intensity Hand Cream by Bliss:** *Silky* doesn't even begin to describe this decadent moisturizer. *Intense* does, though! This stuff deeply conditions your hands, leaving them super soft and not too slick! Like most Bliss products, High Intensity runs a bit more, at \$18 for a full-size bottle at [blissworld.com](http://blissworld.com), but you can sometimes find travel sizes at places like Sephora retail stores.

