

Chapter 1: Blog Site

In This Chapter

- ✓ **Knowing how blogs work**
- ✓ **Adopting the b2evolution blog application**
- ✓ **Running multiple blogs with WordPress**
- ✓ **Using a blog hosting service**
- ✓ **Incorporating a blog with an existing site**

A *blog*, for those of you who have been couch potatoes instead of 'Net potatoes, is short for *Weblog*. A blog is like an online diary. You post your thoughts, photos, or information of interest to your viewing audience and then collect comments from people who read your blog. Kids use blogs, and so do politicians. Blogs come in many different varieties. There's the *vanity blog*, which is put up by someone who absolutely thinks it's the coolest thing since wireless pointing devices but only fills the blog with vacuous text. And there's the *serious blog*, put up by someone who has important information to convey to his Web site visitors. In this chapter, we explore two pieces of blog software and explore a blog used by two book authors to display tutorials and information about digital photography and image-editing applications. You can use the information in this chapter to create your own blog or to create blogs for your clients.

Examining Blog Software and Services

If you type **blog software** into your favorite search engine, you get pages of results to explore. Much of the most popular blog software and many blog templates are free.

Before actually showing you some blogs, we tell you a bit about how they work. When you add a blog to your Web site, you add PHP pages to your Web site. The pages enable you to display your blog online and accept comments from visitors to your blog. You post entries to your blog from the administration pages. From the administration pages, you can also delete pesky comments or comments you don't consider suitable for your blog. When you post an entry to your blog or a user posts a comment, the information is stored in a MySQL database on the server. When someone visits a blog site, the PHP page plucks the information from the database and displays it.

b2evolution

The b2evolution blog software, which is free, features an administration section that enables the user to create blog posts and also manage comments posted by users. The b2evolution blog is multilingual and supports multiple users and multiple blogs. You can download different blog *skins* (user interfaces) to change how the blog looks to visitors. If you're conversant with PHP code and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), you can modify the blog to match the look and feel of other Web pages on the site. In the following sections, we show you some of the features of a b2evolution blog.

Introducing the b2evolution application

The b2evolution blog is powered by PHP and a MySQL database. As of this writing, the current version of b2evolution is b2evolution 2.4.5, which is also known as Monument Valley. You can download b2evolution at <http://b2evolution.net>. Follow the links to the Download section.

In order to run b2evolution, your Web server needs PHP 4.3 or above and MySQL 3.23 or above. The designers of the application claim that it works best with Linux with an Apache server. Everything on the blog is done online through a Web browser. b2evolution has been tested with the following browsers: Firefox 1.0+, Internet Explorer 6.0, and Konqueror 3.5+.

The b2evolution application has an impressive manual, which you can view at its Web site. You can see the full manual at http://manual.b2evolution.net/Main_Page. The manual covers every conceivable question about the application, including how to change the look of the blog, how to create blog entries, how to manage multiple blogs, and so on. The downloaded application comes with installation instructions that link to the b2evolution Web site and manual.

Installing b2evolution

If your Web server has the required features (listed in the preceding section) to run b2evolution, you're ready to install b2evolution on your server. You can find detailed instructions with the application. The following steps are condensed, but they give you an idea of how simple it is to install the application on your server.

1. Download and unzip the b2evolution application.

Detailed installation instructions can be found here:

http://manual.b2evolution.net/Install_b2evolution

All the necessary files you need to run the application are downloaded into a folder named Blogs.

2. Create a new MySQL database on your server.

You can easily create a MySQL database through your Web hosting service's control panel or a server application called phpMyAdmin. When you create the database, you're prompted for a name, user name, and password. You don't have to configure the database because the b2evolution application handles that task for you.

3. Upload the Blogs folder to your server via an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) application, such as CuteFTP or FileZilla.

When you unzip b2evolution, all the files required to run the application appear in the Blogs folder.

4. Change permissions on several pertinent files.

Using your FTP application, change the permission of files that configure the blog, enable uploading of image files when creating blog entries, and so on. Detailed instructions on which files need permission changes are in the complete instructions.

5. Install b2evolution on the server:*a. Access the Install folder.*

On a typical installation, you can find this at www.mywebsite.com/blogs/install/.

The installation dialog boxes appear.

*b. Follow the prompts to enter your MySQL database name, user name, and password.***6. After entering your database information, choose New Installation, click Go, and then follow the prompts.**

The installation software writes the config files and populates the database. During the installation, you receive a username and password, which you use to log in to the blog. If desired, after logging in to the blog for the first time, you can change the default password.

7. After you install b2evolution on your server, click the Log In link.

This takes you to the blog's log in page, where you're prompted for your user name and password. Before you can actually post to the blog, though, you have to change a few files.

8. Change a few permissions on the server and make some changes to the config.php file.

Most FTP applications give you the option to change permissions. The blog installation instructions tell you what changes to make.

After making these changes, you're ready to go blogging.



Posting a blog entry in b2evolution

After you install and set up a b2evolution blog, you (or your client) can begin posting entries to the blog. When you post entries to a b2evolution blog, you do so through the Back Office, which you access by logging in as administrator and then clicking the Log into Backoffice button. Several tabs in the Back Office enable you to perform myriad blogging tasks. The Back Office is well documented in the online manual. It's also fairly intuitive — almost as easy as writing an e-mail. If your client is familiar with working in a Web browser, you'll have him up and blogging in no time flat.

When you create a blog post, you enter the information in the Write section of the Back Office. You use the various buttons to add hyperlinks, images, and so on. (See Figure 1-1.)

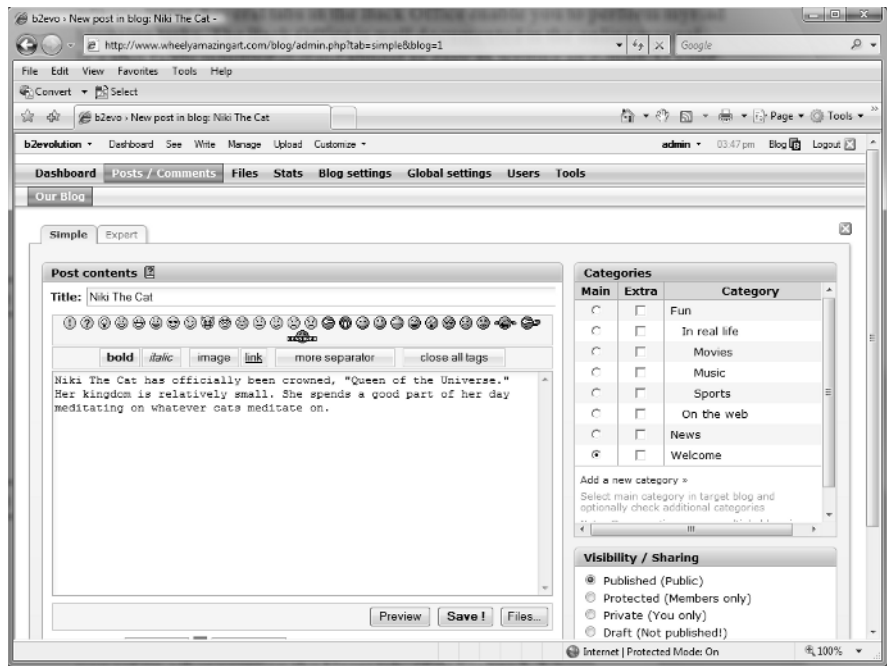


Figure 1-1:
Post an
entry to
the blog.

After writing a blog entry, you can preview it (see Figure 1-2) before clicking the Save button. After you upload the post, visitors to the blog can read it and add comments.

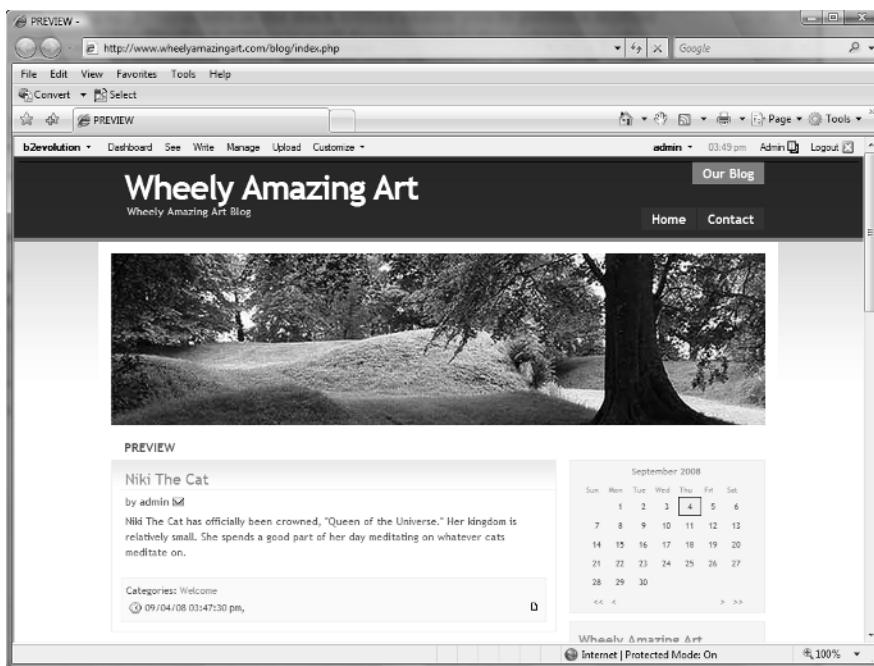


Figure 1-2:
Preview the
blog prior to
posting it.

Managing a b2evolution blog

You manage a b2evolution blog through the Back Office. In the Back Office, you configure your blog and add other users to the blog. If you're maintaining the blog for your client, you're the administrator, and you set up other users on the Users tab. (See Figure 1-3.)

After you have the blog up and running, you can manage posts as well as user comments. You can edit previous posts, delete posts, and delete comments that you deem inappropriate for the blog. You do this on the Posts/Comments tab of the Back Office. (See Figure 1-4.)

WordPress

Another very popular blog application is WordPress. Like b2evolution, WordPress is free. The application is feature rich. After you set up a blog on a server, you (or your client) can manage everything online through a Web browser. WordPress supports multiple blogs and multiple users. If desired, you can have users create profiles with WordPress. Depending on the template you use, visitors to the blog can leave comments about each post.

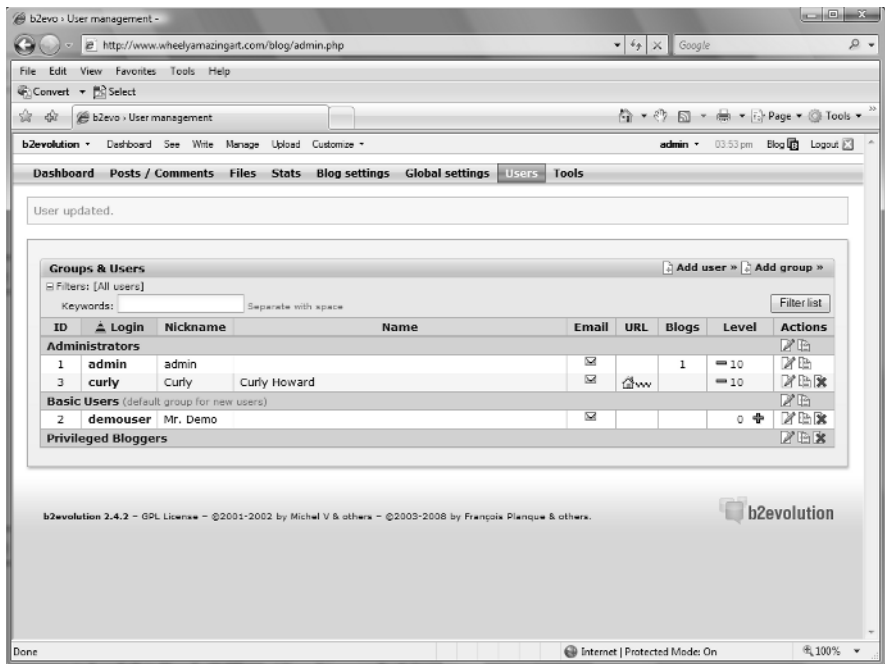


Figure 1-3:
Set up other users in the Back Office.

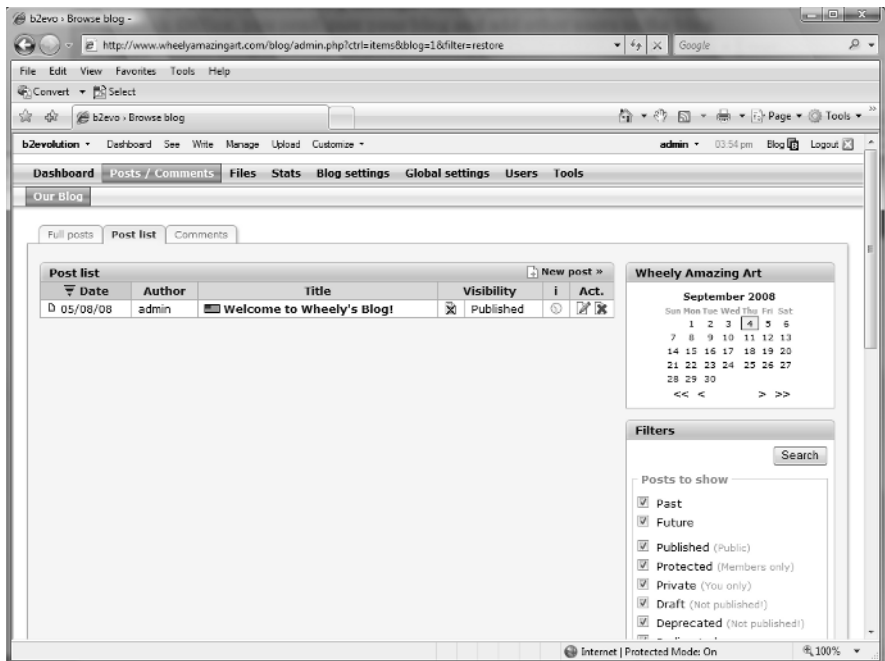


Figure 1-4:
Manage blog posts here.

About WordPress

WordPress also uses a combination of PHP code and a MySQL database to display and maintain the blog. As of this writing, the current version of WordPress is WordPress 2.6.1. You can download WordPress at <http://wordpress.org/download>.

To run WordPress, your Web server needs PHP 4.3 or above and MySQL 4.0 or above. The designers of the application claim it works best with an Apache or a LiteSpeed server.

WordPress comes with installation instructions. Although the application doesn't have a full-fledged manual, you can find impressive documentation on the application at http://codex.wordpress.org/Main_Page. The WordPress Web site also features an impressive support section (<http://wordpress.org/support>) that covers many installation issues as well as how to modify templates.

Installing WordPress

If your server has the necessary features (listed in the preceding section) to run WordPress, you're ready to install the application. Detailed installation instructions can be found here:

http://codex.wordpress.org/Installing_WordPress

To give you an idea of how easy it is to install the application, here's a condensed version of the installation process.

1. Download the application and unzip the files.

The files needed to run the application are downloaded into a folder called WordPress.

2. Create a new MySQL database on your server.

You can easily create a MySQL database through your Web hosting service's control panel or a server application called phpMyAdmin. When you create the database, you're prompted for a name, user name, and password.

3. Open `wp-config-sample.php` in a word-processing application.

We recommend using an application like Notepad to make your changes. More sophisticated word-processing applications use smart quotes (they look like this: “ ’ ”), which will cause errors when used to designate the database name, user name, and password.

4. Change the database information.

Modify the file by changing the default name of the database, user name, and password.

5. Save the file as `wp-config.php`.

6. Upload the files to a folder on your server.

Create a folder on your server. The logical name for that file is Blog. Upload the files to this folder.

7. Install the application on your server.

To install the application, navigate to the `install.php` file on your server. The default location is `www.mywebsite.com/blog/wp-admin/install.php`.

8. Follow the prompts to install the application.

The installation dialog box prompts you for a name for your blog and your e-mail address. After you supply that information, WordPress automatically fills in the table for your database. The application generates a user name and password.

9. Write down your user name and password.

You need these to log in to your blog, administer it, and post entries. If you're not crazy about the user name or password, you can change one or both of them when you administer the blog.

10. Log in to your blog.

You'll find a `wp-login.php` link at the bottom of the installation dialog box. Click the link to begin blogging.

Modifying a WordPress blog

After you install a WordPress blog, you can modify the blog to suit the Web site to which it linked. You can modify an existing theme (skin) or upload a new theme to your server. The downloaded version of WordPress has two themes. However, WordPress is a popular application, and many developers have created themes for the application. To modify the look and feel of your WordPress blog with a theme, follow these steps:

1. Open your Web browser and navigate to `http://wordpress.org/extend/themes`.

The WordPress Theme Directory Web page appears. (See Figure 1-5.)

2. Navigate to a theme you like.

As of this writing, there are more than 200 themes. You can speed up your search by displaying themes that have color schemes similar to the site to which they'll be linked. You can sort by color by enabling one or more check boxes.

3. Click the thumbnail to preview the theme in your browser.

The test site appears in a new browser window. (See Figure 1-6.)

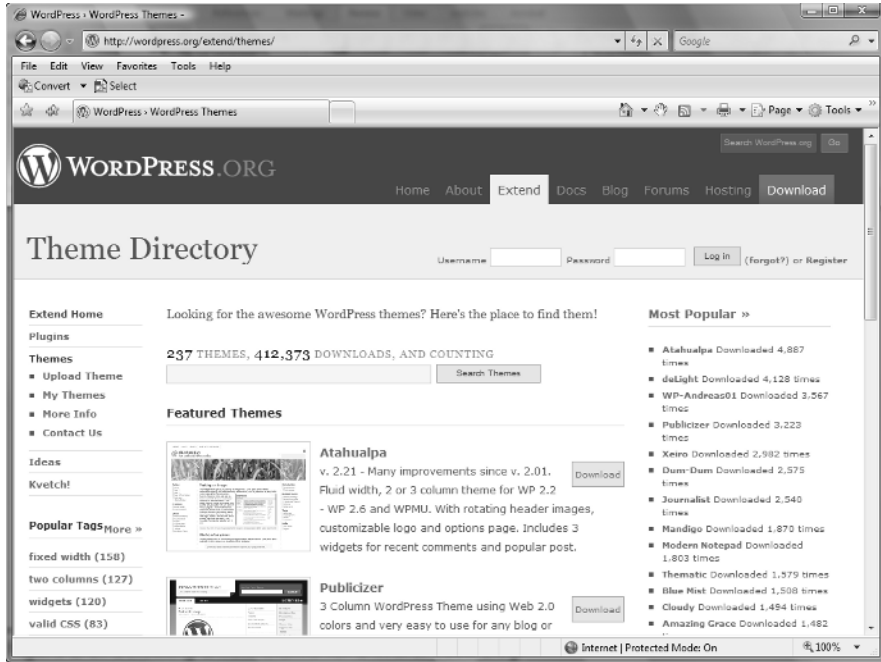


Figure 1-5:
Select
a new
theme for a
WordPress
blog.

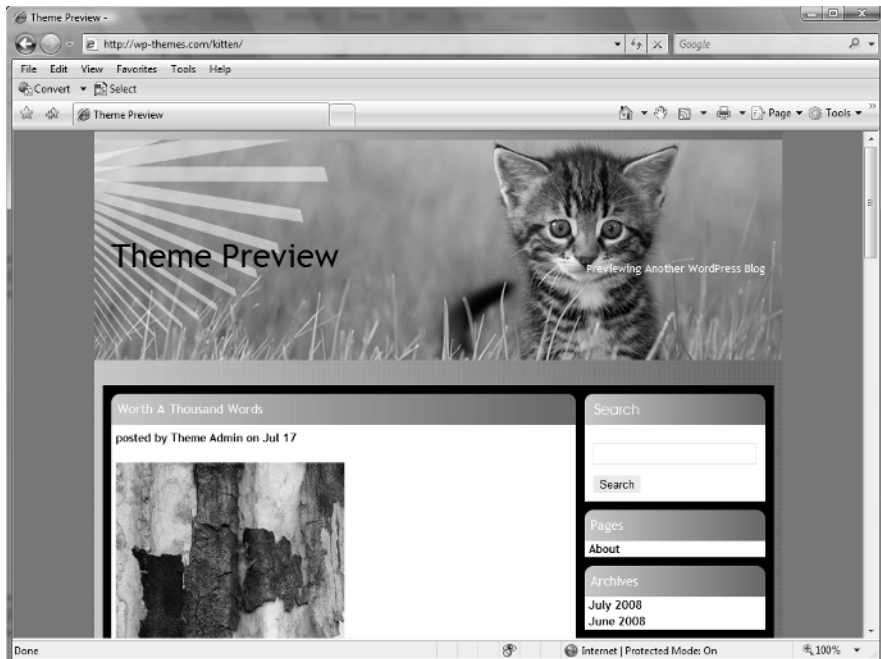


Figure 1-6:
Preview a
WordPress
theme.

4. When you find a theme you'd like to use, click the Download link and then follow the prompts to download the file to your desktop.

5. Unzip the file.

6. If desired, modify the theme in your HTML editing application.

You'll find tutorials on modifying themes at this URL:

```
http://codex.wordpress.org/  
Blog_Design_and_Layout#Themes_and_Templates
```

7. Upload the Themes folder to the following directory on your server:

```
www.mywebsite.com/blog/wp-content/themes
```

After uploading a Themes folder to this directory, you can change the look of your blog.

8. Log in to your blog.

When you log in as administrator, the Dashboard section of your blog appears, which is where you administer the blog, write new posts, add new users, and so on. (See Figure 1-7.)

9. Click the Presentation tab.

Your Web browser refreshes and displays the themes you uploaded to your server. (See Figure 1-8.)

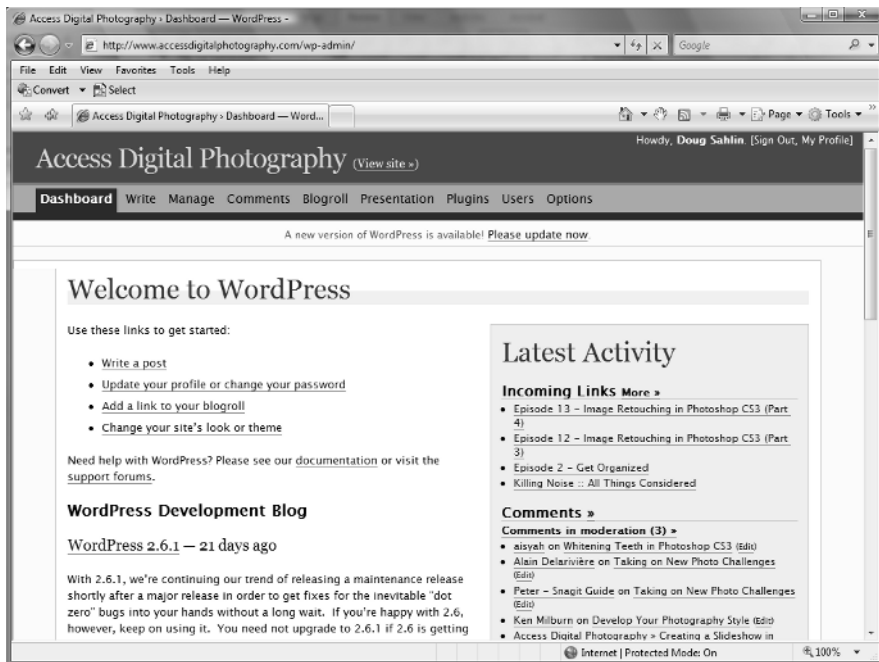


Figure 1-7:
The
WordPress
Dashboard.

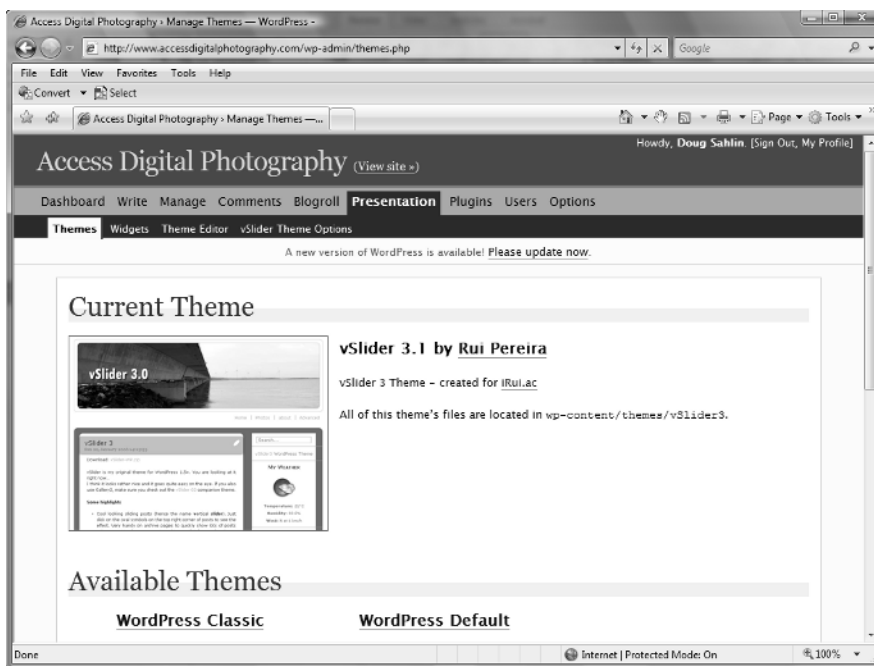


Figure 1-8:
Choose a
theme from
the uploads.

10. Select the desired theme.

The previously used theme is replaced.

Posting a WordPress blog entry

Blogs are all about getting the word out. WordPress makes it easy for you to post entries to your blog. You can add images and hyperlinks when posting a message to your blog. To add an entry to your blog, follow these steps:

1. Log in to your WordPress blog.

When you log in as administrator, WordPress displays the Dashboard, which enables you to administer your blog.

2. Click the Write tab.

Your Web browser refreshes to the Write page of your blog.

3. Enter the desired information.

When you post an entry to your blog, you can format the text and add images to the post. You can also add hyperlinks by clicking the Link icon. This opens a dialog box that enables you to enter the URL and determine whether the Web page opens in the same browser window or in a new one. Figure 1-9 shows a post being written. Figure 1-10 shows the post as it appears on the blog.



Figure 1-9:
Writing
a post.



Figure 1-10:
The entry,
as it
appears on
the blog.



If you or your client posts information on several different topics, you can create a category for each topic. This makes it easier to manage your blog.

Managing a WordPress blog

If you're setting up a blog with multiple authors and multiple categories, you can easily manage the blog through the WordPress Dashboard. You can also edit or delete posts. To edit posts in a WordPress blog, follow these steps:

1. Log in to your WordPress blog.

When you log in as administrator, WordPress displays the Dashboard, which enables you to administer your blog. If you have other people creating content for the blog, users with editor status can also edit blog entries.

2. Click the Manage tab.

Your browser refreshes to show all entries posted to the blog. (See Figure 1-11.)

3. Click the Edit link for the post you want to edit.

WordPress opens the entry on the Write tab.

4. Edit the message and then click the Save button.

WordPress publishes the edited post.

The screenshot shows the WordPress 'Manage' tab interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Dashboard', 'Write', 'Manage', 'Comments', 'Blogroll', 'Presentation', 'Plugins', 'Users', and 'Options'. Below that, a sub-navigation bar includes 'Posts', 'Pages', 'Uploads', 'Categories', 'Files', 'Import', 'Export', 'Title Tags', and 'Ads'. A message states: 'A new version of WordPress is available! Please update now.' The main content area is titled 'Posts' and features search filters for 'Search terms...', 'Status...' (set to 'Any'), 'Author...' (set to 'Any'), 'Month...' (set to 'Any'), and 'Category...' (set to 'All'). A 'Filter >' button is below the filters. The posts are listed in a table:

ID	When	Title	Categories	Comments	Author			
194	2008-05-30 4:58:21 am	Welcome to Access Digital Photography	Breaking News, Digital Photography News	0	Doug Sahlin	View	Edit	Delete
256	2008-05-29 10:54:27 pm	How to Shop for a Tripod	Photography Equipment	0	Ken Milburn	View	Edit	Delete
253	2008-05-05 9:49:20	Taking on New Photo Challenges	Digital Photography News	2	Ken Milburn	View	Edit	Delete

Figure 1-11:
Manage posts here.

You can also add categories to the blog, modify comments, and do other tasks on the Manage tab. You can add links to the blog through the Blogroll tab (in this version of WordPress; the Links tab in other versions), plus add and manage users through the Users tab.

Exploring other options: Blogger.com

If your client doesn't have PHP capability on his Web server but still wants to go blogging, many online sources can host a blog. The online blog is linked to the blogger's site. Google acquired Blogger.com in 2003. Google has made improvements to the service, and it now features the capability to upload images with blog posts. You don't have to download any software; you do everything online. Blogger.com users can choose from a variety of templates.

Hosting a blog with Blogger.com is a three-step process. You create an account, name your blog, and then choose a template. After choosing a template, you or your client can begin posting words of wisdom — or a reasonable facsimile thereof. Figure 1-12 shows Doug's blog at blogspot.com.

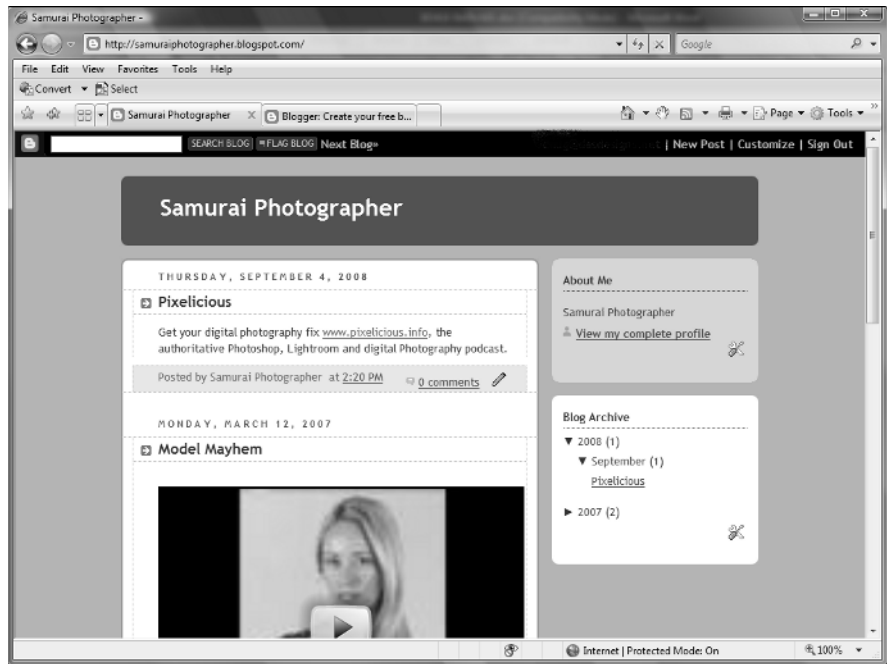


Figure 1-12: A free blog linked to an author's Web site.

Creating a Web Site from a Blog

When Doug and a fellow photographer decided to create a Web site to post digital photography, Photoshop, and Photoshop Lightroom tutorials, they decided to use a WordPress blog for the site. The blog makes it possible for site contributors who don't know HTML to add tutorials to the site. After setting up the blog, Doug added links to the blog that enabled viewers to visit different pages and other linked blogs. He also signed up for a Google AdWords account to monetize the site. Google AdWords pays the site owner when an ad is clicked through. The blog is shown in Figure 1-13.

Managing spam

The biggest problem with blogs is spam. When users find a blog, they think it's a place where they can post anything with links to everything from counterfeit Rolex watches to porn Web sites. Your first defense against spam in a WordPress blog is two-pronged:

- ◆ Require that an administrator approve a comment before it's posted.
- ◆ Require that the person posting the comment add her name and e-mail address.



Figure 1-13:
Create a full-fledged Web site from a blog.

Another option is for WordPress to notify an administrator by e-mail when a comment is posted. You choose these options in the Discussion section of the Options tab (see Figure 1-14).

Another powerful option for preventing spam is to use one of the built-in plug-ins: namely, the Akismet plug-in. This plug-in searches posted comments for any known spam words (think Viagra), and quarantines the posts for a site administrator to review. You need to set up an account at WordPress.org, which is free. When you enable the Akismet plug-in, you're prompted to enter your WordPress API (Application Programming Interface) key, which you can retrieve by logging into your account at WordPress.org. Trust us: As your blog becomes more popular, it will become a target for spammers. The Akismet plug-in does a remarkable job of thwarting spam, as shown in Figure 1-15.

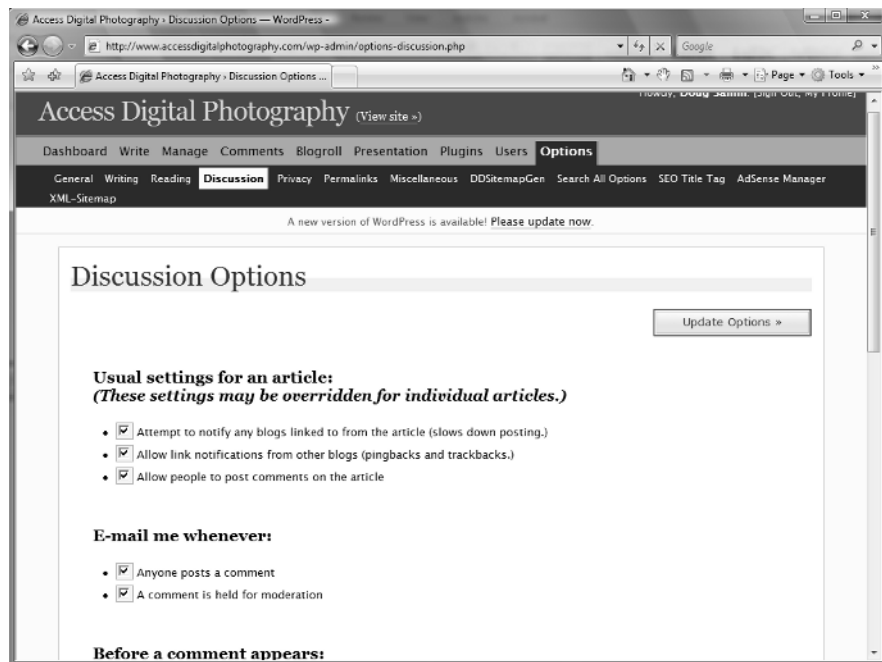
Extending WordPress

When Doug set up the site, he searched the 'Net for plug-ins to extend the blog. He wanted the blog to be recognized by search engines, easily administer Google AdWords, create a sitemap, and much more. He found the plug-ins here:

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/>

Figure 1-16 shows the sitemap automatically generated and updated with a WordPress plug-in.

Figure 1-14:
Set user
commenting
options
in the
Discussion
section.



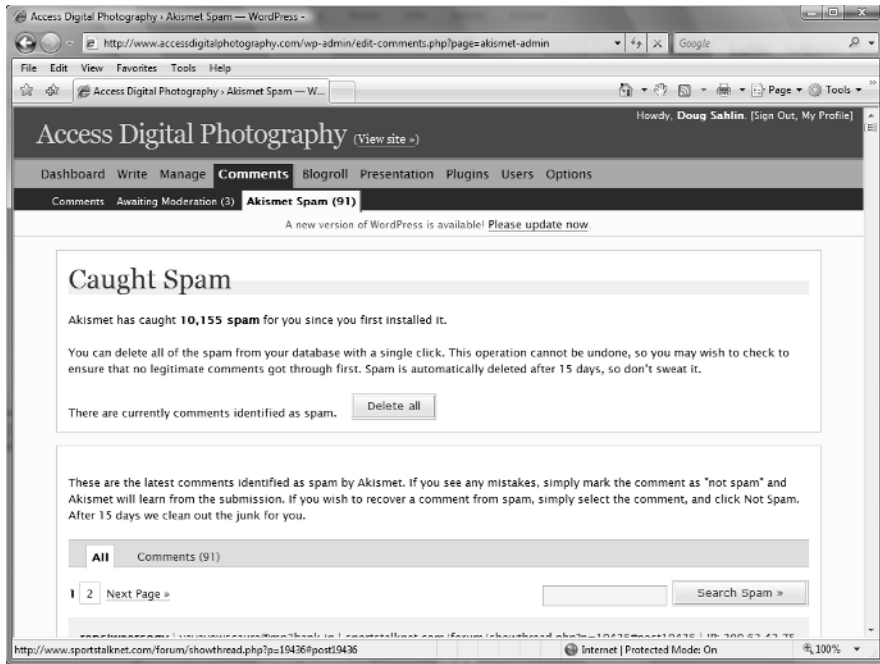


Figure 1-15:
Put a stop to spam on your blog.

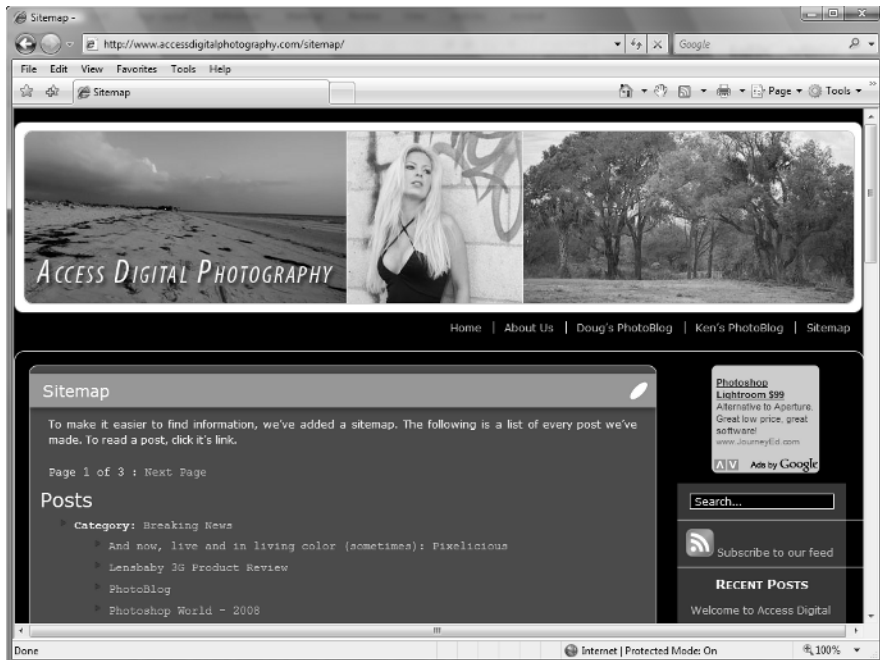


Figure 1-16:
Make life easier with WordPress plug-ins.

Photoblogs

WordPress is an extremely versatile application. With the right template, you can get the look you're after. Photographers like to post their work online, but many aren't conversant with HTML editing. If you're contacted by a photographer who wants to be seen online, consider the one-two punch of a regular blog that's linked to a *photoblog*. You can find photoblog templates for the WordPress application by typing **WordPress photoblog template** in your favorite search engine. Figure 1-17 shows Doug's photoblog, which is linked to www.accessdigitalphotography.com.

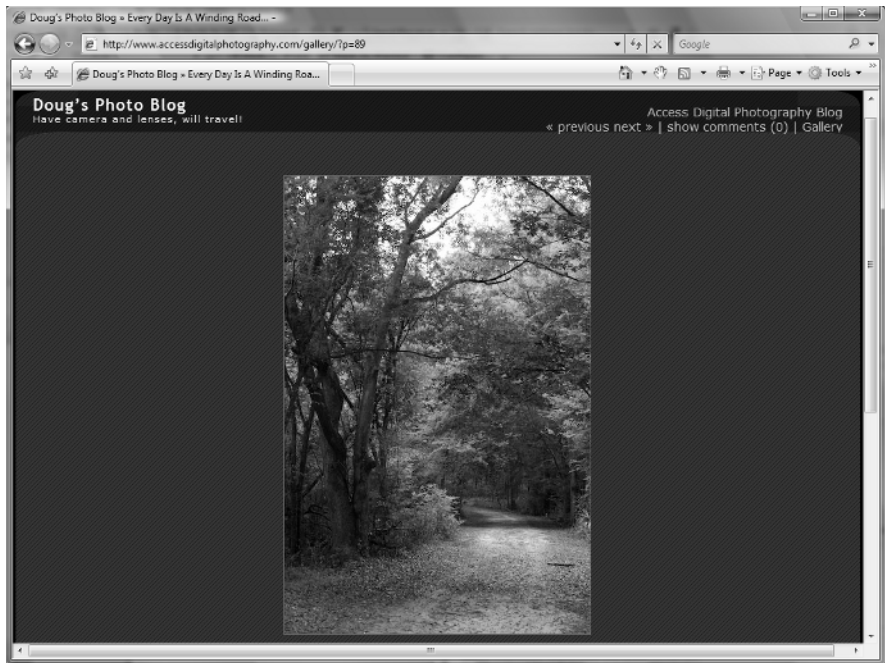


Figure 1-17:
A photoblog
that's easy
on the eyes.