

Chapter 1

Choosing Blogger as Your Blogging Software

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So you made the decision to start a blog. Blogger is a perfect tool to help you publish your thoughts, ideas, and opinions as part of the growing blogosphere. Blogger not only is user-friendly but also has the power of one of the world's strongest brands behind it: Google. Starting a blog might seem intimidating at first, but blogging is one of the simplest ways to get your voice heard.

Whether you're starting a blog for business or just for fun, Blogger offers the tools, features, and support you need to be a successful blogger. To top it off, Blogger is completely free to use. In this chapter, I tell you what Blogger can do for you to help you make the most of your blogging experience. You might be surprised at just how much this free blogging platform has to offer.

Introducing Blogger

Pyra Labs launched Blogger in 1999 as one of the first programs dedicated completely to blogging. At the time, blogging was in its infancy, and the three Web developers who created Blogger had no idea what their product would grow to become.

Blogger is often credited with helping to boost blogging into the mainstream. By offering an easy-to-use and easily accessible blogging platform, people slowly began to realize how much power blogging could deliver. Terms such as *user-generated content*, *citizen journalism*, and *social Web* became part of the common vernacular, and people (and businesses) from all walks of life wanted to jump on the blogging bandwagon.

But what exactly is a blogging platform? In the simplest terms, a *blogging platform* (or blogging software) is the computer program that does all the work behind the scenes to publish your content on the Internet. You type the content into your blogging software, such as Blogger, WordPress, or TypePad, and the blogging software creates a Web site where your content resides (see Figure 1-1). The blogging software formats your content, dates it, archives it, and more. Suddenly, having a Web site was no longer a possibility only for businesses with a budget to burn. With the birth of blogging and the popularity of Blogger, anyone could have an online presence, become a *blogger*, and join an online community that would come to be known as the *blogosphere*.



Blogger simply gives your blog a home online. Imagine Blogger as a banquet hall. As host, Blogger offers a location for various people to create and store their blogs just as a banquet hall gives people a place to hold events. What happens on your blog and the success of your blog depends on you.

Figure 1-1:
The popular
“The Secret
Diary of
Steve Jobs”
blog.



Unlike a traditional Web site that offers a static message, a blog works more like an online diary with posts published in reverse chronological order. In this way, blogs tell a story, and that story is completely up to the blogger, who has the freedom to write and publish anything he wants. Although blogs started out as very simple online diaries, they grew to be much more. Blogs

are still used now by many people simply for fun, but they are also used by people who try to earn an income from them, launch a new career, or build a business, for example. The opportunities that blogs create are seemingly endless. It's all up to the blogger.

Of course, some unwritten rules of the blogosphere and secrets to success exist, such as posting frequency, networking, and creating compelling content. However, a blog is the product of the blogger and evolves the way the blogger desires. At its core, blogging is a simple concept. It requires little to no monetary investment but could potentially demand a great deal of sweat equity.

Understanding the Google Connection

In 2003, Google noticed Blogger and made an offer to purchase the blogging platform from Pyra Labs. Google had been known in the online world as the search engine powerhouse that was extending its reach to include online advertising and more. In fact, Blogger could be considered one of the first in a string of acquisitions made by Google to extend its brand and its strength in the online market.

It turned out that Google's timing was perfect, and Blogger's hundreds of thousands of users quickly turned into millions. Google benefited from new access to millions of customers, and Blogger users benefited from a series of redesigns and upgrades to the software program that made it easier to use and added more functionality than ever. Those upgrades and redesigns would allow the new Blogger to retain its position as the leader in a market that was growing more and more competitive every day. The blogging platform that was once considered the "beginner's tool" continues to attract new users at a staggering rate.

Blogger users can now leverage the power of Google and its many products. Considering the availability of Google applications, users of Blogger can easily incorporate them into their blogs to advertise, publish content from mobile phones, upload and embed videos, and send RSS feeds to their feed readers. Here are several Google applications that users of Blogger can incorporate into their blogs:

- ✓ **Google Docs:** With Google Docs, users can create documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. Google Docs is particularly helpful when bloggers want to share documents with other people or publish presentations on their blogs.
- ✓ **Blogger Mobile:** If you use a mobile device in the United States, you may be able to publish content on your blog directly from that device. Take a look at Chapter 15 for details about blogging via your mobile device.

- ✓ **Google Earth:** Google Earth is a perfect tool for creating maps for your blog.
- ✓ **Gmail:** Gmail is an excellent free email program that can be accessed from any computer. Read Chapter 9 to see how Gmail works seamlessly with Mail-to-Blogger and makes it easy to publish blog posts from anywhere at any time.
- ✓ **Google Groups:** You can join Google Groups that interest you in order to network and share information with like-minded people. Alternatively, you can start your own Google Group. Each of these activities can help drive traffic to your blog, as described in Chapter 12.
- ✓ **Picasa:** When you upload photos to Blogger, they're stored in your Picasa account, which comes free with Blogger. You can also organize and edit your photos by using Picasa. Check out Chapter 6 for details about Picasa.
- ✓ **Feedburner:** Feedburner is the most popular Web content feed-management program online. You can share your blog's feed using Feedburner for readers to subscribe to using their feed reader of choice, such as Google Reader. Chapter 9 provides more information about blog feeds.
- ✓ **Google Toolbar:** Using the free Google toolbar helps you save time because redundant tasks are quicker to perform with a click of the mouse. Additionally, the Blogger instant-blogging feature, BlogThis!, appears directly on the Google Toolbar. BlogThis! is covered in Chapter 9.
- ✓ **Google Reader:** Google Reader allows you to subscribe to blogs and to follow those feeds from any computer or certain mobile devices. More details about Google Reader are in Chapter 9.
- ✓ **YouTube:** You can upload your own YouTube videos to embed in your blog, or you can use YouTube to find videos by other users that you want to share in your blog. Check out Chapter 15 for more information on adding videos to your blog posts.
- ✓ **Google Video:** Google Video is a video search engine as well as a site to upload videos that you can link to or embed in your blog.
- ✓ **Google AdSense:** AdSense is an advertising system you can use to display ads on your blog in order to generate revenue. Read Chapter 11 for all the details about Google AdSense.
- ✓ **Orkut:** You can use the Orkut social networking site to promote your blog. Find out more about social networking in Chapter 12.

Debunking Blogger Myths

The following Blogger myths can be found circulating the Internet in online conversations, but they hold little to no validity:

- ✓ **Blogger is too frequently unavailable.** In the past, users complained that the Blogger software would “go down” too frequently, meaning that it was unavailable to users who wanted to update their blogs and to readers who wanted to read those blogs. Since Blogger has moved completely into the Google infrastructure, the system has become more stable and more reliable.
- ✓ **Blogger deletes blogs haphazardly.** Users also complained about their blogs suddenly disappearing altogether. Many users who suffered this fate discovered their blogs were temporarily or permanently deleted due to potential policy infringements, covered in Chapter 18.
- ✓ **Blogger offers very few features.** Other blogging software programs, such as WordPress, offer a wide array of added features, which makes them superior to Blogger. Since Google purchased Blogger in 2007, new features are added all the time to make Blogger more competitive with WordPress.
- ✓ **Blogger is good only for beginner bloggers.** The limited functionality of Blogger created a reputation for the software as inadequate for power bloggers. Google has invested time and money into enhancing Blogger’s functionality so it remains easy to use but is more feature-rich. As such, Blogger has become a blogging platform for both beginners and seasoned professionals.

Discovering the Benefits of Blogger

With so many blogging software options, what makes Blogger stand out? Certainly, since Google purchased Blogger, the ease of integration with other Google products and the enhancements that are constantly added to Blogger make it a viable choice for any blogger. Perhaps the most enticing aspects of Blogger are its simple point-and-click usability and its nonexistent price tag. Following are some details about several benefits you’ll enjoy when you use Blogger.

It’s free!

You can safely assume that a beginner blogger or a casual blogger will be intrigued by the free Blogger platform. Much of the popularity of Blogger can be attributed to the old adage “Why pay for something when you can get it for free?” In other words, why invest in another blogging software program when Blogger can deliver the same features at no cost? To many bloggers, this question is easy to answer, and Blogger is the obvious choice.

Of course, some bloggers prefer the advanced customization options that other blogging platforms provide, but with advanced customization also comes a price tag. You also generally need programming or coding skills that many bloggers don't know or aren't interested in learning. Because blogging applications such as WordPress rely on a variety of third-party plug-ins to add functionality, the customization options are far greater than what Blogger currently offers. However, most of that customization requires that you pay for a domain name, additional disk space, hosting, and more. Each blogger must define his blogging goals and determine whether paying to use a blogging platform is necessary.

It's easy to use

When it comes to blogging software programs, it doesn't get much easier than Blogger. Starting a Blogger account, customizing your blog, and writing and publishing your blog's content are simple tasks, thanks to the basic WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor that requires no technical knowledge to use as long as you're familiar with the functionality of basic word processing software. Although learning to use blogging software might seem intimidating, Blogger takes away much of the challenges, allowing you to become a confident member of the blogosphere!

It has loads of features

Blogger comes jam-packed with features and goodies for users. Unlike other blogging software programs that require users to upload (or pay for) additional features, Blogger has a wealth of built-in tools, such as Google AdSense, feeds, polls, and slideshows. Chapter 8 covers many of these tools.



With the power of Google behind Blogger, new upgrades have been integrated into the program that make blogging easier than ever. You can be certain that Google isn't done yet. More features are sure to be in the pipeline already. You can keep on top of Blogger updates by reading the Blogger Buzz blog at <http://buzz.blogger.com>.

It's versatile

For users who want a more customized experience for their blog readers, Blogger offers versatile domain and hosting options. Users can choose to use their own domain names for their blogs (for example, `MyBlog.com`) rather than traditional Blogspot addresses (for example, `MyBlog.blogspot.com`). This option is popular for business bloggers and power bloggers who want to create a seamless brand experience for their readers and customers.

Additionally, bloggers can choose to host their Blogger blogs through a third-party host rather than through Blogger. Although third-party hosting is an added expense, some bloggers prefer it in order to provide maximum control over their blogs. Read Chapter 16 for more information about third-party hosts and domain names.

It's flexible

Blogger offers options for bloggers of all experience levels and with varying blogging objectives. Whether you understand HTML (hypertext markup language) or not (see Chapter 9 for more information about HTML), you can use Blogger. Users also have a variety of blogging options available to them, such as instant blogging, audio blogging through podcasts, mobile blogging (mobile blogging), video blogging (vlogging), blogging by e-mail, and voice messaging through their Blogger blogs. In short, Blogger makes it nearly impossible *not* to blog! Get more details about multimedia blogging in Chapter 15.

Blogger also makes it quite easy for multiple authors to write for the same blog. Adding and removing blog authors takes just a few seconds, making it a helpful choice for people who want to start or expand their blogs to a multiuser format. Check out Chapter 14 to find out about multiuser blogging with Blogger.

It can help you make money

Many bloggers are interested in monetizing their blogs. In other words, they want to be able to make money (either passive or active income) through their blogs. Some free blog platforms, such as WordPress.com, don't allow users to monetize their blogs. Blogger not only *allows* monetization — it also encourages it, by making it incredibly easy through Google AdSense, one of the most popular online advertising services.



Because Blogger is owned by Google, the same company that owns Google AdSense, it's not surprising that Google AdSense is integrated directly into the Blogger program. With just a few clicks, Blogger users can insert Google AdSense ads into their blogs and begin making money from them almost immediately.

Blogger users can also monetize their blogs through affiliate advertising, direct advertising, sponsored reviews, and more. Certainly, as Google's online advertising initiatives grow, blog monetization opportunities for Blogger users will also grow. The seamless integration of Google products into Blogger sets it apart from the competition and makes it an excellent blogging choice. Chapters 10 and 11 cover more ways to make money from your blog.

It exposes you to the spirit of community

Blogger users make up a unique online community that shares a passion for blogging and an interest in learning to use all the features and add-ons available through Blogger. As you grow your blog, networking with the Blogger community can be an invaluable resource for you. A search on Technorati (a popular blog search tool) returns numerous blogs that discuss Blogger (visit <http://technorati.com/blogs/tag/google+blogger> for a current list). No matter what problem or question you encounter, the Blogger community is readily available to help you navigate beyond any challenges that might arise throughout your lifetime as a blogger.

Comparing Blogger to Other Blogging Software Options

Blogger has changed significantly in recent years. New functionality is continually added to ensure that Blogger retains its position as market leader. Other blogging software programs have come and gone with several threatening Blogger, but the team behind Blogger continues to improve the product by offering improvements and new technologies. The following list describes some other blogging programs:

✓ **WordPress:** The biggest rival to Blogger is WordPress, which is known for its wide variety of plug-ins and add-ons, such as contact forms, related posts links, and sitemaps, that allow users to customize their blogs to suit their individual needs. Blogger offers customization, but WordPress wins the race in terms of giving users the most variety. The drawbacks of WordPress are twofold:

- The free version is far more limited than the version that requires users to pay for their own domain names and web hosting.
- The free version doesn't allow users to monetize their blogs.

You can read *WordPress For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Lisa Sabin Wilson (Wiley) for more information about WordPress.

✓ **TypePad:** Although TypePad is easy to use, it isn't free. Users pay a monthly fee to use TypePad. It offers a decent level of customization, such as templates and design (although less than WordPress with paid hosting), but its use comes at a cost.

✓ **Moveable Type:** The program's biggest drawback is the expensive licenses that users have to pay for in order to use it. The installation process also isn't as simple as in other blogging software programs, and its features aren't as vast. On the flip-side, it is extremely easy to add multiple blogs to the same account with Moveable Type, which made

it popular for team blogs in the past (although WordPress is gaining ground in this market).

- ✓ **LiveJournal:** Users must pay a monthly fee to use LiveJournal, which provides a limited number of features and customization options.
- ✓ **MySpace:** MySpace offers a blogging option, but it's quite different from Blogger and many of the other available blogging software programs because so much of the success of a MySpace blog comes from the audience of MySpace members who become its "friends". MySpace is more of a social network (see Chapter 12 for more information on MySpace) with a blogging platform included rather than a stand-alone blogging software program such as Blogger.
- ✓ **Xanga:** Much like MySpace, Xanga is a social networking site with a blogging option integrated into it rather than a stand-alone blogging software program such as Blogger.

You can read more about the various blogging software programs in *Blogging For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Susannah Gardner and Shane Birley (Wiley).

Blogging with Blogger

Blogger has been around for a long time — longer than most other blogging software programs. That means people are familiar with it and comfortable with it. Because Blogger works with just about any Web browser, is available in a myriad of languages, and is free to use, the barriers to entry are practically nonexistent.

The first steps

Anyone can start a blog with Blogger *right now* and be a part of the blogosphere in less than five minutes. It's true. To start a blog using Blogger, you only need to visit the Blogger home page, shown in Figure 1-2. Then follow these three simple steps:

1. **Create an account.**
2. **Name your blog.**
3. **Choose a template.**

Naturally, navigating through the above steps and the steps that come after you launch your blog (when you customize it and make it look and act the way you want it to) require a bit more work. This book helps you move through the process smoothly.

Figure 1-2: The Blogger home page is where your entry into the world of blogging begins.



The right tools

To start a blog with Blogger, you only need a computer and an Internet connection. However, the more you blog, you might find that you want to experiment with different blogging methods and capabilities. For example, you might want to invest in a digital camera so you can take your own pictures to upload in your blog posts. Alternatively, you might want to buy a digital video camera and try your hand at video blogging. You can read Chapter 15 for more about blogging with different media.

The important thing to remember is that your blog will grow with you. Start with the basics. As you become more comfortable with Blogger and with blogging in general, don't be afraid to test the waters and try new things. Creating a podcast might sound impossible to you now, but the more you blog, the more apt you are to jump in and learn something new to take your blogging experience to the next level.



Don't rush in and buy all the cool gadgets on Day One. Take your time to learn and then decide which tools will help you meet your blogging goals. Blogging success doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and patience. None of those tools is going anywhere.