Chapter 1

Understanding Blogging and TypePad

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*B*efore we move ahead with some technical TypePad how-tos, let's start at the beginning. If you're not an experienced blogger, this chapter provides a simple framework for you, explaining the basic social dynamics and technology of blogging. The definitions and concepts we introduce in this chapter are used throughout the book, so a solid understanding of them is helpful. If you've already been blogging for some time, feel free to skip ahead to the next chapter.

In this chapter, we help you understand the social dynamics of a blog — how it works and why people even do it in the first place. We discuss the idea of community — a key difference between writing for a blog versus writing for a book or magazine — and we offer considerations for managing this community. We also explain some of the fundamental technological elements of a blog (including RSS feeds and search engine optimization) and how you can harness these elements to create a successful blog. All these points work toward producing a polished, attractive, user-friendly blog that invites participation from readers.

Dynamics of Blogging

Even if you don't have a blog yourself, you probably at least read a few of them. You may already have a sense of the general ebb and flow of a blogger's relationship with his or her readers. But reading a blog and writing a blog are two very different creatures — if you're just starting out, you'd be wise to have a solid understanding of the blogging dynamic before you jump in with both feet. This section gives those of you in the planning stages a few things to consider.

What is a blog?

The word *blog* is short for *weblog.* It's an online journal written by one or more authors. Some are updated multiple times a day; others are updated rarely, perhaps once a month. Most of the time, the author's most recent post is the first thing you see when you visit his or her blog, and as you scroll down, you'll be able to read the posts in reverse sequence, from the most recent to the oldest.

Unlike writing for a book or magazine, writing a blog offers the author immediate access to readers. There is no waiting around for editorial approval. A blogger can write a post and click Publish, and his or her words are instantly transmitted to the Web. Blogs have quickly joined the ranks of mainstream media as a cutting-edge and (sometimes!) accurate source of information for readers on a wide range of subjects.

Fundamental to the blogging experience is the presence of reader feedback in the form of a comments section for each post. The *comments section* is the place where readers can instantly agree, disagree, encourage, or ask questions of the author. Any comment you leave will, most likely, be visible to other readers of the blog. Many bloggers will tell you that some of the best, most robust discussion happens not in their own posts, but in the comments section. (You will occasionally encounter a blog that does not have a comments section, but this is rare.)

Why do people blog?

In the grand scheme of things, blogging is a relatively new form of human interaction. Engaging with readers through a computer screen can be enjoyable, but it can generate its fair share of headaches. Considering the millions of blogs that currently exist, countless people clearly think blogging is worth the effort. But why? Most of the answers to that question fall under two main categories: blogging for fun and blogging for business.

Blogging for fun

It's the reason most of us first ventured into the blogosphere — to have an online spot of our own that documents something important to us. Some people blog as a way to keep long-distance family members updated on the kids. Others enjoy using their blog as a journal for a specific process, such as a house remodeling or a weight-loss journey. Others document a hobby, such as knitting or woodworking, by sharing their achievements and offering tutorials. Plenty of others write a blog with no specific aim in mind — they keep a blog as a life journal, with no thematic thread running through it. You certainly don't need an official reason to start a blog.

You may often hear tips about how to develop your blog and gain a large readership; in reality, a large readership and a vocal comments section are not even remotely necessary to enjoy the process of blogging. You may start a blog and, quite unexpectedly, develop a following. Conversely, you may happily churn out posts for the benefit of only a handful of readers. Either option is acceptable, and you will find that your blogging satisfaction is highest when you focus on the quality of your own content, not on the number of people who may or may not be reading. Some of the finest blogs around are those written purely as a hobby, and the authors' clear passion for their topic makes the blogs so appealing to readers.

Most bloggers will tell you that a benefit of blogging (perhaps an unexpected one) is honing your writing and communication skills. As with most activities, we get better with practice, and preparing posts for a readership of any size can help us sharpen our writing abilities. Many people stumbled into blogging to document a particular process, only to realize that they enjoyed the act of crafting a good sentence. Think of it as your payoff for staying awake in freshman composition!

How to find related blogs

Wondering whether there's already a blog on your topic of interest? Visit `blogsearch.google.com` a search engine specifically for searching other blogs (as opposed to other Web sites). Or visit `blogs.com`, a site owned by TypePad's parent company, Six Apart. This site regularly links to blogs offering quality content on a range of subjects. Sites like these give you an opportunity to find out how (or whether) your particular topic is being addressed in the blogging community. Is left-handed cake decorating your thing? You'll probably find that there's a blog on the subject. Even if someone already has your particular topic or idea covered, don't hesitate to jump in and start, especially if you think you can offer a fresh perspective or an interesting twist.

Blogging for business

A growing number of bloggers are earning income on their blogs, primarily through selling ad space, a subject we tackle more fully in Chapter 12. Especially in your early blogging days, keep your expectations realistic when it comes to earning income — only a small minority of bloggers are able to earn enough income to fully support themselves through blogging. But it's not a bad way to supplement your main income, even if only modestly.

Business blogging isn't just for individuals; companies large and small are setting up interactive spots in the blogosphere where they can engage with customers. Even if these blogs don't generate income themselves, they are a valuable (and very inexpensive) marketing tool for talking about new products, offering technical support, or explaining your creative process. If you're a book author or musician, you may find the blogosphere is an efficient way to support your primary artistic purpose by connecting with the people who buy your books or music. In this interactive age, consumers increasingly expect to be able to engage online. Chapter 2 offers you some information about TypePad's services geared toward business bloggers.

Specifically, small business owners with limited marketing budgets may find blogging to be invaluable in showcasing their product or service. Use a blog to host a giveaway of your product or offer photographs of new products coming out soon. Allow customers to give you feedback, and you might find your next big idea in your own comments section.

Building a blogging community

Blogging is, at its core, an instant form of dialogue between blogger and reader. People connect online by agreeing, disagreeing, laughing, commiserating, learning, or questioning, among other things. This dialogue creates connection, which in turn leads to a word you'll hear often in the blogosphere: community. Whether you're blogging as an individual or as part of a bigger team or corporate entity, establishing a community is key to increasing readership. To encourage that community, you'll need to consider a few things before you start blogging, such as how you will engage with your readers, handle negative comments, and project your intended image.

Understanding online community

Community, as described in the context of blogging, is simply the idea that people connect with one another online. Community refers to the way that people congregate in cyberspace, bound together by common interests or causes. People engage with one another online through comments, e-mails, social media (see Chapter 10), and other means, forming a sense of togetherness. A common element (usually) of the most widely read blogs is a strong sense of community — a feeling that the blog in question is a reliable place to gather, receive information, share ideas, and possibly even generate friendships.

REMEMBER

It's important to note that in defining what blogging community is, we should also take note of what it isn't. Most wise and experienced bloggers will tell you that the online connection can be a strong one, but it should never take the place of real-life relationships. Avoid the temptation of engaging so heartily in your online community that you neglect the real one. Finding balance as a blogger is key, and you can do this by seeking out blogging tools that help you engage in the online community without letting it govern your life. In Chapter 7, we discuss TypePad's commenting features, explaining how you can use those tools to streamline your blog interactions in a practical way.

Engaging effectively in the online community

You may be blogging just for fun, with no intention of developing a readership. As we say earlier in this chapter, this is a perfectly valid reason to write a blog, and you shouldn't feel any sense of obligation to draw readers to your blog if that's not why you're blogging. But if your aim is to turn your TypePad blog into a place where people want to gather, be deliberate in how you engage in the blogosphere. Some bloggers pay consultants big bucks to help generate a sense of community on their blog. The truth is that there is no magic formula for this — just hard work, good manners, and common sense. Here are a few things you can try:

✔ **Offer your readers something useful.** Building a successful blog ultimately involves offering good content with a clear purpose — for example, to inform, entertain, or encourage. Write for your own enjoyment, but (if you want to develop a readership) do it with your readers in mind — what is valuable to them? Chapter 6 offers more advice about writing good posts.

✔ **Participate generously in the blogging community.** Especially as you're starting out, you can encourage dialogue at your own blog by participating in the dialogue elsewhere. Leave thoughtful comments at other blogs, and when you find something worth reading, link to it from your own blog. This builds goodwill with other bloggers and has a way of coming back to you.

✔ **Elicit feedback.** If it's feedback you're after, write in a way that invites it! Ask a question of your readers, or bring up a topic that you're sure people want to discuss.

✔ **Write often.** People are more likely to gather at a blog that is updated at least a few times per week. Don't have the time or inclination to post this often? Depending on the TypePad level you choose, you can write posts ahead of time and then schedule them to publish in the future (see Chapter 6). This helpful feature allows you to write multiple posts when the mood strikes you and publish them at your desired pace.

✔ **Be user-friendly.** Offer a design that is easy on your readers' eyes (see Chapter 11) and use categories to make your blog searchable and streamlined (see Chapter 6).

Setting standards

The give-and-take dynamic of an online community is generally a good thing for bloggers; most of us find the dialogue intriguing and stimulating. Many blogs with large readerships have grown, at least in part, because they've engaged effectively with readers and other bloggers. They've offered their readers something that is useful or entertaining or both. They've asked their readers for feedback, offering them a chance to interact with one another.

It's not a bad idea for bloggers to set some commonsense ground rules at their blog, defining how they'll manage things and how they expect their readers to interact. Many bloggers will go so far as to set up a separate page in which they spell out their guidelines for community interaction and etiquette. (See Chapter 6 for instructions on how TypePad allows you to set up a page and to find out how a page is different from a regular blog post.) Especially if you plan to blog about hot-button issues that can breed controversy, setting guidelines might be a sanity saver for you. Some suggestions for these guidelines include

✔ Explaining whether or not you delete comments and if so, on what grounds (such as offensive language or name-calling, spam, or off-topic comments).

✔ Letting readers know that they can always expect a response to your private e-mails or that they can never expect one, or (perhaps more realistically) something in between.

✔ Spelling out your own guidelines on whether you accept payments for posts or free products in exchange for a review (see Chapter 12). Transparency in this department, particularly, is an important element of developing trust in your readers.

The blogosphere is a wide-open space, which means there is limitless potential for interaction from a wide variety of people. Don't fear the occasional *troll,* which is blogspeak for a commenter who hangs around your comment section purposely to stir up trouble. It happens to nearly every blogger at some point, even those who are blogging about noncontroversial topics. It is generally prudent to ignore trollish behavior; giving attention to it often makes it worse. (The exception, of course, is if the behavior reaches a level that is threatening. In this case, you should always contact the proper authorities.) Don't let yourself become discouraged by the occasional negativity; dust yourself off and think of what you enjoy about blogging. For every story about negative comments, there are a dozen stories about positive, helpful interactions that may even lead to real-life friendships.

Considering privacy issues

Privacy is understandably a big deal to many bloggers. You may be starting a blog with the intention of growing a large readership and even building a business — if this is the case, you may be happy to have as many eyes as possible browsing through your blog. But particularly for people who blog as

hobbyists or to chronicle more personal items such as daily family life, it can be disconcerting to know that complete strangers may read the words you write. TypePad offers several privacy options, including password protection, comment blocking, and search-engine blocking (we tell you how to apply these options in Chapters 4, 7, and 5, respectively). Even with these options in place, it's still a good idea for bloggers to apply common sense and restraint when dealing with the issue of privacy. Use the TypePad tools that best suit your needs, but use your head as well. Here are a few things to consider:

- ✔ **Think of others.** You might not be an especially private person, but perhaps your spouse, boss, or mother-in-law is. It's a common courtesy to consider others' privacy preferences before you write something about them.

- ✔ **It's a small world.** Ask any blogger you know, and they will probably be able to tell you a story about the time a real-life acquaintance unexpectedly ran across the blog. If you write a post about how much you hate your neighbor's dog, be aware that your neighbor might find the post. You'd be surprised how often this type of thing happens in the blog world, so remember what you already learned the hard way in eighth grade: If you won't say something to someone's face, don't say it behind his or her back.

- ✔ **Remember that you can't take it back.** Even if you delete something you've written, it may continue to be referenced by search engines indefinitely. There's not much you can do to change that, other than changing your publicity options. Your mom's advice to "think before you speak" applies to blogging too.

- ✔ **Start slowly.** Especially if you're a new blogger and you're not sure where your comfort level lies along the privacy spectrum, err on the side of revealing too little instead of too much. Perhaps you'll want to withhold information such as real names and geographical locations until you've spent a little more time in the blogging community. You could use a pseudonym for yourself or your family, or you might not want to include photographs of your children, for example. After you've blogged for a while, you will likely develop a better sense of what privacy levels make you most comfortable. At that point, you can always begin to fill in more private details for your readers, should you so choose.

Finding an online identity

Your *online identity* is the face you present to the online world. It consists of, among other things, the name of your blog, your domain name, the name you use as a user id, your writing tone (on your own blog and in the comments you leave elsewhere), and the content of your posts. As a blogger, the words you write convey something about yourself, so be intentional about communicating authentically.

Using your own voice

It might initially sound appealing to invent an online persona for yourself, and certainly some bloggers have done this with varying degrees of success. Ultimately, though, you will likely find the greatest personal satisfaction from conducting your online interactions the way you would conduct your real-life ones. In other words, be yourself. As you write your posts (see Chapter 6), avoid the temptation to imitate another blogger. Instead, develop your own writing style or refine the one you already have. If you fall in love with blogging and use your blog as an online "home" for many years, you'll be glad that you use the voice you're most comfortable with — your own.

Choosing a name for your blog

It's one of the first decisions you have to make about your blog, and it's a big one: what should you name your blog? In Chapter 3, we tell you how to set up your TypePad account, and you'll be asked right away to name your TypePad URL (your blog's online address, such as `http:// typepadfordummies. typepad.com`). We strongly suggest naming your URL the same name as your blog, as a way to keep one cohesive online identity. If your URL is `http:// typepadfordummies.typepad.com,` you can see why your readers might be confused if they visit your blog and see "A Million and One Uses for Orange Juice" splashed across the top of your header design. (See Chapter 3 for a further explanation of the difference between a URL and a header.)

Remember that the name of your blog will help a reader form an initial opinion about the purpose and tone of your content. When you browse at a bookstore, aren't you more likely to pick up a book with a catchy and descriptive title? It's the same for blogs — if your blog title makes an impression, a new reader is likely to stick around and read more. Keep the following advice in mind as you develop your blog's name:

✔ **Check domain availability.** Many bloggers like to have their own domain name (such as `typepadfordummies.com`). It's a good idea to check the availability of your blog name as a domain name (and buy it right away) even if you're not quite ready to use it. See Appendix A for an explanation of domain names and how to map one to your TypePad blog.

✔ **Be descriptive.** Ideally, your title is an accurate reflection of your content. If you write snarky political commentary in your posts, reflect that tone in your title. If your blog is general in nature (such as a journal), you'll probably want to choose a more general name.

✔ **Avoid commonplace wording.** Terms such as *reflections, musings,* and *thoughts* aren't catchy and are overused. If you want your blog to be memorable, steer away from bland wording in your title.

✔ **Use a thesaurus.** Think of the words and concepts you hope to communicate to a potential reader. Write the words down and then use a thesaurus to list even more variations. Play around with them until something seems right.

> ✔ **Keep it short.** A long URL is hard to type, and a long blog title is hard to remember. Corporations choose short slogans because they stick in our heads, so apply the same logic to your blog name. Anything more than four or five words is probably too long.
>
> ✔ **Brainstorm.** Don't just think of words that describe your blog. Especially if your blog is a personal journal, think of any creative word or phrase from your past that might translate into a good title. The name of the street where you grew up? A compelling phrase from your favorite poem? A goofy nickname your spouse calls you? Interesting blog titles can lurk in unexpected places. See Chapter 17 for some examples of TypePad bloggers who have made great title selections.

Understanding Blogging Technologies

When you decide to start a blog, you'll need to choose a blogging platform. A *blogging platform* is simply the software you use for blogging. It's the site you sign in to when you're ready to write, edit, or manage your blog. Several platforms are available (TypePad, Blogger, and WordPress, for example), and they all offer a wide range of technical options. We offer a few comparisons of those platforms in Chapter 2. This section explains the basic blogging technologies present in most blogging platforms, including Rich Text and basic HTML editing choices, RSS feeds, and search engine optimization options. We also explain the difference between hosted and self-hosted platforms.

Rich Text

All major blogging platforms offer two ways to compose a blog post: HTML mode or Rich Text mode. HTML (short for Hypertext Markup Language) is the basic programming language (or code) that allows your browser to "read" your blog post and display it correctly. If you're familiar with HTML, you can make changes or tweaks as necessary to manipulate how your text and images appear. Don't worry if you don't know a thing about HTML; you can still blog. You'll just want to use the Rich Text editor instead of the HTML editor.

Rich Text is sometimes referred to as *WYSIWYG* (pronounced wiz-ee-wig) — it's the acronym for What You See Is What You Get. In other words, when you type your post in the Rich Text (WYSIWYG) editor, you'll see a preview of how the text and images of your post will look when published. The Rich Text editor is similar to what you're used to working with in Microsoft Word or Apple's Pages. The Rich Text editor has buttons to click to format text (such as bold, italic, and underline), to insert images and other multimedia files easily, and to change the alignment of your text. Chapter 6 explains these buttons more thoroughly.

Figures 1-1 and 1-2 show the difference between TypePad's Rich Text editor and HTML editor.

Figure 1-1: Use the Rich Text editor for writing your blog posts.
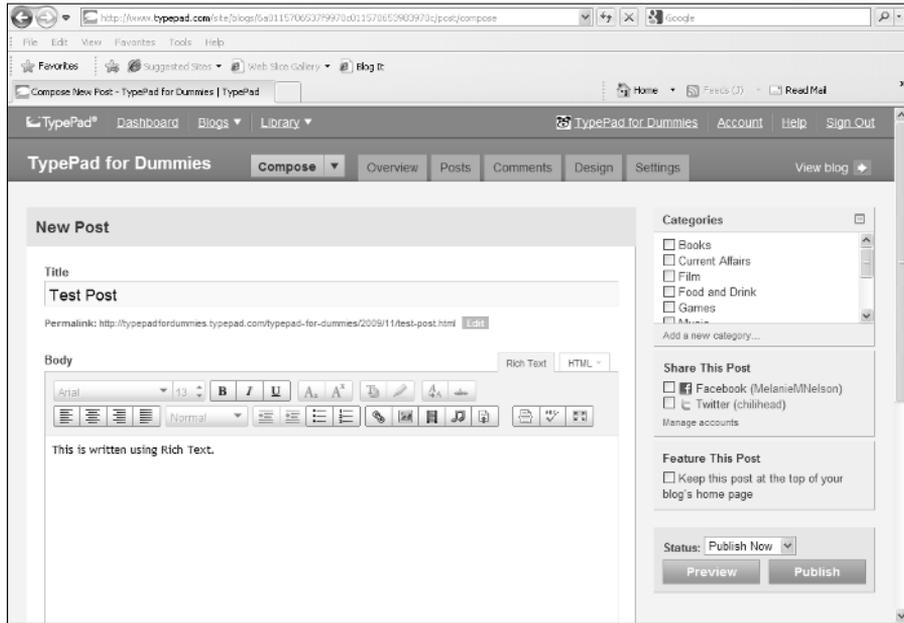
Figure 1-2: Use the HTML editor if you need to tweak your HTML code.

REMEMBER
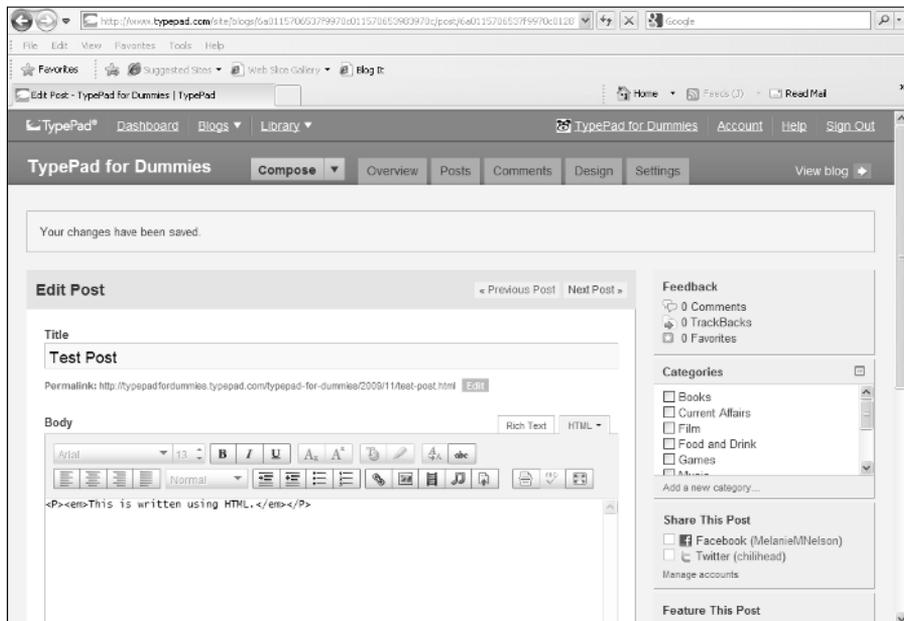
Depending on the blogging platform you choose, your WYSIWYG mode may be called Rich Text (TypePad), Compose (Blogger), or Visual (WordPress). They all mean WYSIWYG.

RSS feeds

If you read a blog regularly and want to know when it's updated, you could visit that blog several times a day to see whether the author has posted anything new, or you could subscribe to the RSS feed and let it do the work for you. *RSS* stands for *Really Simple Syndication* and is the standard way for your readers to be alerted when you update your blog. The RSS feed sends new content to a feed reader as that content is available.

A *feed reader* (also known as an *aggregator*) is a site that allows you to sign up for an account and add the RSS feeds of blogs and Web sites you're interested in. The feed reader provides the updates for all the feeds you're subscribed to in one place. Two of the most widely used feed readers are Google Reader (`www.google.com/reader`) and NewsGator (`www.NewsGator.com`).

Using a feed reader yourself is easy. All you have to do is establish an account with a feed reader, subscribe to the RSS feed you want to monitor, and then check your feed reader when you have the time.

An RSS feed for your blog is automatically generated when you sign up with any of the major blogging platforms (TypePad, WordPress, or Blogger). There are several formats for RSS feeds: Atom, RSS 2.0, and RSS 1.0. Atom and RSS are basically the same types of blog feeds; it should not matter which feed you choose to offer or subscribe to. However, if you are podcasting and want to offer a feed for that service, you will want to offer RSS 2.0 to your readers because it offers the necessary parameters for that function.

Another way for readers to subscribe to your RSS feed is through e-mail. Many people prefer to receive new alerts in their e-mail inbox instead of through a third-party feed reader. You can offer this option with FeedBurner (which we discuss in Chapter 5).

Search engine optimization (SEO)

If you want people to find your blog when they do a search on a particular topic, you'll want to think about how to use SEO (search engine optimization) on your blog. *Search engine optimization* is simply using keywords effectively in your posts and titles so search engines can catalog your blog and include it in search results.

Before we explain how to use SEO on your blog, though, let us first explain how search engines work. Search engines send out virtual search teams of

code called *robots* (also known as *bots* or *spiders)* that visit blogs and Web sites to look for words people use when they search for information. As these spiders crawl around each Web site or blog, they gather data relevant to what people are searching for and rank that data. (How they rank the data is based on algorithms and constantly changing formulas and is dependent on the search engine.) When spiders crawl your blog looking for relevance, they are looking specifically at semantic data (what you're writing about and which words you use) as well as contextual data (who is linking to you and what words they're using when they link to you). The more relevant your blog is to a specific topic or search term, the higher your blog appears on the results page for that topic or search term.

SEO is such a large topic that hundreds of books, blogs, and Web sites are devoted to teaching you how to use it effectively. We want to give you a few pointers to get you started, but this list is in no way exhaustive. Here are few suggestions on how to use keywords to help your blog's SEO rankings:

✔ **Use relevant keywords in your main post title.** Titles have more weight with search engines than paragraph text (though that's important, too). Including a keyword or two in your post title will help your SEO ranking. The title of your post will also be the permalink of your article. A *permalink* is the address of an individual blog post. Each post you write has its own address (permalink). Search engines consider your post titles and permalinks as they rank your site for relevance to a topic. Here are two examples of titles:

Not so great: Back from Vacation!

SEO friendly: New Orleans French Quarter: Cafe Du Monde, St. Louis Cathedral, and Bourbon Street!

Not only is the second title more helpful to your readers by telling them what your post is about, but it's also more likely to be picked up by search engines because it uses terms people search for regularly (that is, if they're looking for information about New Orleans).

✔ **Use keywords associated with your topic and niche within your post.** One way to ensure that you're using relevant keywords throughout your blog is to think about how you would find the information if you were searching for it. What words would you type into a search engine to find information on your topic? Use those words in your titles and articles.

✔ **Choose your link words carefully.** Try to be as descriptive as possible when making words into a link. For example, if you'd like your readers to read your blog policies, instead of writing "My blog policies are here" (where the word "here" is a link to your policies) or "Click here for my blog policies" (where the phrase "Click here" is the link to your policies), write something like "Before you leave a comment, read my blog policy for commenters" (where "blog policy for commenters" is the link to your policy). Not only are the longer links more descriptive, but also, they're more search-engine-friendly. Spiders and bots are looking for interpretive word strings — phrases such as *click here* are everywhere

> on the Web and are hardly useful in setting your content apart from the crowd. Make your content stand out by using descriptive words and phrases as links.
>
> ✔ **Assign relevant keywords and categories to your post before you publish.** Chapter 6 shows you how to create categories that fit your topic and how to attach tags (or keywords) to your posts to make them more SEO-friendly.

Search engine optimization is important if you'd like to expand your readership or make your content readily available to others, but it shouldn't take over your blog. Your readers will be turned off if all your content reads like a commercial or search results page. Write content that appeals to your readers (interests them, helps them, or answers a question for them) and creates community. Incorporate SEO as you go, but not at the expense of alienating your readers. As your blog content grows, so will your SEO because it's information people want to know. The bottom line: Create content for people, but keep it friendly for the machines.

Hosted versus self-hosted blogging platforms

When you are comparing blog platforms to see which one is right for you, one of the things you'll need to consider is whether the platform is hosted or self-hosted. A *hosted blogging platform* is one that allows the blog to reside on the host's server. TypePad is an example of a hosted blogging platform. TypePad allows you to keep your blog on its server and use its software to blog — you don't have to download anything to your computer. All updates to the server or software are handled by TypePad instead of you. Hosted blogging platforms such as TypePad are very popular because they offer an easy way to get started with a blog without having to know anything about HTML, CSS, or Perl (a few of the types of programming code that build your blog behind the scenes and allow your browser to read your blog design properly) — using a hosted blogging platform is pretty much a point-and-click affair.

Although hosted blogging platforms are popular and easy to use, they have some issues you should consider before you commit:

> ✔ Blogs on hosted platforms can appear to be less professional because they have `.typepad.com` (or `.blogspot.com` for Blogger blogs) at the end of the URL (for example, `http://typepadfordummies.typepad.com`). However, you can skirt this issue by buying your own domain name and mapping it to your account (see Chapter 3 and Appendix A for further information and instructions). What that means is that you can buy your own domain name (for example, `www.typepadfordummies.com`) and map it to your TypePad account so when someone visits your

> blog, they see `http://www.typepadfordummies.com` in the address
> bar instead of `http://www.typepadfordummies.typepad.com`.
>
> ✔ Hosted blogging platforms give you less control over HTML and CSS, and
> you won't see any Perl. Although you can tweak your HTML in your Rich
> Text editor, that applies only to individual posts. If you're fluent with
> CSS and HTML and are used to making changes to your blog by changing
> the code by hand, you'll be disappointed. You're not allowed to access
> the full code of your blog directly. There are work-arounds (see Chapter
> 14, where we discuss how to use Advanced Templates with TypePad),
> but you'll still be limited. If you don't know the first thing about HTML
> and are fine not messing with your code (and, in fact, prefer not to), this
> issue won't be a problem for you.

A *self-hosted blogging platform* is one that allows you to use its blogging software but asks you to house your blog on your own server. Because you likely aren't set up with your own server, you will need to pay a third-party Web host to host your blog (you can learn more about choosing a server provider at WebHosting Talk: `webhostingtalk.com`). Movable Type (sister to TypePad) and WordPress.org are self-hosted blogging platforms. The thing that makes self-hosted platforms attractive to bloggers is that they allow you to have full control over your HTML, CSS, Perl, and PHP. Code junkies love to have access to their code. The biggest con to using a self-hosted blogging platform is the learning curve. A self-hosted platform requires you to contact a server provider and rent space, install the software on the server (usually a one-click install with CPanel, which most server providers offer), and transfer files from your computer to the server (this is called File Transfer Protocol, or FTP). Although updates to the server will most likely be handled by your server provider, software updates will be handled by you (again, usually a simple one-click procedure, but one you're responsible for).

If you're new to the blogging world and aren't sure if you'll be staying or just want to get your feet wet before you commit to so much responsibility, we suggest going with a hosted blogging platform such as TypePad. The hosted platforms will help you slowly familiarize yourself with blogging and the mechanics behind it without overwhelming you. If you decide you want to manage your own code down the line, you can migrate your blog to a self-hosted platform such as Movable Type or WordPress.org.

Considering some of the basic concepts and terminologies we've given you in this chapter will help you navigate more smoothly throughout the blogosphere (whichever platform you ultimately choose). A successful blogger is one who is well-informed about blogging trends and solidly connected in the blogging community. Along with what we've told you here, keep a keen eye out for changing technologies and engage honestly and fairly in the blogging community around you. Most important, don't let yourself get mired down in what you *don't* know — the best way to learn is to jump in and start!