

Chapter 1

A New Friend Named BuddyPress

In This Chapter

- ▶ Building a community-driven Web site with BuddyPress
 - ▶ Creating communities for niche industries
 - ▶ Discovering the benefits of BuddyPress
 - ▶ Laying the WordPress foundation
 - ▶ Exploring the BuddyPress community
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The popularity of social communities on the Web is undeniable. If you picked up this book, most likely, you're already familiar with WordPress. WordPress has created the world's most popular blogging platform (no kidding, the *world's!*), allowing millions of users all over the globe to freely publish content on the Internet and invite others to join the discussion. BuddyPress, introduced to the WordPress community in 2008, was the next logical step, enabling bloggers to expand their Web sites to include a social community for their visitors to participate in.

This chapter explores why you want to create a social community on your Web site and the benefits of using the BuddyPress platform to accomplish that goal. Because BuddyPress integrates with the WordPress blogging platform, you also discover some of the BuddyPress features that work in tandem with WordPress MU, such as member blogs and blog tracking features.

Building a Social Community with BuddyPress

Social communities are all over the Web today. One very popular example is Facebook (<http://facebook.com>). Facebook launched in 2004 and today is the largest and most popular social network on the Web, with more than 250 million users (and growing). Before getting into details of building your

own social community with the BuddyPress platform, have a look at a few impressive statistics about Facebook (see Figure 1-1).

- ✔ More than 120 million users log in to Facebook at least once a day.
- ✔ The average Facebook user has 120 friends on the site.
- ✔ More than 1 billion photos are uploaded to Facebook each month.
- ✔ More than 10 million videos are shared on Facebook each month.
- ✔ More than 45 million active user groups exist on Facebook.
- ✔ The fastest growing demographic on Facebook are those 35 years old or older.

Those are some impressive statistics, no? You might be asking why I'm sharing Facebook stats (www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics) in a book about BuddyPress. The answer is simple: They illustrate the extreme popularity of social communities and the availability of a network where people can connect, share, and interact with others via a computer connected to the Internet.

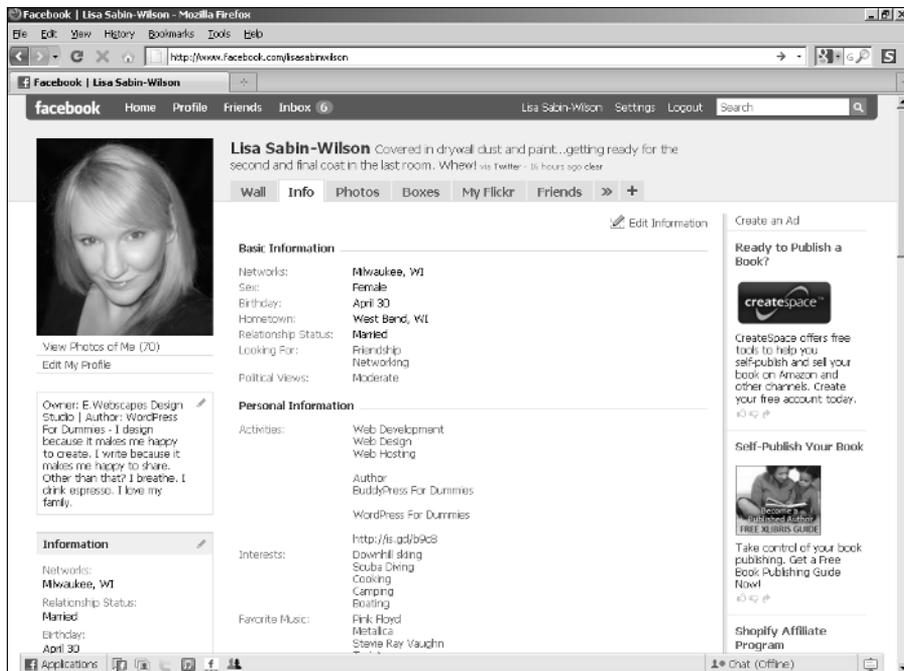


Figure 1-1: Facebook is the world's largest and most popular social community.

BuddyPress allows you to create a very similar type of social community on your own WordPress-powered Web site and helps you take your existing Web site to the next level by allowing your visitors to become members. A BuddyPress social community gives its members a handful of core features that are easy to set up and allows them to immediately connect with other members of the community. Members can have extensive profiles that contain personal biographical information that allows other members to find out more about them. Members share with other members any information they want, from personal information and news to Web site links, photos, videos, music, and more.

Why build a social community?

In March 2009, I attended a conference in Austin, Texas, called South by Southwest Interactive where geeks from all over the world gather for one weekend to network and discover the new, exciting, and innovative Internet trends and technologies. I attend this conference annually, and there is always a buzz about the major trend for that year. The buzz phrase at South by Southwest in 2009 was, “It’s all about the conversation.” The Web has become more than just a place to *obtain* information today; it has become a place to *share* information and connect with other people through ongoing conversations through different types of social media. Social communities give people the opportunity to *be* the media rather than just be consumers of the media.

One nice benefit to Facebook is its size — almost everyone I know has a Facebook account and I can find them there, add them as a friend, and connect with them easily (and probably more often than I would off the computer). A negative aspect of Facebook is that all the content shared on that site is stored on that site. Therefore, for people to find the source of the information they are seeking, they end up on the Facebook Web site, rather than your site; and the point of having a Web site is to build content that people want to read and consume.

Your Web site isn’t generic, is it? Of course not! More than likely, your Web site is about something — a specific topic, product, or service. BuddyPress gives you the opportunity to open up your Web site for members to join your community and engage in discussions about topics that you’re passionate about; so passionate that you started a Web site. You aren’t the only one in the world with a passion for your particular topic — inviting others who share your passion to join your community will benefit you and your members by allowing the entire group to share advice, tips, and connections.

Types of people who build social communities

It's been said that there's a blog on the Internet for every possible topic that you can think of, and it's true! There are blogs about politics, education, media, technology, beauty, Hollywood, arts and crafts, designing, health and medicine, and news, just to name several. If you can think of a topic — I bet there's a blog about it.

These topical blogs function in the way you would suspect them to: The blog owner publishes articles and content that he or she thinks readers will find interesting; then visitors to the site are invited to participate in the discussion of the articles through blog comments.

Web site owners who want to take the interactivity on their site a few steps further can now build a social community where visitors to the Web site can create a membership and become part of the content and conversation. In addition to leaving comments on the articles, members can write their own articles, share more information, and participate in the site as a full contributor rather than just a visitor. Members can benefit from networking and connecting with other members within the community as well. Here are a few examples of the types of communities I'm talking about, all built with the BuddyPress/WordPress platform. (In Chapter 17, I give ten real-world examples of BuddyPress in action.)

- ✓ **Tasty Kitchen** (<http://thepioneerwoman.com/tasty-kitchen>): An active social community of members who like to cook.
- ✓ **Gigaom Pro** (<http://pro.gigaom.com>): A network of analysts providing technology-related research papers and notes.
- ✓ **VWTankWars** (<http://tdi.vw.com>): By Volkswagen, a network of VW TDI drivers working to make a world record mileage score.

Businesses large and small benefit from adding a social community component to their Web sites by gaining the ability to invite their customers, or potential customers, to participate in the discussion about their business.

Political movements are ripe for social community involvement because they encourage the sharing of ideas and news, and the involvement in causes. Some would say that the success of Barack Obama's campaign for President of the United States was aided tremendously by the very energetic and active social community of voters on the Internet. Barack Obama's campaign Web site was a social community of voters and potential voters, whose thoughts and ideas helped to shape a good portion of Obama's campaign. The success of that social movement on the Internet is undeniable, no matter which way your politics fall.

Other niche industries and communities can experience the same type of success when they gather people in one environment on the Internet — it's all about listening to the conversation that develops!

Discovering the Benefits of BuddyPress

Working with the BuddyPress software since July 2008, I can attest to the rapid (and wonderful) development that takes place to improve BuddyPress. BuddyPress is constantly improving the software and introducing exciting new and useful features with each new release. If you spend time on the official BuddyPress Web site at <http://buddypress.org> (see Figure 1-2), you'll find that the development of the platform is community-driven; that is, the community suggests ideas and wish lists for new features, and the developers of the BuddyPress software do their best to answer the call. Imagine a software company, say Microsoft, driving the development of its operating system in such a manner: The world would be a better place! It's exciting to be part of a development community that is so responsive to its users.

Figure 1-2:
The official
BuddyPress
Web site.



Aside from the exciting pace and quality of development, BuddyPress also offers the following advantages to users who wish to create a social community on their Web site:

- ✔ **WordPress MU:** BuddyPress plugs right into the WordPress MU platform. WordPress is very easy to set up and use, even for the novice Web site developer.
- ✔ **Ease of use:** BuddyPress is easy to install and set up; you don't need to be a major geek or programmer to accomplish these tasks.
- ✔ **Flexibility:** BuddyPress offers a suite of plugins for WordPress that you can choose from. You can choose to use all of them or just a few of them.
- ✔ **Extensibility:** Using plugins and themes, you can customize BuddyPress to suit your needs.
- ✔ **Community:** As I've already mentioned, the BuddyPress community is a very active adjunct to the already huge and active WordPress community. Finding assistance and camaraderie is just a mouse click away!

The following sections will quench your curiosity with more details on these features and point you to the various places in this book where you can find more detailed information.

WordPress as the foundation

You're probably aware of how easy the WordPress blogging platform (see Figure 1-3) makes creating a blog or Web site. Millions of users blog on WordPress (<http://wordpress.org>), a proven success in Web publishing and content management. Using such a solid and successful platform as WordPress for the foundation of your new social community (built with BuddyPress) is a formula for success because WordPress makes managing and maintaining a Web site very easy.



Three different versions of the WordPress software currently exist, as follows:

- ✓ **WordPress.com:** This is the hosted version.
- ✓ **WordPress.org:** This is the single user, self-hosted version.
- ✓ **WordPress MU:** This is the multi-user version.

The screenshot shows the WordPress.org homepage. At the top, there's a navigation menu with links for Home, Showcase, Extend, About, Docs, Blog, Forums, Hosting, and Download. Below the navigation, there's a statistics section showing 39 Categories, 14 Pending, 155 Tags, and 0 Spam. A 'QuickPress' form is visible, allowing users to create a new post with fields for Title, Content, and Tags. To the right of the form, there's a 'Download WordPress 2.8.2' button. The main content area features a paragraph about WordPress being a state-of-the-art publishing platform, followed by a 'Ready to get started?' section with a 'Download WordPress 2.8.2' button. At the bottom, there are sections for 'WordPress Books', 'From the Blog', 'It's Easy As...', and 'WordPress Users'.

Figure 1-3:
The official
WordPress
Web site.

Currently, the only version that is compatible with BuddyPress is the WordPress MU version. WordPress.com and WordPress.org do not have the ability to host the features of BuddyPress right now, although that may certainly change in the future. When I refer to WordPress in this book, I am referring to WordPress MU, the multiple user version of the software. You will find a great deal of information about WordPress MU in Chapters 2 and 3.

The WordPress platform gives you a great foundation for your social community with the following features:

- ✓ Multiple member blogs
- ✓ Articles organized by topic
- ✓ Content archived by month and year
- ✓ Categorized link lists
- ✓ Interactive comments
- ✓ Privacy controls
- ✓ Built-in RSS feed syndication
- ✓ Easy management of media files, such as photos, video, and music
- ✓ Hundreds of plugins and themes to extend your Web site

Once you have WordPress running on your site, you're more than halfway toward building a social community. Adding the BuddyPress suite of plugins gives you the ability to extend additional features to your visitors that allow them to join your site's community and create a full-featured member profile; create a blog on your site; and create groups, forums, photo albums, and more.



I mention in the Introduction that *BuddyPress For Dummies* is not a guide on using the WordPress software, but rather a book about adding the BuddyPress platform onto an existing WordPress-powered site. Although Chapters 2 and 3 of this book explore the basics of getting WordPress running on your site, this book assumes a certain level of existing familiarity with WordPress. You might also want to pick up my other book, *WordPress For Dummies* for more in-depth information on running WordPress on your Web site.

With WordPress, you already have a blog or Web site where you're publishing content and inviting visitors to join in the discussion by providing the opportunity for feedback on your content through comments. WordPress also gives you an extended Multi User option where you can invite visitors to join your site and create their own blog on your domain. You can choose to run only one blog (yours), or enable the options that allow your community members to create blogs of their own on your domain. A WordPress-powered blog with the multiple blog option enabled is typically referred to as a *blog network* because it creates a directory of different blogs written by different authors on a variety of topics, all hosted on your Web site.



One important thing to take away from this section is that BuddyPress requires the WordPress MU platform in order to work. That is, you cannot use BuddyPress if you aren't already using WordPress MU.

Be sure to read Chapters 2 and 3 for more information on the WordPress platform, including how to install WordPress on your Web server to lay the foundation for building your BuddyPress social community.

BuddyPress is easy to use

One of the most attractive features of the WordPress and BuddyPress platforms is the ease in which you can install, set up, and use the platform to manage and maintain your Web site. You don't need to be a certified geek or programmer to get BuddyPress up and running, as Chapters 2, 3, and 4 show you. Even someone new to WordPress and BuddyPress can have a full-featured Web site, blog, and social community up and running in a relatively short period.

WordPress has bragging rights to a 5-minute installation (see Chapter 2), and BuddyPress takes even less time to install. Setting up the options for the various BuddyPress features is transparent and easy — just use the WordPress dashboard to configure the feature options. Check out Chapter 3 for a guided tour through the WordPress dashboard to help familiarize yourself with the lay of the land.

Check out Chapter 4 for the steps to install BuddyPress and an exploration of the BuddyPress configuration options.

BuddyPress is flexible to your needs

BuddyPress is an extensive suite of plugins that allows you to create the following features within your social community:

- ✓ **Extended member profiles:** These include shared personal information about each member of your community.
- ✓ **Member avatars:** This feature allows your members to upload a unique personal photo.
- ✓ **Member and site activity streams:** A listing of member actions and activities throughout your community.
- ✓ **Activity wires:** A place where members can leave comments and messages for other members and groups in a public manner.
- ✓ **Member groups:** Community members can gather together in groups based on topics and interests.

- ✔ **Member forums:** Members can create and participate in topic-related discussions with other members.
- ✔ **Blog tracking:** A listing of blog activity throughout your community, including new blog posts and comments.
- ✔ **Searchable member, blog, and group directories:** Search through member lists, group lists, and blogs to find specific information you are looking for.
- ✔ **Member status updates:** Short but sweet updates members can share that answer the basic question: What am I doing right now?

You might find that you don't want or need to use all the features that BuddyPress has to offer, and that's okay. You don't have to use them just because they exist. BuddyPress allows you to use only what you need — you can even delete extraneous features completely if you don't want to use them — enabling you to tailor your BuddyPress community to your liking.

Chapters 5 through 8 provide an in-depth exploration of each BuddyPress feature to assist you in choosing the ones you want to use. Use them all, or use just one — the choice is completely yours.

Extending BuddyPress capabilities

As I mention at the beginning of this section, the BuddyPress development community is very active and constantly striving to improve the BuddyPress experience for both site owners and community members. Not only are development community members active and involved with the development of the BuddyPress software, but several members of the BuddyPress development crew also work to create BuddyPress plugins and themes.

BuddyPress plugins are additional pieces of software that, by themselves, would not work or do you any good. Combine them with BuddyPress and WordPress, however, and you can extend the functionality of your BuddyPress-powered social community to bring additional fun and exciting features to your users.

Using BuddyPress plugins, you can

- ✔ Integrate elements of popular social media sites, such as YouTube videos, into your community.
- ✔ Allow users to add Twitter feeds to their member profiles and activity wires.

- ✔ Integrate Facebook content into your BuddyPress community.
- ✔ Extend search engine optimization (SEO) enhancements to further improve the visibility of your BuddyPress social community in popular search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!.

These features aren't built into the BuddyPress platform, but you can add them by downloading and installing BuddyPress plugins. Chapters 13 and 14 provide you with the information needed to add these additional plugins and features to your site.

Another way to extend your BuddyPress social community is to customize the look and layout of your site with BuddyPress themes and templates. BuddyPress comes packaged with themes for you to use. Figure 1-4 shows the BuddyPress Default theme, but you can also use the BuddyPress Classic theme, which is shown in Figure 1-5.



The BuddyPress default themes include all the basic elements that you need when starting a new BuddyPress social community on your Web site. You can extend your community in several ways by using the plugins and themes released by members of the BuddyPress community, but these default themes are an easy way to get started.

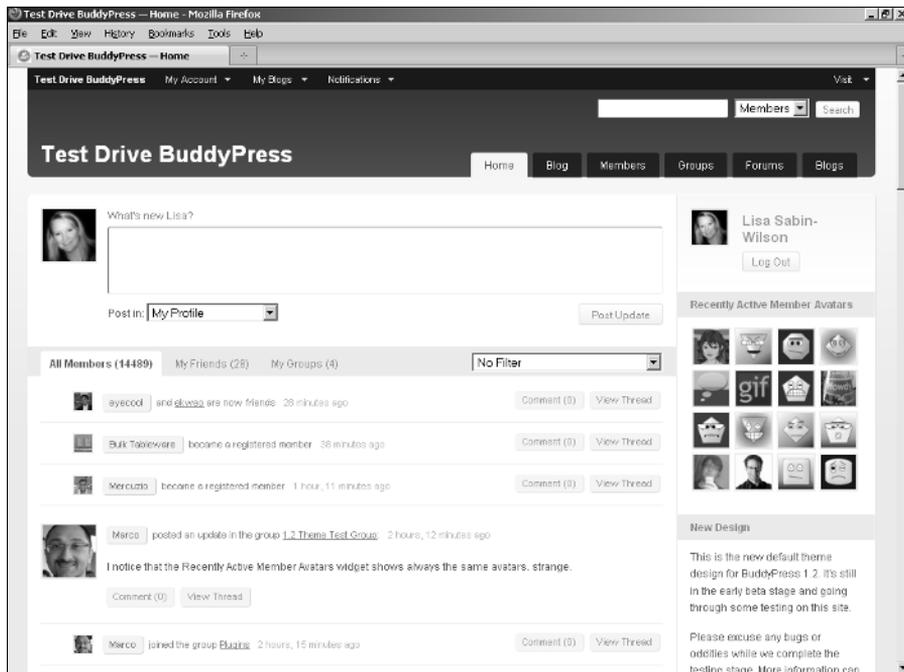


Figure 1-4:
The
BuddyPress
Default
theme.

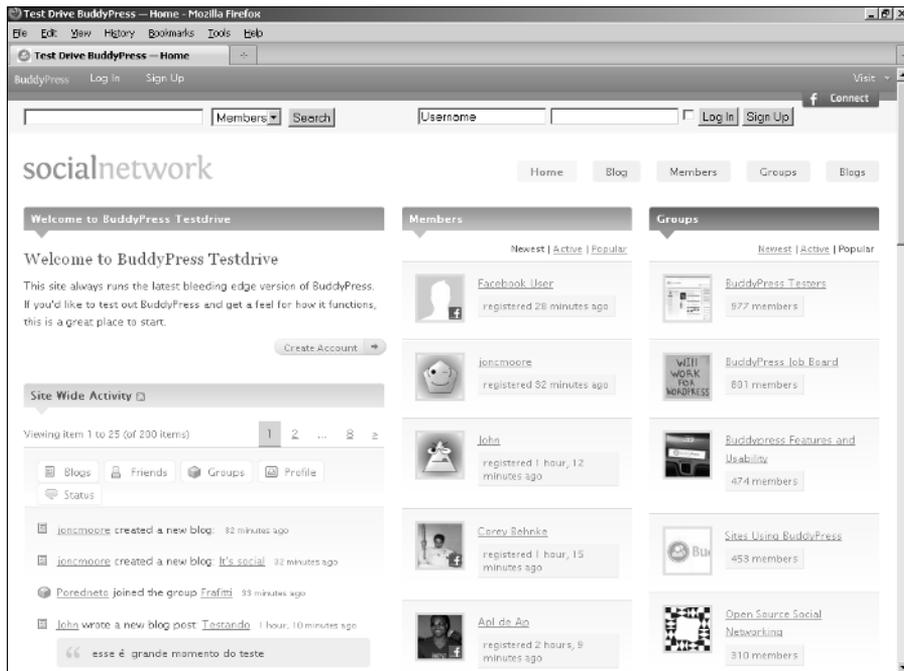


Figure 1-5:
The
BuddyPress
Classic
theme.

Chapters 9 through 12 provide you with information on how to customize your BuddyPress theme, including

- ✓ Finding, downloading, and installing free themes created by members of the BuddyPress development community
- ✓ Using HTML and CSS to customize the design and layout of your existing themes
- ✓ Using BuddyPress widgets to provide your site visitors with easy navigation features
- ✓ Creating a custom BuddyPress theme from scratch by understanding BuddyPress theme structure, template tags, and functions

Taking part in the BuddyPress community

The BuddyPress community was born from the larger WordPress community, which makes sense because BuddyPress is a component that you can add to the WordPress platform. WordPress is already a very large and active community of developers, designers, and users on the Web, full of people who are very passionate about the WordPress project. That excitement and passion has continued in the BuddyPress community — and the BuddyPress community is growing in numbers each day.

Why is this important information to know? As a user of the BuddyPress platform, it's nice to know that you have support out there when you need it. WordPress and BuddyPress are very much a "users helping users" community. Users from all over the world bring different levels of experience and knowledge to the community and freely share their experiences, tips, and advice with other users. This kind of grassroots involvement made WordPress the extreme success it is today.

You might be asking yourself, "Where do I find this passionate group of BuddyPress users?" Answer:

- ✔ **<http://buddypress.org>**: The official BuddyPress Web site where you can browse for news and information; click the Sign Up button at the top right of that site to become a member and start participating in the sharing and discussions that go on there.
- ✔ **<http://buddypress.org/forums>**: The support forums for BuddyPress where you find official BuddyPress developers and BuddyPress users and community members sharing their knowledge, information, and experiences with other BuddyPress users.
- ✔ **<http://buddypress.org/developers>**: The BuddyPress developers community — and you don't need to be a developer to join and participate. You find extremely helpful information and resources that help you on your way to building and maintaining a BuddyPress social community on your Web site.
- ✔ **<http://twitter.com/buddypressdev>**: Are you a Twitter user? Then follow @BuddyPressDev on Twitter; they always update their Twitter stream with information about new BuddyPress releases and features.