

Chapter 1

Examining Blogging at the Professional Level

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding what professional bloggers do
 - ▶ Knowing the advantages of blogging
 - ▶ Deciding whether a blog is right for you
 - ▶ Connecting your blog with business
 - ▶ Coming up with your professional blogging objectives
 - ▶ Outlining your strategy
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When you do something professionally, it generally means getting paid, and professional blogging is no different. Whether you want to earn your living with your blog or simply enough to pay for the family vacation or a college education, you want to know how to make money with your professional blog. This book explains the different ways to monetize your blog so you can pick the ones that work best for you.

However, to be a successful professional blogger, you need to think about more than just the sources of revenue — advertising, paid posts, affiliate commissions, and so on. You need to think about your professional, business objectives and then develop a plan to meet them. That's the big difference between a personal or hobby blog and a professional blog.

Personal bloggers have stories and experiences they want to share and may fall into making a little money along the way, but it doesn't start out that way. Professional bloggers have a business objective for their blog, and they develop a plan to achieve it.

Can you be successful with a blog without a clear plan? Sure, but it isn't probable. For instance, TechCrunch is a blog that began by reviewing new Internet products and companies and has since grown into a network of

technology sites about content and new media; however, hundreds of abandoned blogs never get past a few readers. Even a lucky accident doesn't stay successful without a long-term plan, especially now that the field is far more crowded.

This chapter gets you started with your professional blogging plan. I describe what professional bloggers do, go over the main reasons to start a professional blog, and give you some tips for setting your professional blogging objectives and getting started.

Knowing What Professional Bloggers Do

According to blog search engine Technorati's annual survey of the blogosphere, the top reasons that bloggers blog are to

- ✓ Speak their mind
- ✓ Share their expertise and experience
- ✓ Make money or do business

The principal difference between a personal, or hobby, blogger and a professional one is that the personal blogger has an interest in a subject, and the successful professional blogger has an interest, a professional objective, and a plan to achieve it. Usually, making money is part of the plan; for the most part, that's what I'm concerned with in this book.

However, I don't equate professional with commercial. Although making money is often a goal of the professional blogger, it isn't the only successful outcome. For example, swaying public opinion or building a support community for a health issue or charity is a successful professional outcome.

Regardless of whether you expect your blog to be a moneymaker, a marketing tool, or a means to promote a cause, a well-planned blog can help you achieve your goals. In blog search engine Technorati's 2009 survey, 71 percent of the bloggers surveyed said they're better known in their industry because of their blog, 63 percent said prospective clients have purchased products or services after reading their blog, and 56 percent believe that their blog helped their company be regarded as a thought leader (see Chapter 5 for more about what being a thought leader means).

Building Your Online Community: The Blogging Advantage

For the most part, the professional blogger writes to support or promote an organization or himself, or wants to develop a blog as a central element of an online business — and for good reason. Prospective customers are online in ever-increasing numbers. What if you already have a Web site? Why would you need a blog to reach all those prospective customers online?

On your Web site, you talk at your visitors. On a blog, however, you speak with them. A traditional Web site is like a monologue; you speak and hope someone is listening. If you have a Web site, it's probably all about you, and that's okay; it's your online brochure.

But your Web site isn't a community, and there's rarely any conversation.

A blog, on the other hand, is a conversation with your community — the readers, customers, and prospects who are interested in what you have to say or offer. In your blog, you write about, and link to, the ideas of others as well as your own. You also create space — or places for comments — for your readers to participate and to speak with you.

This conversation on the blog is what engages and establishes your online community. In the process, you build deeper relationships with your readers and customers and achieve greater awareness for you, your blog, and your brand.

Simplifying Web site management with blogging software

Apart from the conversational opportunities of the blog, a blog may be preferable for a simple technical reason if you don't already have a Web site. Blogging software is a lightweight content management system (CMS) that allows you to share content on the Web without the expertise needed to develop a full-scale Web site. Most blogging programs are much easier to use than Web development tools, which means you can manage a simple blog with relatively little tech support. As a result, you're more likely to update the blog frequently. Search engines love sites that are updated frequently.

Knowing what people do online

According to the Pew Research Center's September 2009 research, 77 percent of American adults use the Internet, up from 67 percent in 2005, 46 percent in 2000, and 14 percent in 1995.

And 73 percent of U.S. adults use the Internet in an average day, doing one or more online activities like

- ✓ Using a search engine to find information (50 percent)
- ✓ Looking for information about a hobby or interest (29 percent)
- ✓ Doing research for their jobs (23 percent)
- ✓ Looking for information about products and services (20 percent)
- ✓ Reading blogs (10 percent)
- ✓ Buying products (8 percent)

The latest versions of the most popular blogging platforms (I focus on TypePad, WordPress, and Google Blogger in this book) are also very flexible and support a wide variety of advanced functionality. Because of this, you can develop fairly robust sites with blogging software. This means you can add things, such as multiple sections, shopping carts, and discussion forums, and online users won't realize that you're using blogging software.

Establishing trust

You need to understand why blogs are increasingly seen as trustworthy.

It starts with a human voice. People trust other people, not faceless entities. When people speak with each other on a blog, they get the chance to know each other. This humanizes the organization in a way that can't be matched by any number of missions and manifestos.

Readers also approach blogs with an expectation of honesty and transparency. Combined with the human voice, this creates an accessible platform for your expertise.

Of course, you have to live up to the expectations, but assuming you do, your blog is an unparalleled tool for attracting customers, industry influencers, and advertisers. (In Part II of this book, I give you more information on how to attract those types of valuable readers.)

Extending networking opportunities with social media

Social media, such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook, is hot. Traditional Web sites? Not so much. Starting a blog lets you bask in the social media glow. Your blog tells your customers that you get it and are on top of the latest trends. Now, those aren't good enough reasons to embrace social media on their own; consider them beneficial and unintended consequences.



The real reason you want to contribute to the social media buzz, loud though it may be, is the network effect. If you tell a compelling story to the right people, they'll share it with others, and each person who hears it shares it onward with her network. Messages delivered through social media, including blogs, spread faster and farther, and sometimes they even spread at accelerated rates, dubbed going viral. This speed is built into the form.

Linking to and building upon other people's ideas are core values of the blogosphere. Blogging software makes doing so easy, with no need to understand HyperText Markup Language (HTML), the programming language used to create Web sites.

The proliferation of social sharing tools that allow blog readers to organize their favorite content and pass it along to friends and colleagues makes it just that much easier to share, and share widely. The most popular tools include the following:

- ✓ **Widgets:** A *widget* is an onscreen tool that displays or allows access to content — blog posts or their titles, the weather, ads, and so on. A widget, shown in Figure 1-1, lets you easily share your content. Bloggers who are fans of your blog simply insert the code in their blog sidebar to give their readers a preview of your posts.
- ✓ **Social bookmarking sites:** A social bookmarking site, such as Delicious, lets you save, tag, and share bookmarks to sites. You can even display your Delicious selections on your blog sidebar.
- ✓ **Content aggregators:** Content aggregators like Digg (see Figure 1-2), kirtsy, and memeorandum are a good way to find the hot topics in a community. Content aggregators let you submit and vote on posts. The most popular topics are featured at the top of the rankings on the aggregator's Web site.

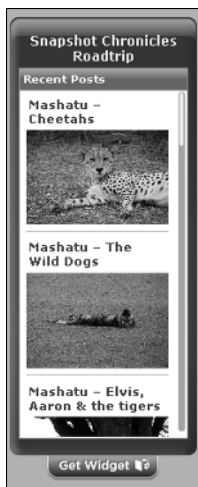


Figure 1-1:
This widget
displays
previews
of recent
posts.

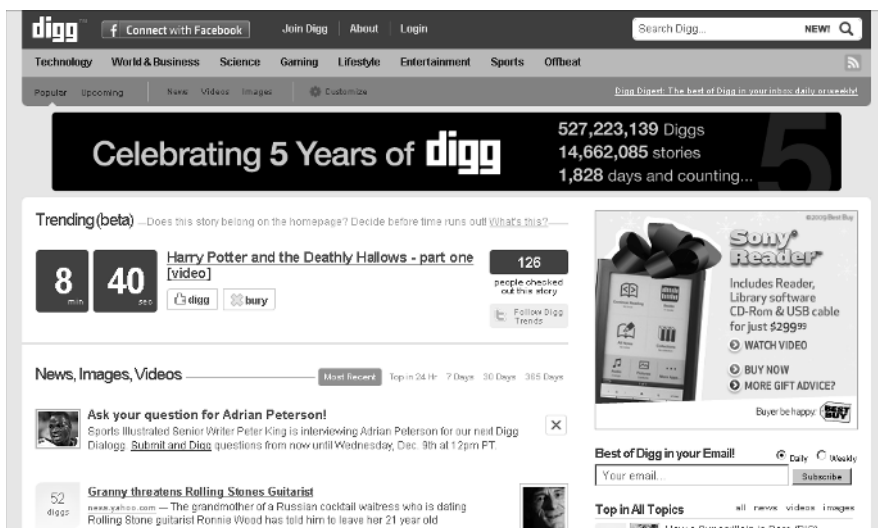


Figure 1-2:
Aggregators
like Digg
distribute
blog posts
to a wider
audience.



Don't fall into the myth of *viral marketing*. Tell your story, make it a good one, and encourage your community to share the message. But never forget that the community, not you, decides whether a story is compelling enough to go viral. All you can do is create the potential.

Deciding Whether a Blog Is Right for You

Blogging is a lot of fun and offers many advantages, but it may not be the right solution for you. The following sections help you decide whether you're willing to make the long-term commitment and invest your time, effort, and money to develop a blog.

You like to write or are willing to hire someone else to do it for you

Do you like to write? If you do, a blog may be the right social media choice for you. If you don't, you have alternatives. You can hire someone to write the blog, explore other forms like podcasting or video, or focus your social media effort on social networks like Facebook and Twitter. I discuss your options in more detail in the nearby sidebar "Hiring consultants versus doing everything yourself."



Do yourself a favor: If you don't like to write, don't kid yourself that you'll miraculously come to love it. That rarely happens.

Hiring consultants versus doing everything yourself

Should you hire consultants to help you or try to do everything yourself? This question doesn't have a so-called "right" answer. Both approaches have their merits, and you can combine them, getting help when you need it and doing things yourself when you don't. Although this book makes it easier to do everything on your own, I discuss the options at different stages of your blog and plan development.

The most important question to ask is: Do you like to do a task, or is it a task you're happy to avoid? Are you really good at the task, or are you better off focusing your talents on what you really do well?

For example, I'm fairly capable with blogging software and HTML; however, I'm a marketing

strategist, not a graphic artist. I always bring in designers to help me with logos, blog mastheads, and graphics.

If you don't like writing and decide to look into implementing podcasts or videos, you'll most likely use a blog to distribute your multimedia content, so most of the advice in this book is still relevant. However, you need to understand additional tools and techniques that are beyond the scope of this text. I recommend that you invest in a general introduction to podcasts or online video, such as *Podcasting For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Tee Morris, Chuck Tomasi, Evo Terra, and Kreg Steppe, and after you select your toolset, a book that covers your chosen tools. For example, I use Sound Forge to edit podcast files and rely heavily on an aftermarket book.

You have a point of view you want to share

Regardless of whether you write, record, or film your story, you need to have a point of view, or personality, for your blog. Back to the human voice: Brochures, like your Web site, are impartial and factual. They can use the impersonal third-person voice, and no one minds — not too much anyway.

Your readers expect your blog to go beyond that, to reveal some of the person(s) behind the organization. First-person and second-person voice are required. If that's something you feel comfortable and confident with, blogging might be a good option for you.

Also consider the following points:

- ✓ **Bloggging takes time.** Ask whether you can devote the time and resources to developing, writing, and promoting the blog.
- ✓ **You need to say something interesting to capture an audience's attention.** Do you have something you want to say? I dig into how to fine-tune this into an editorial mission for your blog in Chapter 2, but before you even start, you need to have an idea about topics of mutual interest to you and your prospective customers.



When deciding what you want to write about, keep in mind that a contrarian position can be very effective. This isn't a license to be argumentative. No one likes a bully. But don't think that the only approach is to agree with prevailing opinion. A controversial point of view can be very successful.

Your customers and prospects read blogs

Also consider whether a blog is right for your business goals. Here are some points to ponder:

- ✓ **Your customers must be interested in reading blogs.** Are your customers and prospects online? Are they reading blogs? If you don't know, ask them.
- ✓ **What are your competitors doing (or not doing) in social media?** Do they have blogs? If they do, do they have an engaged readership, or is their blog merely a mirror of their Web site?

Exploring the Blog and Business Connection

In the following section, I outline three basic ways bloggers use blogs to achieve professional objectives:

- ✓ Starting a blog to promote a business
- ✓ Converting a hobby or personal blog into a revenue generator
- ✓ Creating a blog-based business, such as an online magazine or review site

Use these definitions and the real-world examples sprinkled throughout the chapter to home in on the situation that fits you best.

Using a blog to promote your business

Whether you sell a product or a service, your business relies on earning the confidence of your customers, their trust that your products will perform as promised, and their trust in your expert advice. Your blog helps you forge the personal relationships that lead to mutual trust.

When a blog promotes an existing business, the main sources of revenue are usually fees and product sales, not advertising.

Small businesses, particularly ones that sell online, use blogs to promote their products and services. In 2007, Jill Notkin started The Daily Grind of a Work at Home Mom blog (http://workathomemom.typepad.com/the_daily_grind_of_a_work) to support her online boutique of upscale baby products, Alex Casey Baby. As shown in Figure 1-3, most of her blog content isn't about her store, but the branding is always visible, and she sprinkles in the occasional post about her products and special discounts.

However, you don't have to be an online business to have a blog. In 2004, Butler Sheetmetal, a small, family-owned firm in the United Kingdom, started the award-winning blog The Tinbasher (www.butlersheetmetal.com/tinbasherblog), shown in Figure 1-4, and it's still going strong.

Figure 1-3:
For an online store, a blog is a great way to engage with prospective customers.

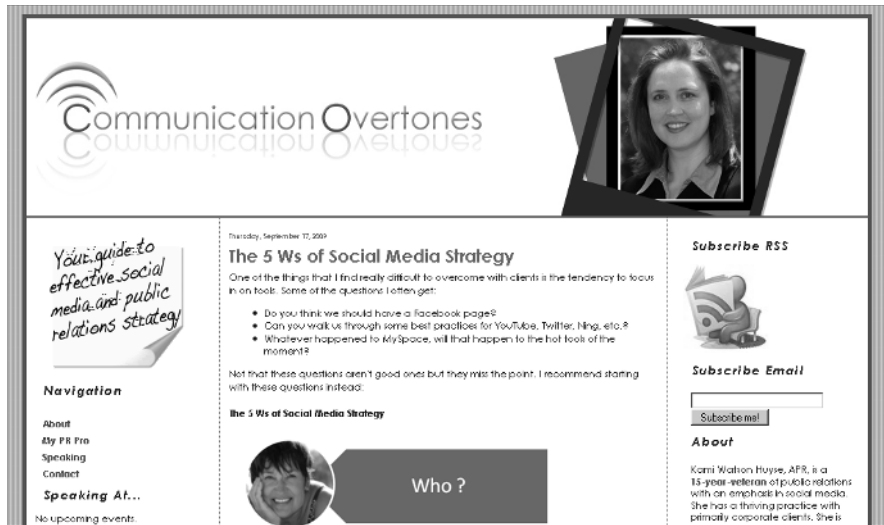


Figure 1-4:
Even if your product can't be sold or delivered online, a blog can be an effective way to connect with your customers.



Sometimes your product is you. Professional service firms, consultants, and authors use their blogs to showcase their expertise and promote their services. For example, on her blog Communication Overtones (www.overtonecomm.blogspot.com), public relations (PR) consultant Kami Watson Huyse writes about PR and social media strategy, and often uses stories drawn from her own business experience to illustrate her point, as shown in Figure 1-5.

Figure 1-5: Consultants use blogs to showcase their expertise and demonstrate thought leadership.



Carla Birnberg, a professional freelance writer who blogs about healthy living at MizFitOnline (www.mizfitonline.com), started her blog as a place for editors to read her work and to broaden her platform for a potential book. Read Carla's advice for new bloggers in the nearby sidebar, "Words of advice from bloggers who've been there."

Some other examples of consultants who use blogs to demonstrate thought leadership include

- ✓ **Seth Godin:** Well-known author and marketing pundit (<http://seth.godin.typepad.com>)
- ✓ **Yvonne DiVita:** Entrepreneur and expert in marketing to women online (www.lipsticking.com)
- ✓ **Shel Holtz:** Organizational communications and podcasting expert (<http://blog.holtz.com>)



Write in your authentic, first-person voice — "I" not "we" unless you have a multi-author blog. Avoid being too promotional.

Turning a hobby blog into a business

Going from hobby blog to a blog-based business is the most likely path for individual, or personal, bloggers. They start a blog to share their passion for a topic — everything from parenting to health issues to hobbies like crafting and bird watching. Their voice is honest, fresh, and informative. They build a following, and before long, the blog is a full-time unpaid job.

To convert a hobby blog to a business, you need a business plan and a monetization strategy. Generally, revenues come from a mix of streams, including advertising, affiliate commissions, product sales, consulting services, freelance writing, and speaking fees.

Words of advice from bloggers who've been there

Carla Birnberg writes about healthy living at MizFitOnline (www.mizfitonline.com). A professional freelance writer, she started the blog as a place for editors to read her work and broaden her platform for a potential book.

The most rewarding thing about blogging for her is helping people: *"I owned a personal training studio in the early '90s and have been passionate about fitness ever since. I love that MizFit allows me to give away all the information and knowledge I've accrued for free."*

Like many bloggers, her passion has led to other opportunities, including radio and a podcast, www.twofitchicks.org. Her tip for new bloggers:

"Read, read, read other blogs in your genre. Offer to do guest posts for them!"

Marie Cloutier started Boston Bibliophile (www.bostonbibliophile.com) to combine her personal hobby, reading, with her professional life as a librarian. She says:

"I was deep into job hunting and wanted to create something online that would reflect my personality and interests, and maybe help distinguish me from other people. At

the same time, I hoped that by talking about the books I love, I would be able to connect with like-minded readers and share our love of literature."

Like many bloggers, she doesn't consider the blog to be a major contributor to her income but has gotten business opportunities as a result of it, including a yearlong contract job.

Her tip for new bloggers:

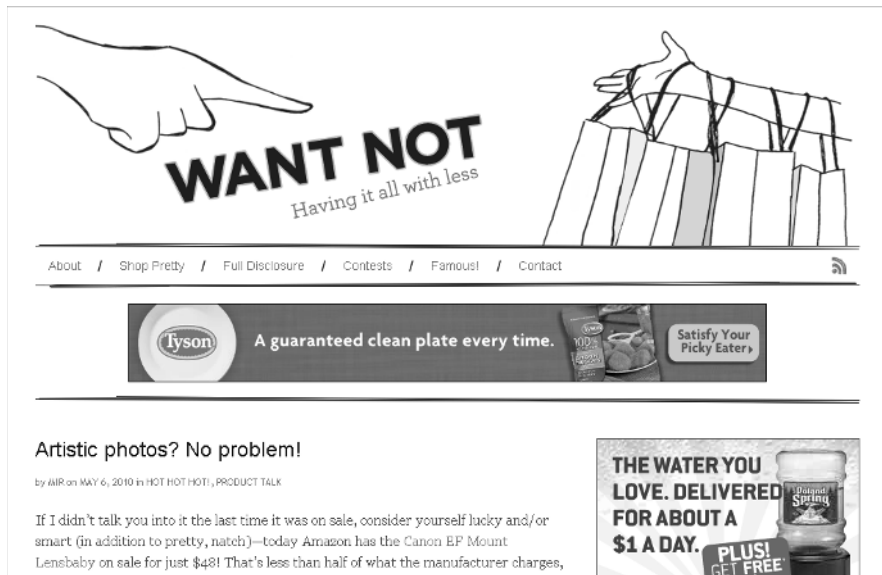
"Have some idea about what you want to accomplish with your blog and start slowly. You don't have to do it all at once."

Matt Kepnes, author of Nomadic Matt's Travel Site (www.nomadicmatt.com), wanted to become a professional travel writer and thought a blog would be a good way to build a portfolio. Instead, he's been able to turn his Web site into a job that permits him to travel the world full time. Most of his revenue comes from advertising and e-book sales, and the site gets about 100,000 visitors per month.

For Matt, the most rewarding thing about blogging is *"the ability to work from anywhere and meet people all over the world."* Read more about Nomadic Matt's Travel site in Chapter 2.

Blogger and freelance writer Mir Kamin is a self-described frugal shopper. She started her shopping blog Want Not (<http://wantnot.net>) to share the many deals she found online with her friends (see Figure 1-6). Her blog has since grown into a successful commercial enterprise and a full-time job.

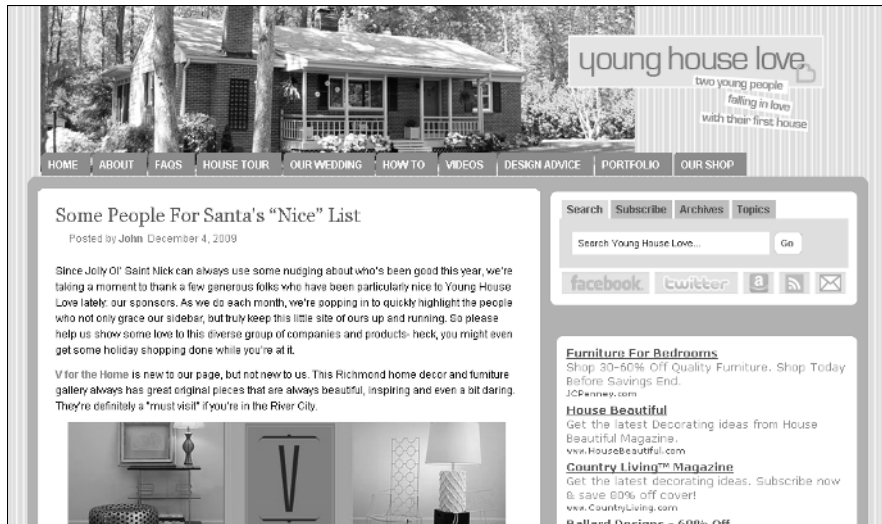
Figure 1-6: Want Not is a hobby blog that made the transition to a full-time business.



Sherry and John Petersik started their home improvement blog Young House Love (www.younghouselove.com) as a way to share the story of their kitchen renovation with friends and family. Today, their initial labor of love (shown in Figure 1-7) is a full-time job for them both and includes a successful online shop, design consulting business, and column in a national do-it-yourself magazine.

Sometimes, your hobby blog bears fruit for your career. That's what happened to Megan Garnhum Capone, author of shopping blog A Girl Must Shop (www.agirlmustshop.com) and a professional graphic designer. A Girl Must Shop makes some money from advertising, affiliate commissions, and sponsored post opportunities, but the real success has been the career opportunities it has created for Megan. She says:

Figure 1-7:
Like Young
House Love,
most hobby
blogs turned
full-time job
derive their
revenue
from multi-
ple streams.



“A Girl Must Shop has helped me land consulting jobs. When a potential client sees my blog, [he’s] confident that I can do the same for [him]. My blog also helped me launch my career into online marketing. Previously, I had been focused on traditional marketing. A Girl Must Shop was my proof that I could successfully manage a Web site and helped me land a ‘job of my dreams’ position as a Web content manager.”

Developing a blog as a small business

Someone who develops a blog as a small business is usually motivated by the same thing as a hobby blogger who decides to go pro — a passion for a hobby or interest, and the desire to share knowledge and experiences with others. The main difference is that the blogger *starts* with the intent to build a blog to make money. That means having a plan from the very beginning.

The most common types of blogs as small businesses are magazines, review sites, and shopping blogs. Blog networks and communities, including hyperlocal sites, also fit into this category. Small business blogs typically make most of their money through advertising, sponsorships, and affiliate marketing. Not surprisingly, their business model often resembles that of a print magazine.

Here are some examples of blogs that are small businesses:

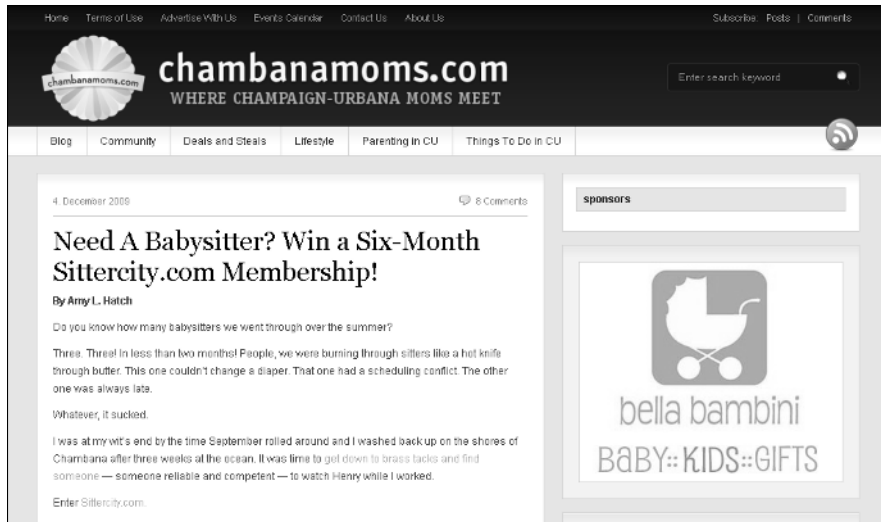
- ✓ **Blog Nosh Magazine:** The blog version of a literary magazine; see Figure 1-8 (www.blognosh.com)
- ✓ **Savvy Auntie:** An online community for aunts (www.savvyauntie.com)

- ✓ **ChambanaMoms.com:** A hyperlocal portal for moms in the community of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois; see Figure 1-9 (www.chambanamoms.com)
- ✓ **Palate Press:** An online wine magazine (<http://palatepress.com>)

Figure 1-8:
Online magazine Blog Nosh is the online equivalent of a literary digest.



Figure 1-9:
ChambanaMoms.com is a hyperlocal community.



Understanding the common types of blog content

A blogger can write multiple types of posts, collectively referred to as *blog content*, although most limit themselves to one or two types. Content type isn't subject matter, topic, or tone; only your imagination and talent limit those. Here are some content types:

- ✓ **Essay:** Stories, sketches, and anecdotes about daily life. Many personal blogs use this type of content. For example, Mom-101, Woulda Coulda Shoulda, and Young House Love.
- ✓ **Review:** Product reviews. For example, Z Recommends, Cool Mom Picks, and Try Handmade.
- ✓ **Expert:** Blog posts that focus on one subject matter, written by one or more experts in the field. They typically have an educational, experiential focus. Blogs by professional services providers — such as public relations agencies, consultants, and attorneys, and corporate blogs — often take this form. For example, Marketing Roadmaps (my professional blog), It's Not a Lecture, and ReadWriteWeb.
- ✓ **Opinion/editorial:** A favored form in the political blogosphere. For example, Huffington Post and PunditMom.
- ✓ **Shopping:** Shopping blogs may have reviews, but the most salient characteristics tend to be explicit links to merchants and product pricing. For example, Cool Mom Picks, Want Not, and Green Mom Review.
- ✓ **News/events:** This type of post covers everything from news, reports, and analysis to entertainment news, rumors, and gossip. For example, MamaPop, TMZ, and PerezHilton.com.

Setting Your Professional Blogging Objectives

The first step in your professional blog plan is to set your objectives, just as you would with any business endeavor. In the simplest terms, determine

- ✓ **Who you're trying to reach:** To define your audience, build a *profile* of your readers — who they are and what they're interested in. Creating a tangible picture also makes it easier to write in a conversational tone for a person. You write for someone, not into the void.
- ✓ **What you have to offer, tell, or sell your readers:** You have stories, experiences, advice, and a product. Your readers and customers have interests, needs, and desires. Your blog is about where these things meet.

- ✔ **How you'll differentiate your blog from the competition:** You find a unique niche — a story only you can tell. This is what attracts readers to your blog instead of the competing activities they could be doing — reading other blogs, hanging out on Facebook, and so on.
- ✔ **Which monetization strategy fits you, your blog, and your audience the best, assuming making money is one of your goals:** You have choices. Lots of choices. I cover them in detail in Part II.
- ✔ **How you measure success.** Revenue? Readers? New business opportunities? You need to define what success means to you and develop a plan to evaluate your progress.

Be concise and as specific as possible, but don't treat the plan as inviolate. As you go through the process of developing your professional blog, you'll discover new things about blogging, your market, your audience, and possibly even yourself. Some of this discovery suggests a different course of action than you initially planned. Don't change your plan on a whim, but do change or add to it if it makes sense.

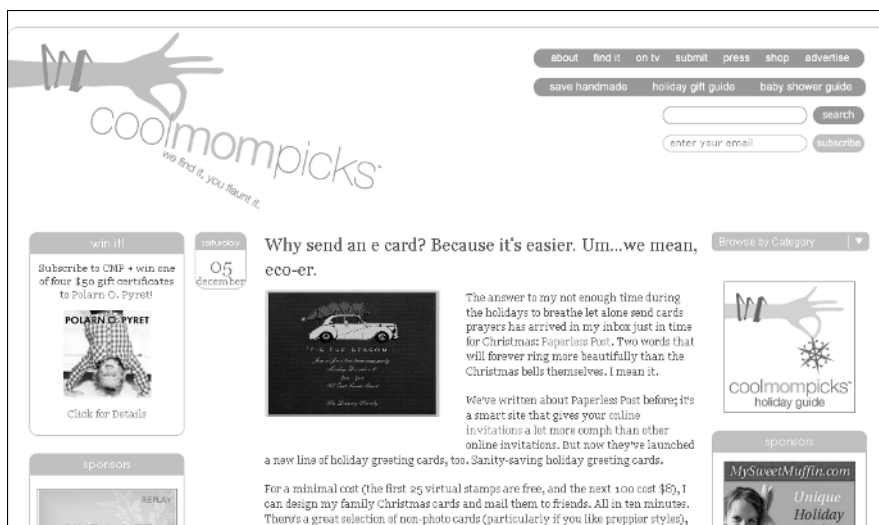
For inspiration, consider blogger and marketing professional Chris Hogan who writes men's fashion and style blog Off the Cuff (www.offthecuffdc.com). One of his goals when he started his blog was to see whether the blog could establish him as an expert in men's fashion, even though he has no formal training in fashion or design. He's succeeded almost beyond his wildest dreams. A leading authority in men's fashion recently retained him as a marketing consultant to help with the social media launch of an iPhone fashion application. Read the full story in the nearby sidebar, "Off the Cuff, a blog with style," in this chapter.

Narrowing your scope to find your niche

Marketing professionals use the proven tactics of differentiation and narrowing scope in their programs to improve their chances of success, and you can use the same strategies for your blog.

Don't try to be all things to all people. To separate your blog from the pack, find an unmet need in your market or focus on a smaller group than you originally intended. For example, shopping blog Cool Mom Picks (<http://coolmompicks.com>) reviews products for moms, as shown in Figure 1-10. Moms, particularly new moms, are a very attractive demographic group that buys lots of products — for their children, their families, and themselves.

Figure 1-10:
Review
blog Cool
Mom Picks
focuses
on finding
unique, cool
products for
moms and
kids.



But Cool Mom Picks doesn't review everything. You can find reviews of diapers and the latest DVD from Disney on large parenting sites. Instead, the founders identified an unmet need for reviews of handcrafted and unique products from small online boutiques, independent designers, and entrepreneurs. These are the sort of products you'd find in a small, chic baby boutique in New York, London, or Paris.

Niche works. The site consistently ranks among the top parenting blogs.



Can you segment your market — either demographically or, as Cool Mom Picks did, by interest/content? If you have an interesting story for a market segment, you may want to start small and narrow. Stay focused, achieve your goals, and then develop your expansion plan. Read more about differentiation and finding your unique niche in Chapter 2.

Articulating your monetization strategy

Most professional bloggers earn their income from a variety of sources. Advertising, affiliate commissions, speaking and consulting fees, freelance writing, book deals, sponsorships, and in-kind compensation like free products and services are all part of the revenue mix.

When deciding what monetization options make sense for your blog, you have to consider your topic, your readers, and your own personal inclinations. For example, Chris Hogan's audience for Off the Cuff, covered in the nearby sidebar "Off the Cuff, a blog with style," in this chapter, spans more than 40 countries. He's considering adding advertising to his blog, but it has to be both international and fit with the Off the Cuff brand.

If you want to dig right into the details about your monetization options, skip ahead to Chapter 4.

Evaluating your plan

How do you know whether your plan makes sense? You should be able to make slight course corrections without changing your overall plan. If you can't — if the new thing that has caught your eye doesn't fit — don't force it.

The exception to this rule is a *game-changing event* that impacts your ability to reach your goals. A game-changing event is something that stops you in your tracks and prevents you from continuing on your path, such as finding out that a big publisher is investing thousands of dollars to create a site just like yours or that someone else owns the copyright for the name you've settled on. Luckily, those don't happen every day, not even in this fast-paced environment.

Blog aggregator kirtsy (<http://kirtsy.com>), which focuses on content for the women's market, faced a game-changing event early in its life. Originally, the site had a different name, and the site's founders had invested time, energy, and resources into their brand. Unfortunately, though, another online entity had trademarked the original name. Rather than engage in a costly and potentially losing legal battle, the kirtsy team chose to rebrand and enlisted the help of its community to suggest possible new names.



Being able to register a domain name for your blog, which I go into in Chapter 8, isn't an indication that you're free and clear of possible copyright issues. You need to make sure that someone else doesn't own the registered trademark for the name you want. I explain these issues in more detail in Chapter 3.

Off the Cuff, a blog with style

In 2005, Chris Hogan started menswear fashion and style blog Off the Cuff (www.offthecuffdc.com) to express his passion for fashion. He'd always had an interest in men's fashion. His father was a sharp dresser in the East Coast Ivy League style, and as Chris got older, he realized he liked that style. Chris also worked at two Ralph Lauren stores during college, which gave him an appreciation for timeless style and attention to detail, and also helped him understand the power of brand management. He was equally interested in the history behind men's clothing, much of which is related to function. For example, the single, or double vent, at the rear of a man's jacket was to make it more comfortable when being worn on horseback.

Chris had a plan when he started Off the Cuff. He says:

"I like writing and enjoy being educational on the blog. Part of the plan was simply having an interest and talking to people about it. However, there was also a desire, almost an academic curiosity, to find out whether I — without any formal training, simply a genuine interest in menswear — could be viewed as an expert in men's fashion? And not just by the consumer, but by the experts in the field? How long would it take?"

Chris realized his goal of being viewed as an expert by the experts was not so far-fetched when J. Peterman took his call. Well, not exactly. There was a messenger bag in the *J. Peterman* catalog that Chris wanted to review. He knew that the J. Peterman order line was actually staffed by people at the company, not a distant call center, so he called, delivered his spiel about the blog and asked whether there was a discount program for bloggers. He repeated the story a few times, clearly moving his way up a chain.

And then he was connected to John Peterman himself.

Chris had the presence of mind to deliver his pitch about the blog and the bag again. He heard typing on the other end of the line. Clearly, Peterman was checking out the blog. "It didn't hurt," Chris said, "when I told John that I was wearing J. Peterman pants at the time — which I really was." On the spot, Peterman made up his mind to send Chris a free bag for his review.

Chris has also gotten freelance writing assignments as a result of the blog. He wrote for Men's Flair (www.mensflair.com) for a couple years, which led to an assignment for an international men's fashion magazine, *The Rake* (www.therakeonline.com). Most recently, he was contracted by Nivea for Men to write a regular Fashion/Style column for Nivea's The Groom Room blog (www.niveaformenusa.com/local-content/groomroom.html).

He wasn't running any advertising on the blog when I spoke with him in May 2010, but he was considering an opportunity with an online custom tailor that can ship worldwide. Off the Cuff has about 20,000 readers in more than 40 countries, so it's very important to him that any advertising on his blog be both international and fit with the overall Off the Cuff brand.

Chris has also gotten opportunities to work with marketers through Off the Cuff. He wrote a post about Nike's sponsorship of elite golf athletes and as a result, was recently invited to visit the *Oven*, the Fort Worth, Texas, facility where Nike Golf creates its PGA professional's golf equipment. He'll also attend a PGA event as a guest of Nike.

Like many bloggers, Chris focuses his attention on his content, not on promotion, but does participate on Facebook and Twitter.

The most rewarding thing about blogging for Chris is helping people:

"To paraphrase style icon Alan Flusser, in the privacy of the dressing room, every man wants to know how to dress well. Often, they're afraid to ask for help. Off the Cuff answers those questions about how to dress well."

His tip for new bloggers is to really love what you write about because that comes through on the blog and attracts readers. Also, if you think you may want to do something more with your blog down the road, start thinking like a professional upfront. He says:

"Treat your blog, and your writing, like part of your brand. That way, if the opportunity you dream about actually shows up someday, you'll be ready."

A common form of monetization for professional bloggers is consulting. Through connections, Chris met Alan Flusser, one of the most well-known menswear authorities worldwide and author of multiple books on men's fashion. Subsequently, when Flusser was looking for a social media marketing consultant —

someone who understood men's fashion and social media — to help him launch an iPhone application for men's fashion, Flusser remembered his meeting with Chris. He hired Chris to work on the project and the rest, as they say, is history. Chris says:

"Having the opportunity to work with Alan and his team is literally one of the most significant moments in my life. Alan has, quite literally, written the books on menswear and permanent style, so to actually sit in his office and work on a business plan is amazing. I am helping him learn more about the blogosphere and new ways to expand his brand and in return, I have the chance to learn from and work with the best in the business. In one way, I have achieved my initial goal of being considered an authority by the experts, but in a larger sense, everything is only now just beginning."

From dream blog to dream job; it doesn't get much better than that.

Off the Cuff

Classic. Modern. Style.

Tuesday, November 03, 2009

J. Peterman's Mailbag - The Best Bag Ever?



It's funny how sometimes things just come together. I am a bag guy; I have lots of different bags, from elegant leather briefs to beat up nylon messengers.

One of my all-time favorites is the Counterfeit Mailbag, from the J. Peterman Company. In fact, it's one of the first bags I ever wrote about and was sent to me by John Peterman himself - it can't really get better than that.

The bag, based on the classic leather workhorse lugged across the country by a generation of letter carriers, is simple and classic. Unique enough to be modern and fit effortlessly into the current "heritage" trend it is also timeless enough to always look current.

I ♥ WHAT YOU'RE BLOGGING!

ONE OF SHINY MEDIA'S TOP 100 FASHION & LIFESTYLE BLOGS

About Me



OTC: Washington, D.C., United States

Off The Cuff is an award-winning site dedicated to the principle that classic style and modern life can live quite comfortably with each other. Founder and Editor-in-Chief Chris Hogan is a frequent contributor to leading

Setting realistic expectations

Setting realistic expectations is extremely important so you don't get frustrated and abandon your effort before your blog has had time to succeed. Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

- ✔ **Set milestones along your way to your long-term objective.** Achieve them and then move on to the next. For example, say your long-term objective is to make your living from your blog. A good first milestone is to build your audience to a level that attracts some advertisers. If you sell a product on your blog, forecast sales on the low side and adjust as you have real sales results from the blog. And so on.
- ✔ **Consider your own personality and style.** If you don't like criticizing things, starting a review blog probably isn't a good idea. Consider another type of blog to share your experiences and opinions with readers.
- ✔ **Don't expect to achieve your goals overnight.** Successful bloggers you've read about in the news include Heather Armstrong (www.dooce.com), who parlayed being fired from her job for blogging into a wildly successful and popular, personal blog, more than 1 million followers on Twitter, and a book deal. She had something to say that resonated with readers and worked hard to achieve her success.

I hope you can be that successful. But keep in mind that overnight success is extremely rare. Sure, the success seems sudden to an observer, but almost always the person has worked long and hard in obscurity or delayed a dream like Paul Potts, the phone salesman and amateur opera singer who won the *Britain's Got Talent* competition in 2007.



In other words, getting to the top takes hard work, and you have to work just as hard to stay there. If you want to make your living from your blog, you have to treat it as your job.

Have realistic expectations for your blog, and start by being honest about the effort you're willing to put in. The reality is that readers don't come simply because you build it, so you have to be prepared to work hard — just like you would at any full-time job.

Sketching Your Preliminary Plan

After you define your objectives — you know what you want to achieve — decide how you're going to achieve them. That's the nitty-gritty of building a strategic plan for your professional blog.

In Chapter 2, I discuss defining the audience and a niche for your blog, and in later chapters, I discuss monetization strategies and blog development. However, before you dive into the detail, sketch a preliminary, strategic plan for your blog.

Here are the main questions that you need to answer:

- ✓ What do you really want to write about? What's your passion? How can you share that with readers in a meaningful way?
- ✓ Who will read it? What do they want that someone else isn't delivering?
- ✓ How will the blog fit into your existing Web site? How can you use them together to reach your objectives?
- ✓ How does a blog fit into your business strategy for your product/service? What are your overall goals?
- ✓ Is the blog the product? If so, how will you make money? Do you want to make money or simply cover your costs?

Take a few moments before you read on to jot down some ideas for your blog. You can then use the rest of this book to build upon your initial instincts to develop a blog and strategy that meets your objectives.

