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Share Your World

By Robert Moritz

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Read PARADE.com
Online Column

Have you ever felt the urge to discuss minor league baseball statistics, celebrity gossip, Dutch tulip cultivation or French cuisine with a vast, appreciative audience? Have you thought about creating a personal Web site but been discouraged by the technical hurdles? Perhaps it's time you discovered the power of the blog.

You've likely heard about the blog phenomenon and wondered what all the hoopla is about. A blog—short for Web log—is an online diary that looks like a Web page but is incredibly simple to create and update by posting text, photos or links to other sites. Because they're free and easy to use, blogs have skyrocketed in popularity in recent months.

"We're seeing about 30,000 new Web logs created every day, along with more than 500,000 new posts," says David Sifry, CEO of [Technorati.com](#), a Web site that tracks blogs. "The Blogosphere is doubling in size every five months. People are talking to their communities, and the communities are responding. It's growing faster than the Web did."

The rapid growth is due mostly to an array of online services that require virtually no technical know-how to use ([see below](#)). As a result, ordinary people are creating blogs on just about every topic imaginable—from the political to the comical to the educational and inspirational. Odds are, if you can think of it, there is a blogger out there typing about it.

"I wanted something positive to come out of my experience, so I decided to start a blog," says Jeannette Vagnozzi, 40, an administrator for the city of La Verne, Calif. Jeannette was diagnosed with breast cancer last July. She launched her blog, called "Two Hands" ([2hands.blogspot.com](#)), two days later.

Although she created her blog to keep family and friends informed about her treatment, Vagnozzi hoped that others might also benefit from reading about her experiences. They have. To date, more than 30,000 people have read her postings, including her final pathology report, which showed no residual sign of cancer.

While the majority of blogs are like "Two Hands"—personal journals complete with photographs and links to other blogs and Web sites of interest—many focus on specific topics like movies, sports and politics.

Kevin Agee, 20, of Springfield, Mo., created a blog so he could share his thoughts on his favorite baseball team, the Kansas City Royals. His blog is now located at [all-baseball.com/kauffman](#) though he created his first one using the online service "Blogger" ([see below](#)).

"It started as a casual hobby, but now I spend two hours a day writing my posts," says Agee. "The most fulfilling part is knowing that my thoughts and words are out there for

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the world to read.”

Amy Sherman, author of the “Cooking With Amy” food blog (cookingwithamy.blogspot.com), agrees. “When you write in a private journal, it’s a very personal meditation,” she explains. “With a blog, you are expressing yourself to an audience of people who are interested in what you have to say. Blogs are what the Internet was supposed to be about—making it easy to reach out and connect.”

How To Create a Blog

It’s surprisingly easy to get your own online diary up and running.

Visit the Web site of a blogging service like Blogger, Tripod Blog Builder, MSN Spaces or LiveJournal.

Create a personal profile by entering as little (or as much!) personal information as you want the public to see.

Invent a memorable title for your blog and select a ready-made design theme to match your personal style.

Update your blog by posting new journal entries, uploading digital photos and creating links to other interesting sites.

Add extra excitement with the clever tools available through your blog service. Some of these extras may cost money, but many are free. For example: MSN Spaces lets you easily create lists of your favorite books and music, while Blogger offers shopping wish lists and an amazing free tool called “AudioBlogger.” Simply record a voice message (or ask a friend or family member to get involved) using any phone. The message is instantly uploaded to your blog as an MP3 file for easy listening.

Bonus Online Content

My Dog Has A Blog

by Robert Moritz

What do you give a dog who already has flannel pajamas and “Fleece-Lined Dugg Boots”? How about her very own blog? That’s what I decided to do for my dog, Ruby, in anticipation of her sixth birthday. Her site, called “Kiss of the French Bulldog” (www.puppiesandbabies.com/kiss), features Ruby’s personal musings, photos of her pals and, yes, a birthday present wish list. Preposterous? Possibly. A huge hit with friends and family? Most definitely.

Quick And Easy

Using the elegantly simple [Blogger](#)—one of a growing number of free online blogging services linked below—I created Ruby’s user profile (“I believe in hard science and soft snuggles”), picked a ready-made design template and typed up the inaugural post detailing her Malibu Beach vacation. To add a photo of her digging for sand crabs, I used Blogger’s Hello Bloggerbot tool, which lets you upload as many pictures as you want to your site. (Other services also let you easily create photo galleries but usually limit your storage space—MSN Spaces, for example, gives you 30MB.) Seven minutes

and just five mouse clicks later, "Kiss of the French Bulldog" was open to the public.

Get Noticed

The key to a successful blog—one that attracts repeat daily visitors—is keeping it fresh with regular updates. With Blogger, it's as easy as sending an e-mail message or even making a phone call in Ruby's voice (yes, I need professional help) using the amazing free AudioBlogger feature. With it, you can call a designated number from any phone and leave a message that instantly appears as an audio file on your Blogger-made site. To help spread the word about Ruby, I listed "Kiss of the French Bulldog" with a variety of blog directories ([see below](#)) and contacted other pet bloggers suggesting that we add links to each other's sites. You'll be surprised at how supportive the blog community is of your efforts. In fact, the best part of the blogging experience has been reading all the user comments from Ruby's friends and fans. It's an unexpected bonus that truly makes this "father" proud.

A Word To The Wise

Ruby's life is like an open book, but we humans need to think twice before posting personal or confidential information to our blogs. Remember: Unless you've set permissions and controls like those available at MSN Spaces, anyone can view your posts! If the kids are blogging, make sure they understand that certain information should never be shared, like their address, the location of their school or their home telephone number. And if you're tempted to use your blog to vent about frustrations at work, think twice. Your boss could be cruising the blogosphere! There is such a thing as "too much information," but with a little common sense and a few basic precautions, the blogosphere is a terrific place to share your interests, hobbies and opinions—and to make new friends who share them.

Places to Start

Any of these sites will get you blogging, but each offers a slightly different package of services, design templates and other amenities (some of which may cost money). To help you achieve a state of blogging bliss, we've done a bit of research:

- [Tripod Blog Builder](#)

This service is a great choice if your blog aspires to be a full-fledged Web page someday. With a free Tripod membership, you'll be able to create your own Web site (supported by advertisements and with limited features) and a blog. Want more? Five different levels of service are available to help your Web site grow. To read all about it, [click here](#). For a side-by-side comparison of features, [click here](#). To sign up for a free membership (which includes a blog-building tool), [click here](#).

- [MSN Spaces](#)

All the features of this user-friendly service are free. Some highlights include: 30 MB of photo storage (about 750 photographs), permissions and controls that let you decide who can read (or comment on) your blog, and music lists that let fellow bloggers sample and purchase each other's favorite music (from MSN Music, of course) with just two clicks of the mouse. Want to check it out? [Click here](#).

- [Blogster](#)

This free service wants to help you get noticed. In addition to the traditional features, Blogster offers interest-specific "channels" (including pets, sports, love...even writer's block) to help you and your blog mates find one another. Even if you don't sign up for a Blogster account, check out the "[blogtionary](#)" for a comprehensive list of blogging terms (some of which we've never heard, but all of which are pretty darn amusing). If you're sold on this light-hearted but heavy-featured site, [click here](#) to sign up.

- [Blogger](#)

To make the most of Blogger's (completely free!) service, you'll want to be sure your Internet browser (the program you use to navigate the Web, for example: Internet

Explorer, Netscape or Firefox) is compatible. [Click here](#) to find out and to upgrade, if necessary. Some Blogger highlights include: [Photoblogging](#) (post photos to your blog), [Audioblogger](#) (post audio files from any telephone), [Mobile Blogger](#) (post photos or text to your blog using an Internet-enabled cellphone) and [Mail-to-Blogger](#) (post text to your blog via e-mail). Ready to go? Visit [blogger.com](#) to get started.

- [LiveJournal](#)

A free LiveJournal account scores you lots of great services, including message boards (so people can respond to your posts) and the ability to link to up to five other Web sites that you think your readers will enjoy. With a paid subscription (\$5 for two months or \$25 per year), you can get access to everything LiveJournal has to offer—including customized styles and mood themes, a livejournal.com email address, photo storage and text messaging. For a complete list of paid and free features, [click here](#). Want to get started? Visit [LiveJournal.com](#).

The Wide World of Blogs

Unfortunately, nobody has yet created a single, comprehensive search engine (like Google does with Web sites) for tracking down blogs of interest. There are, however, a growing number of blog directories that can help point you in the right direction. Here are some of the best places to start:

- **Technorati:** [technorati.com](#)
- **Globe of Blogs:** [globeofblogs.com](#)
- **Boing Boing:** [boingboing.net](#)
- **Blog Catalog:** [blogcatalog.com](#)
- **Blogarama:** [blogarama.com](#)
- **Blogwise:** [blogwise.com](#)
- **Bloglines:** [bloglines.com](#)
- **Blogs by Women:** [blogsbywomen.com](#)

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