Introduction

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*T*hink back to the Internet circa 1994. (Or just watch while I trip down Memory Lane.) In those heady days, Web pages consisted mostly of personal collections of favorite links. Not many people recognized it, but the Web was a revolutionary force of self-expression and global connection. Yahoo! emerged to catalog all those personal pages and was itself pretty revolutionary. More upheavals followed: e-commerce, instant messaging, MP3, Google. And now, blogging.

Blogging is throwing the Internet forward and backward at the same time. Forward into a new era of consumer empowerment, and backward to the grass-roots spirit of the early Web. The popularity and influence of Weblogs have stolen the spotlight from established media powerhouses. Blogging has taken back the Web.

One of the most influential online research organizations estimated in mid-2005 that a new blog was created every 5.8 seconds. Fortunately, there's no such thing as missing the boat (or the rocket), so if you haven't yet created your first blog, now is the perfect time. Blogging is the perfect antidote to highly commercialized, blandly consolidated Web sites. You can have a great site, be part of an amazingly dynamic global community, and, if you play your cards right, attract a devoted audience.

About This Book

My intent in these pages is to reveal the total world of blogging. That total world includes the following:

- ✔ Understanding exactly what a blog is
- ✔ Knowing how to get a blog
- ✔ Being aware of the potential pitfalls
- ✔ Finding an effective blogging style
- ✔ Smoothly joining the blogging community
- ✔ Searching for blog content and tracking topics
- ✔ Detailing specific blog programs and services
- ✔ Trying fancy blogging techniques such as moblogging and podcasting
- ✔ Using RSS to be a master blog reader
- ✔ Possibly making a few dollars with a blog

Many people, even those who think they know all about blogging, are astonished to learn what a wide-ranging subject it is, laden with possibilities.

New bloggers have innumerable choices. No single book can illuminate all the blogging programs, Weblog services, and feed aggregators, as well as the wide assortment of related technologies. In narrowing the choices offered in this book, my criteria were quality and popularity, with an emphasis (perhaps surprisingly) on the latter. Most new bloggers get their feet wet in one of the popular social networks or one of the big-name hosting services. People follow the advice of friends and acquaintances, so to some extent I follow along those paths. Naturally, the popular services are usually popular for good reasons. Regretfully, I could not find space to describe some great resources, programs, and services that have not yet gained widespread usage. I left out one blog program that I use and love, because I concluded that its features would not serve readers enough to justify many pages of description. But you will find an introduction to blogging at any level, from the most simple to the brain-teasingly complex, in these chapters.

Conventions Used in This Book

I wanted to include the Basel Convention on hazardous waste minimization in this book, but my inability to find Basel on a map brought that idea to a dead end. So, instead, I have settled for the following simple conventions that you find in these pages:

- ✔ When I use an important term for the first time, I *italicize* it. Of course, slanty letters aren't really very helpful, which is why there's a glossary at the back of the book.

- ✔ Web addresses, also called URLs, look like this: www.typepad.com.

- ✔ A few chapters discuss code (HTML, CSS, and PHP) that underlies Web pages. When I must cite an example of such code, it looks like this:

```
# ObjectDriver DBI::postgres
# Database <database-name>
# DBUser <database-username>
# DBPassword <database-password>
# DBHost localhost
```

How to Use This Book

Literacy is required, plus the ability to turn pages.

What You're Not to Read

I forbid you to read trashy novels from the supermarket. And although I'm less adamant about this, I prefer you stay away from Portuguese limericks. I'm just trying to protect you.

Nothing in this book will cause you harm (except for the carpet nails attached to page 129 — good luck with them), but some sections might not scratch your itch. This isn't one of those books where, if you skip something, you'll never understand the subject. Although there *is* a very important paragraph somewhere in the middle of the book . . . I don't remember which one, unfortunately. Good luck with that, too.

Read contents; the chapter titles map out the subject matter of this book. Stick to the subjects you need. Parts I, II, and III are progressively more challenging. Part IV is interesting, with Chapter 13 being the one I would *least* advise you to skip. Part V is useful for everyone, but is definitely optional. If you intend to read Part VI, I feel so sorry for you. Really; get help.

Foolish Assumptions

First, I assume you appreciate self-indulgent banter and silly asides. Attempted witticisms do nothing but distract you from the useful stuff in this book, and I assume you're okay with that. If you're not, talk to my editor. She probably doesn't rein me in enough.

Beyond assuming your tolerance of the occasional funny, I do assume a basic facility with computers, Web browsers, and the Internet. Being a creative act, blogging requires a lot of clicking and typing. You should be familiar with Web forms and their inevitable check boxes and radio buttons. You must know how to position the mouse cursor in a Web form before typing in it. Familiarity with e-mail should put you at the right level. If you are shy about operating a browser or viewing Web pages, you might want to get a beginner's Internet book under your belt or take some quick tutoring from a friend before launching into blogging.

That warning delivered, let me say that my mother, with basic Internet experience and no e-mail, got up and blogging in less than a day and loves it.

How This Book Is Organized

Words. Sentences. Paragraphs. Pages. Chapters. Parts. It's a thing of beauty.

Part I: The What, Where, Why, and How of Weblogs

The three chapters in Part I present a bird's-eye view of the entire blogging landscape. Here you glean not only what a blog is (it's amazing how many people don't really know, even if they read blogs) but also what elements typically go into a blog, from entries to archives, from comments to RSS feeds. The information in this part summarizes, illuminates, and points you to later chapters that explain more completely how it all works.

Also in this part (Chapter 2, specifically), I identify the four types of blog services covered in this book and begin to compare them in a way that helps you decide which level contains your comfort zone.

It might seem presumptuous to consider blogging a lifestyle, but this part gladly presumes just that, and outlines the perks and pitfalls of that lifestyle. You don't have to be a full-time blogger to gain insight into the blogging mindset from Chapter 3.

Part II: Starting a Blog Today

Part II gets right to it, helping the eager first-time blogger find the quickest path to publishing a blog. Chapter 4 explores MSN Spaces, a social network that includes an attractive blogging platform. Chapter 5 focuses on another social network — Yahoo! 360, which provides one of the simplest starting points for the beginning blogger. Blogger.com, the subject of Chapter 6, is by some measurements the world's most popular blogging service and is populated by many newcomers trying out their first blogs. Chapter 7 details TypePad, a full-featured blog service subscribed to by many serious bloggers.

Part III: Installing Your Own Blog Program

The chapters in Part III are the most challenging of the book, but I don't assume any special knowledge. Any ambitious reader can reach an advanced power-blogging state by taking these chapters one step at a time.

Of the five chapters in this part, Chapter 8 is the most important for any reader curious about using a self-installed blogging program. The self-installed programs, which get installed on a server (not on your PC), offer unmatched power and features, along with a steeper learning curve than the hosted blog services. Installation is the hardest part, and Chapter 8 covers the principles encountered when installing any of the big blog programs.

Movable Type and WordPress are the two server-installed programs covered in this book, and each gets a chapter that clarifies how they work after installation. Then I move on to Radio UserLand, a blog program and service that is installed on your PC and connects to a server where your blog actually lives. That setup is unique, and Chapter 11 explains it completely.

Finally, Chapter 12 covers the best of both worlds: power-blogging software that somebody else installs for you, in specialized Web hosts whose accounts come equipped with Movable Type or WordPress ready to go.

Part IV: Total Blog Immersion

My hope is that you become profoundly hooked on blogging in Parts I, II, and III, and then thirst for more information and cooler things to do with your blog. Part IV explores blog culture, blog revenue, podcasting, photos, video, music, and — most importantly — syndicated feeds. Ah, the feeds. Please don't neglect Chapter 13, the first chapter of this part. Feeds are important not only because they make it easy for a global audience to read your blog, but also because fluency with feeds makes it possible for you to follow a global network of blogs and other news sites. Feeds tie together the two sides of blogging: creating blogs and consuming blogs.

Podcasting is a hot topic as I prepare this manuscript, and it will no doubt be hotter as you read it. Thousands of podcasts exist, but millions of people don't know how to get started. Chapter 16 advises you on a handful of services that can get you started.

Part V: The Part of Tens

This part carries on the *For Dummies* tradition by providing selections of blog search engines and directories as well as blogging resources for your browsing pleasure. The Part of Tens is always a fun portion of the book to write and, I hope, fun to read.

Icons Used in This Book

Britney Spears is my icon. I would do anything to see her, meet her, touch her . . . I'm sorry, I slipped into a bizarre alternate reality in which I was a 15-year-old girl with eyeliner. I hope to revisit that reality some day. In the meantime, let's discuss more meaningful cultural artifacts, such as the little pictures in the margins of this book.

Tips are particularly useful nuggets of information.

This icon represents paragraphs that embody a fear of being forgotten. They seem to be crying "Remember me! Remember me!" It's pathetic.

I don't use this icon much because, honestly, I don't know much technical stuff. When I do think of something technical, I'm hideously proud of myself and rattle off gibberish tediously. Don't indulge me when I get like that. These paragraphs can safely and beneficially be skipped.

This icon pops up when your computer is about to explode. It doesn't happen often — every few chapters, maybe. To prevent computer shards flying about the room, read the marked paragraph slowly and carefully, and then drink a cup of prune juice. The efficacy of prune juice in settling down an explosive computer is unproven, but I'm a great believer in the calming effects of squished fruit.

Where to Go from Here

Only one in a hundred readers will read this book straight through, cover to cover. Oddly, that is the exact percentage of the book-buying public that spontaneously bursts into flames. Coincidence? If self-immolation isn't on your agenda for the next week, take the safe route and skip a chapter here and there. Your selection of content in these pages will be determined by your blogging experience level, your ambition, and your curiosity. Beginners probably should read the first three chapters. Then, to get blogging quickly, focus on Chapters 4–7. Chapters 8–12 are for aspiring power bloggers with a hunger for the big, Humvee-type programs. Those chapters could be starting points for readers with the most experience.

A more theoretical reading plan starts with Chapters 1–3, and then skips to Chapters 13–17; that body of material packs a lot of understanding without diving much into the plain mechanics of blogging. And "The Part of Tens," is excellent reading while on the phone with an in-law, in the bathroom, or when sitting in a plane avoiding conversation with your seatmate.