TRIS HUSSEY

Second Edition

Create Your Own Blog

6 Easy Projects to Start Blogging Like a Pro

Personal Blog Using wordpress.com • Business Blog Using a Self-Installed WordPress Blog • Building a Website Using a Blog Engine • Multimedia Blog • Portfolio Blog for Artists • Blogging with Tumblr and Posterous

SAMS

Create Your Own Blog

Second Edition

TRIS HUSSEY

SAMS 800 East 96th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240

Create Your Own Blog: 6 Easy Projects to Start Blogging Like a Pro

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About the Author

Tris Hussey started blogging on a whim and then found himself as Canada's first professional blogger. Tris has worked for several blogging and media startups and has taught new media at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. Tris teaches blogging, WordPress, and podcasting through the University of British Columbia.

In addition, Tris finds time to speak, guest lecture, and contribute to the social media community in and around Vancouver. When not doing all this, Tris manages the marketing and social media for Simply.ca.

Dedication

For my Dad, who always told me to read the manuals.

Acknowledgments

When I started the first edition of this book, I never in my wildest dreams would have thought that I would have not only written two more books since, but also be writing a second edition to this book! I feel blessed and honored that I'm able to do this. Of course, writing a book—even a second edition—isn't an easy job. So I have tons and tons of people to thank.

This book couldn't have happened without the help, direction, and prodding of many, many people. Thanks to Paul Chaney for believing that I could do this book in the first place and letting the publisher know this. Thank you to my brilliant technical editor, Catherine Winters, for keeping me straight. Thanks to the whole editorial team at Pearson—I couldn't ask for better editors and support. Michelle Newcomb, my acquisitions editor, patiently waits for my tardy email replies. Someday I'll get better, Michelle. Thanks to Rob Cottingham of Social Signals for the cartoon at the beginning of Chapter 5, and to my friends and family for inspiring and supporting me while I've been writing this book. Most importantly, thank you to my beloved wife, Sheila, for supporting me and believing in me through this whole process—again!

We Want to Hear from You!

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CHAPTER 5

Creating a Personal Blog with WordPress.com

It seems a little redundant to talk about creating a personal blog, because in the beginning all blogs were personal. To have a business blog was anathema to bloggers. Making a blog that is all about "you" is the heart of personal blogging. You is in quotes because, as you've learned, who "you" are online depends on how much or how little you want to reveal. Because this is a personal blog, it's intended to reflect your beliefs, hobbies, and family—essentially, who you are.

I think many people dismiss personal blogs as less serious than "professional" or "business" blogs, but I think it's just the opposite. Personal blogs are very serious, even if the subject matter isn't. What's more important than who you are? Because the origins of blogging center on the personal blog, it's important not to dismiss them out of hand.

I first started blogging to learn about it for professional reasons and to have an outlet for things I wasn't doing at work. My blog was the epitome of the personal blog. In my case, my blog was mostly about collaboration tools, software, and other geek esoterica. Still, it was personal, and, because I expressed myself well and made some local connections, my humble blog became a springboard to my present career. However, there is a strange hybrid here that is worth noting, the personal-business blog. My blog falls under that category because it is my personal blog, but it serves to drive and support my professional career and business life.

This chapter takes what you've learned in the previous four chapters and builds on it so you can go from a general blog to something that's more your style. Roll up your sleeves here and get to work.

I've written this chapter to serve as a quick start for a blog using WordPress.com. I could have chosen Blogger or a few other engines—Tumblr will get a chapter of its own—to serve as the example, but I've found that starting a blog on WordPress.com gives you a great foundation to build a blog, or a website (which I cover in Chapter 7, "Creating a Website"), with a clear and easy path to grow and expand over time.

Unlike the first edition of this book, I don't cover how to start podcasting or video blogging in this chapter—both of those topics are covered in Chapter 10, "Creating a Multimedia Blog." Over the years of teaching people how to blog and create websites with WordPress.com, I've found that people want to do the following:

- Post content
- Post images
- Embed videos from YouTube (and other places)
- Personalize the theme or design of their blog

That's pretty much it. This chapter puts the focus squarely on those goals. Technology will, for the most part, take a backseat to getting things done simply and easily.

Getting Started with WordPress.com

In Chapter 2, "Installing and Setting Up Your First Blog," I talked about setting up a blog on WordPress.com. I'm going to go into the process in more detail in this chapter to get more into the nitty gritty of things.

Before we get started on creating this new blog of yours, let's first create a place for it to live.

NOTE

Remember, WordPress.*com* and WordPress.*org* are related, but different. WordPress.com is a commercial venture run and owned by Automattic. WordPress.org is the home of the open-source version of WordPress that you can download and install yourself on your own servers. Automattic set up and supports the WordPress Foundation that runs and maintains things needed for WordPress.org to continue.

Creating Your Account

Creating an account on WordPress.com is fast, easy, and free. WordPress.com provides a tremendous number of features for free. In fact, it's pretty easy to start and stick with WordPress.com for years and years.

The first step is to go to WordPress.com and look for the big Get Started Here button (see Figure 5.1)

CAUTION

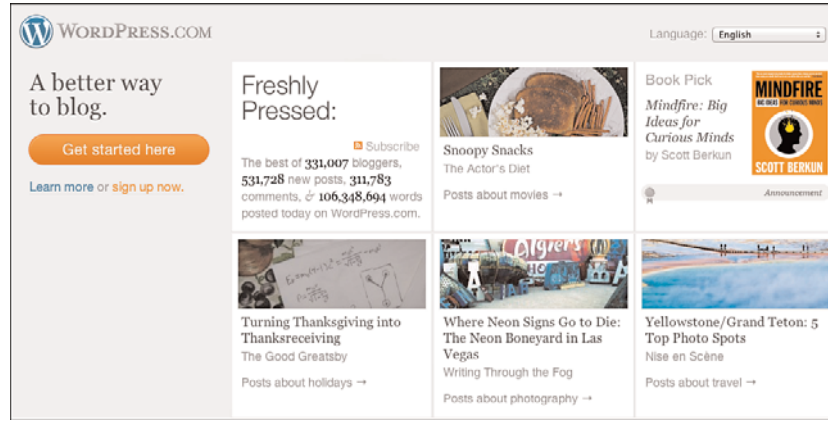
INTERNET EXPLORER 6 NOT WELCOME HERE

Microsoft's Internet Explorer 6 was, for a very long time, the most popular browser on the Internet. It was first introduced more than 10, yes 10, years ago. Although IE 6 was great for its time, its time has long since passed. However, many companies and users hadn't taken the time to update their computers to use newer versions of IE or other browsers like Firefox, Chrome, or Safari. Continuing to support IE 6 was keeping many sites like WordPress.com from taking full advantage of newer technologies, and supporting a decade-old browser just didn't make sense. So, if you try to use WordPress.com using IE 6, you won't be able to sign up until you come back with a "modern" browser.

Sure, it might be harsh, but IE upgrades are free, and sometimes, you have to let go of the past to move forward.

FIGURE 5.1

The home page for WordPress.com.



When you click the button, you'll see a screen that looks something like Figure 5.2. Note that I had to scroll down and shrink things down so you could see all the form fields in one image.

In Figure 5.2, you see that I've picked "createyourownblog2ndedition" for the name. The menu that is open shows that I can have createyourownblog2ndedition.wordpress.com for free, but other options, like createyourownblog2ndedition.com, for a cost. You don't have to decide right this minute whether you want to buy or use a domain for your blog. We'll talk about buying and using domains with WordPress.com later in the chapter.

You'll also note that my *username* for this blog is *also* createyourownblog2ndedition. On WordPress.com, you can keep your username and blog name the same, *or* you can put a different name in the field. Something shorter, like cyob2nded, might have been a good choice here. Why? Shorter URLs are easier for you, and everyone else, to type.

NEW TERM

A username is the word, phrase, or name you use to log in to a computer or service. It's different from your password. Some services use an email address as your username; others, like WordPress.com, ask for a different name to use.

I entered a password and confirmed it in the field, as well as an email address. It is *very* important that you enter your email address correctly because before you can start your blog, you have to click a link sent to that email address to confirm your account. When you click Sign Up, you go to a screen, like Figure 5.3, to put in a little information about yourself while waiting for that confirmation email to arrive.

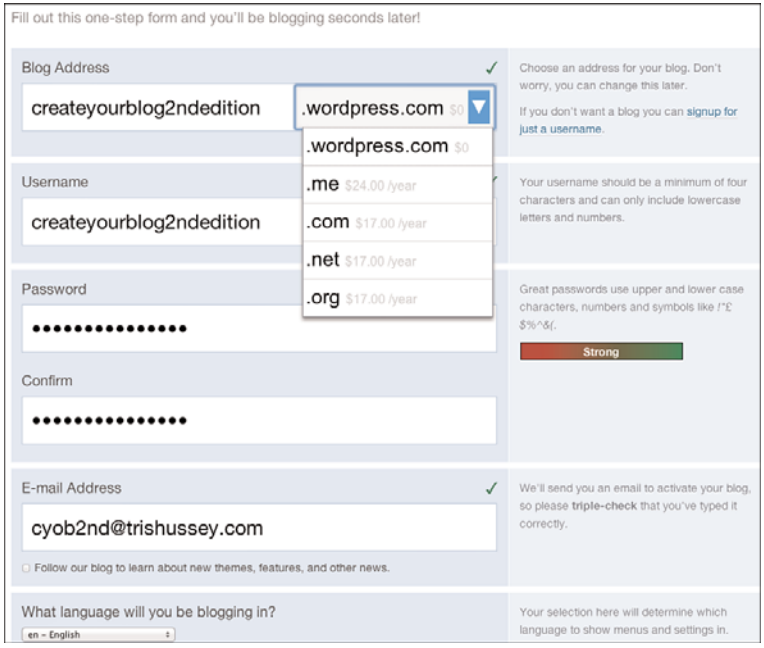
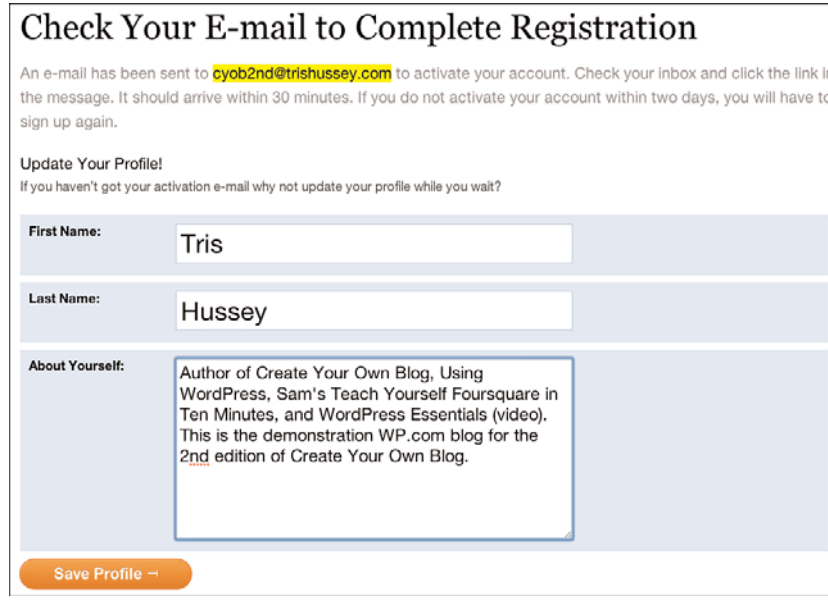


FIGURE 5.2

The sign-up screen for WordPress.com.

FIGURE 5.3

The Edit Profile page on WordPress.com that you reach after starting the sign-up process.

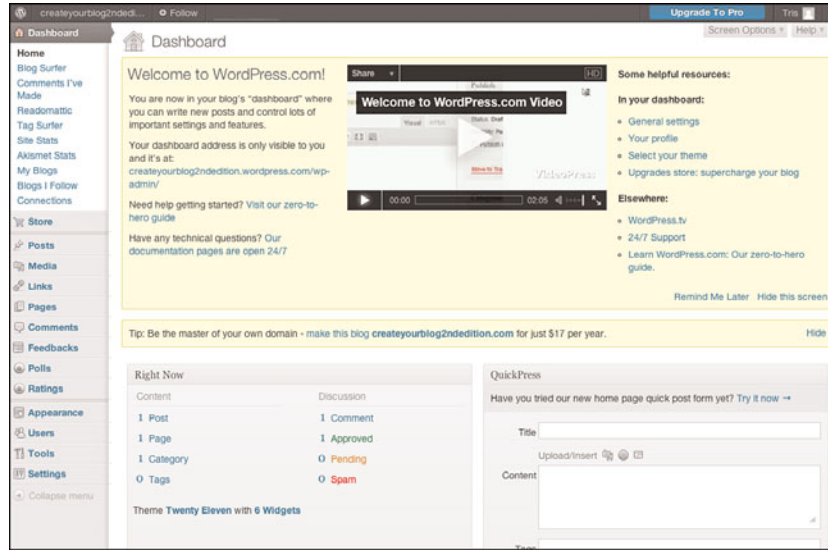


When the email arrives in your inbox, you need to click the Activate Blog button. When you do, you'll see a screen like Figure 5.4.

At this point, if you're ready, you can start blogging! But maybe you'd like to know what some of the import settings and configuration steps are before you dive into blogging.

FIGURE 5.4

Confirmation and success! Also, your Dashboard for your blog on WordPress.com.



Key WordPress.com Settings and Configuration

Despite WordPress.com adding more and more features to the service, they've kept the number of things you need to do to get started to a bare minimum. Technically, you've completed all of them (signing up and confirming your account), but there are a few things I suggest you do to get started on the right foot.

First is updating a few of the basic settings. On the left side of the screen, click the Settings menu item (refer to Figure 5.4). This brings you to the General settings screen. You'll see that the Site Title field is the name you created when you signed up for WordPress.com. You'll also notice that the Tagline is "Just another WordPress.com site." In Figure 5.5 you can see I've updated those fields to things that are more descriptive and interesting. Try to keep the site title reasonably short, but be more descriptive in the Tagline field. The Tagline is supposed to tell visitors a little about what they can expect to read when they come to your site. The last thing I change on this screen is the Timezone. Just pick your city from the menu.

Scroll to the bottom of the screen, click Save Changes, and you're done!

NOTE

Did you notice that on the settings screen, it doesn't say Blog Title, but rather Site Title? That change was made to reflect the fact that blogs have become synonymous with websites *and* that many people are creating traditional "websites" using WordPress as the engine to power them—as you will read in Chapter 7.

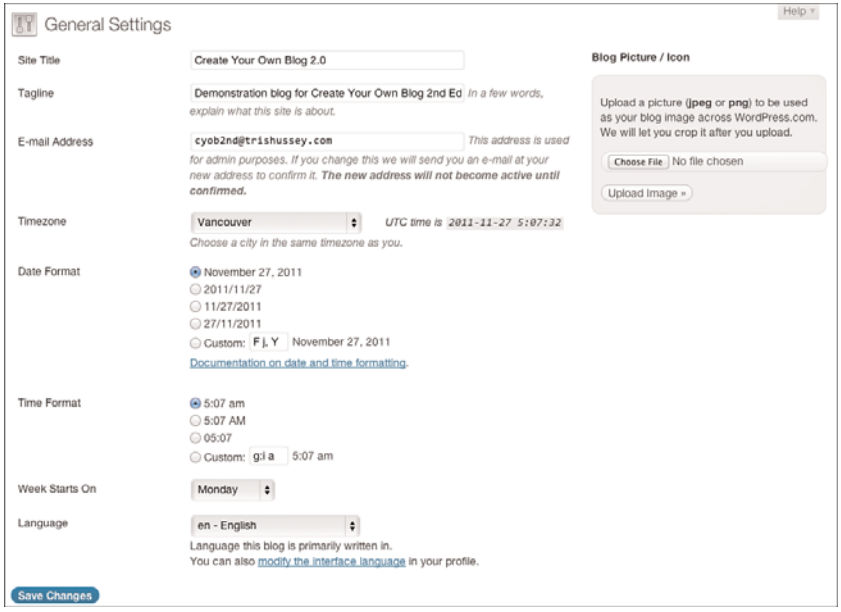


FIGURE 5.5
The WordPress.com settings screen.

Now that the basic settings are updated—yes, believe it or not, that's all you *really* need to do—let's fix up a couple other things that will help you get off on the right foot.

When you start any WordPress.com blog or install WordPress yourself, the software automatically creates a new post and adds a comment to it. This is great so that you can see that everything worked, but leaving the "Hello World" post on your site isn't needed. So, let's delete the post—which will delete the comment as well.

First, click Posts from the menu on the left side. This brings up a list of all (right now, all one of them) posts on your blog. Pass your mouse pointer right below the title of the post until you see the menu that has Trash as an option. Just click Trash and you're done (see Figure 5.6)!

One last thing, and then you are set to get off and running. Just like creating a default Post, WordPress also creates a default About page. Again, on the left menu (you're going to be clicking this menu a lot, by the way), click Pages and you'll see a list of all the pages currently available (see Figure 5.7).

Just like with the Posts listing, pass your mouse below the title, but instead of clicking Trash, click Edit. You can also just click the title About, and you'll get to the same editing screen (see Figure 5.8).

WHAT'S A POST AND WHAT'S A PAGE?

WordPress-based blogs and sites have two basic kinds of content: Posts and Pages (the capitals are intentional). A Post is just what you'd think it is, a blog post. But it's also more. A Post is a piece of content that is also connected to other pieces of content (that is, other Posts) through time and the post topic (based on the categories and tags you picked for that Post). A Page, on the other hand, is a more static piece of content that is more timeless and *isn't* connected to other pieces of content through time or subject. You can easily look at all the Posts in a category by clicking a category link in that post. You can also look at all the Posts from October 2010, for example, by choosing to look at posts by time.

You can't look at Pages in the same way. You can't easily have a list of Pages for your readers. Pages aren't meant for that. Most people use Pages for things like an About page, a contact page, or similar content that can stand by itself.

As a blogger, you will probably create 10 or 20 Posts for every Page you might feel the need to create. You won't need many Pages in your blog. Now, when we start talking about using WordPress to build a website, the whole discussion about Posts and Pages gets more interesting. Let's leave that discussion for Chapter 7.

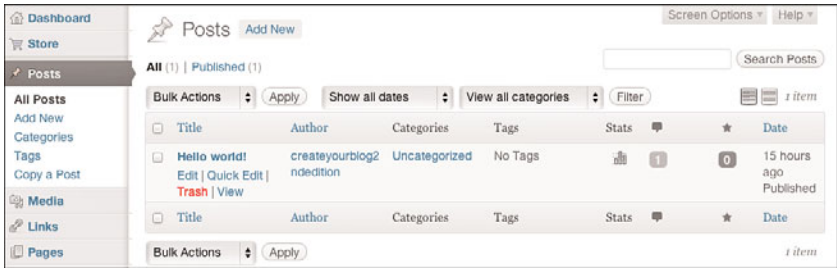


FIGURE 5.6

Deleting the first default post on a new blog.

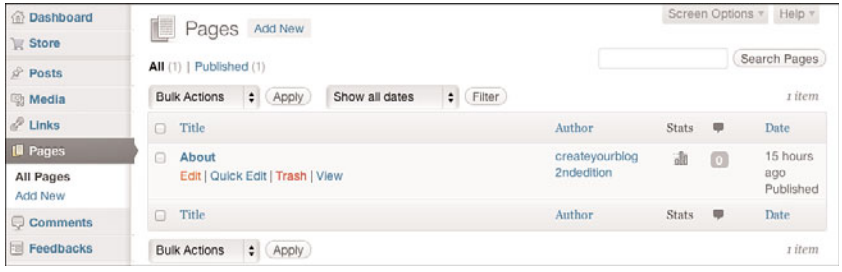


FIGURE 5.7

The list of the Pages for this site.

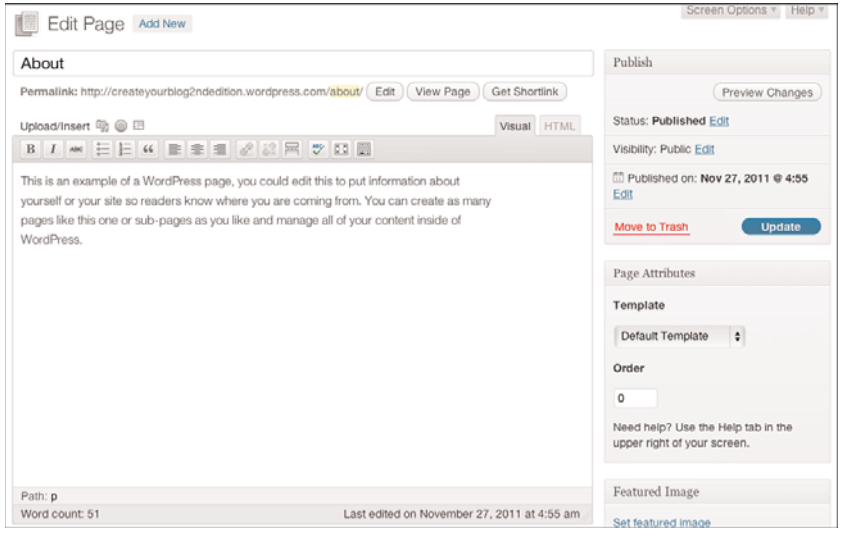


FIGURE 5.8

You'll soon see that the Post editing screen looks almost identical to this Page editing screen.

What you're going to do here is update the content. Maybe you'll change the title to something more than just "About" (about what?) and edit the content of the Page as well. Don't worry if you're not sure about what you're going to say; you can always come back and edit this Page as much as you'd like. Nothing is set in stone here. When you're done, click Update. If you want to see how it looks, click View Page and a new tab or window will open

with the results. Figure 5.9 shows what I did for this demo blog.

We're ready to start with the next step of getting this blog ready for action. Are there more things you can update? Certainly. If you pass your mouse pointer over the Users menu item on the left, a menu will pop out. If you choose My Profile, you can update the picture that is connected to your account and edit other bits of information (see Figure 5.10).

FIGURE 5.9

My updated About page, as meager as it might be.

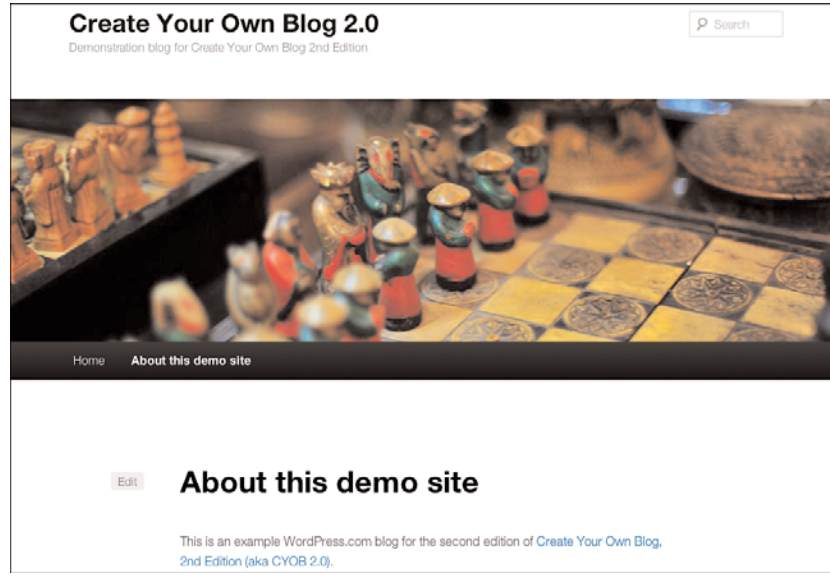


FIGURE 5.10

The profile page on the blog, where you can update more information if you want.

Do you *need* to update this? Eventually, but not right away. Right now we have more fun things to do. The next step is picking a cool and awesome theme for your blog.

Themes and Customizations

One of the best things about WordPress (and most other blogging engines) is that, on a whim, you can change the look and feel of your site with a click. Your content (Posts and Pages) isn't affected at all. You might have to put widgets and menus back in place, but the important stuff—the stuff you've written—will be safe and sound.

Choosing the Right Theme for Your Blog

To get started picking a theme for your blog, first click the Appearance menu on the left. You'll come to a page showing about 30 of the more than 190 themes available to you on WordPress.com. If you see what you like on the first screen, that's great, but most of us want to browse around a little first.

NOTE

WHAT ARE "PREMIUM THEMES"?

When WordPress.com first launched, it offered a selection of some of the best themes available—the best *free* themes available. If you use self-hosted WordPress you can use one of the thousands of other free themes *and* have the option to buy a *premium* theme to use on your blog. Automattic felt that WordPress.com users were missing out on some great themes, so starting in February 2011, WordPress.com users could make a purchase from a selection of the best Premium themes. They cost about $45–$100, but often they offer more flexibility and professional polish than the free themes. The choice is yours, and choice is grand.

To try to narrow down your theme choices, you can put a term into the search box (for example, "blue") and click search, but you still might find yourself faced with a large number of theme choices. What I prefer to do is use the feature filter, as shown in Figure 5.11.

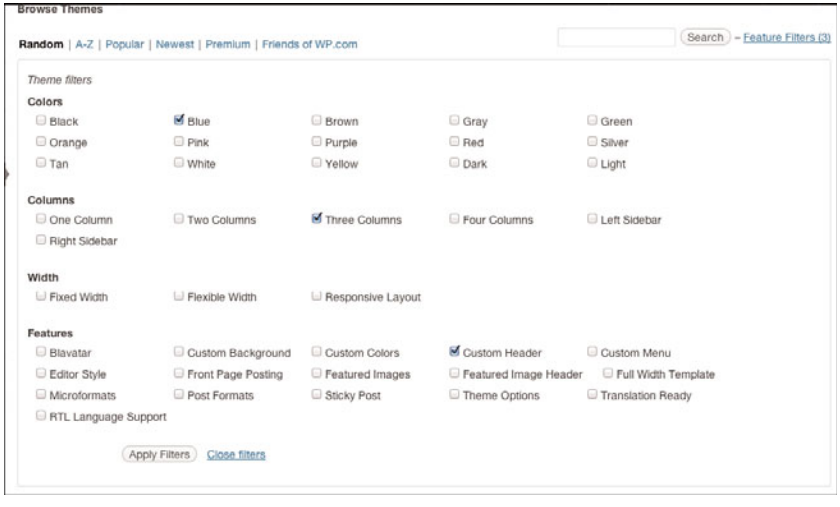


FIGURE 5.11

The feature filter with a few choices made.

After you've made your selections, click Apply Filters; you should see a few themes to pick from, like in Figure 5.12.

It is possible you'll see no results at all. Why? Well, because you might have narrowed the field so closely that there are no themes that appear to fit those criteria. Theme designers put in their own keywords and features, and sometimes they don't do the most thorough job of it. So, the best suggestion when you get no results is to reduce the number of filters you're applying and try again. Sometimes I'm reduced to looking for things like "three columns" or "blue" or "light" when looking for the perfect theme for the job. It just depends on what catches your eye for the task at hand.

After you pick the theme you're interested in, you can select Preview to get an idea of how it looks (but there isn't much to see, because you haven't posted anything yet). Click Activate if you like what you see—at least for the time being—you can always change your mind later and pick a new theme.

Headers and Backgrounds

Many themes allow you to set a custom header image. Themes like Twenty Eleven and Twenty Ten come with several images that you can choose from (or have chosen at random). The theme I'm using for the examples here is called Dusk to Dawn and doesn't come with any images, but you can easily add your own. You start by clicking the Header submenu under Appearance. In Figure 5.13 you can see that if you upload an image that is 870×220 pixels it will be used as is; if it's larger you'll be able to crop it (very handy that you can crop the image right within WordPress!). I made an image for this demo blog, uploaded it, cropped it a bit, and you can see the result in Figure 5.14.

FIGURE 5.12

Results of my feature filter selections (more choices are offscreen).

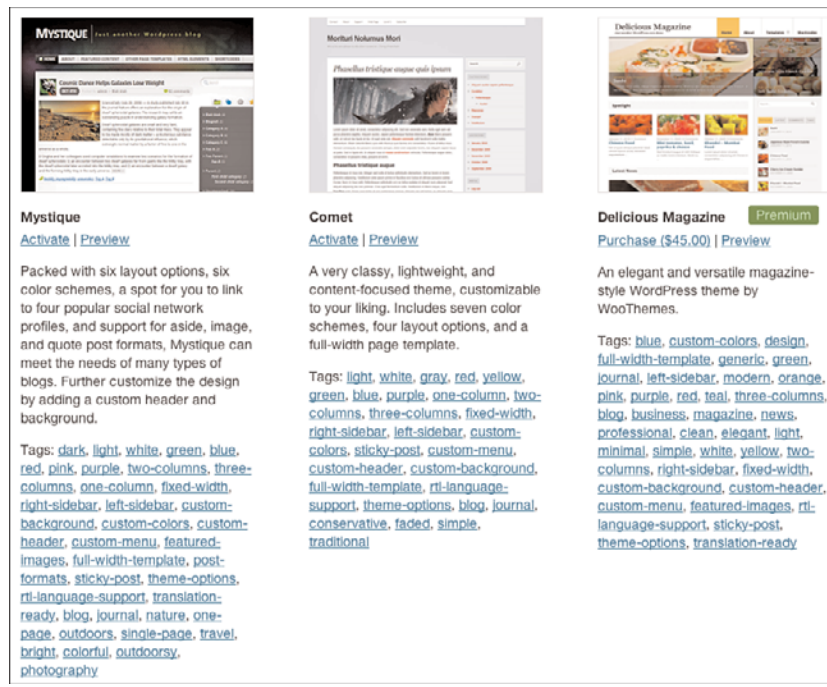


FIGURE 5.13

The custom header image screen within WordPress.

FIGURE 5.14

The result! The custom header in place on the blog.

Although the ability to have a custom header is built in to WordPress, not all themes take advantage of the functionality. I particularly like being able to easily have a custom header image (and one that I can change easily), so I make sure that's one of the features I select in the feature filter.

Some themes go even a step further and allow you to use a featured image on a Post to be the

header for just that Post (like Twenty Ten and Twenty Eleven).

Being able to change your header as easily as uploading a new image makes updating your blog with a fresh look very, very easy. Changing things around doesn't just end with the header; many themes allow you to choose new background images and colors as well.

Dusk to Dawn is one of those themes that allows you to mix things up a bit. Start by clicking Background under Appearance and, just like the Headers section, you'll be given options for what to do next.

You can see what that default background looks like in Figure 5.14, but in Figure 5.15, you can see that I've picked a lighter shade of blue (if you're reading this in black and white, trust me, it's a lighter shade of blue). Figure 5.16 shows the result, which I think makes the details of the default background image stand out more.

Headers and backgrounds are nice window dressing, but what about something a little more useful, like a navigation menu? That's our next stop.

FIGURE 5.15

Custom background screen in WordPress.

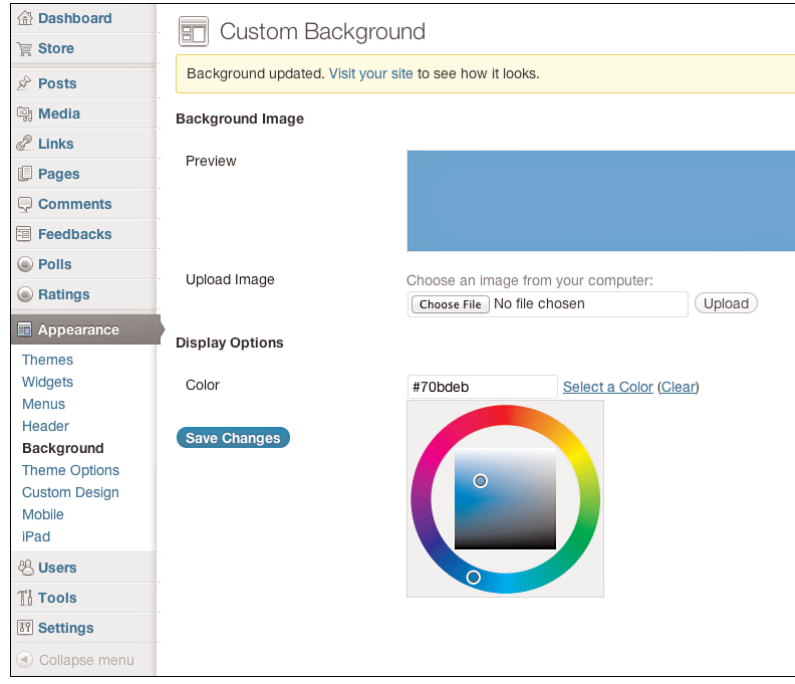


FIGURE 5.16
The new background color on the demo blog. Much nicer, I think.

Menus

Another feature built in to WordPress that themes can take advantage of is the custom menus function. Not long ago, editing your navigation menus was more than a bit of a chore. WordPress Menus allow you to create, edit, rearrange, and manage menus by just dragging and dropping. Like Headers and Background, choose Menus under Appearance to get started (see Figure 5.17).

This particular theme uses menus, but has them only on the sidebar. Other themes have menus horizontally across the top, either above or below the Header (sometimes even both places).

Working with Menus is easy. The first step is to create the menu by giving it a name in the Menu Name box and then clicking Create Menu. We don't have a lot to add to our menu right now, but I added a custom link to my home page (trishussey.com) and added the About page we edited earlier in this chapter to my navigation menu. After I clicked Save Menu, I also made sure to pick the name of my menu from the menu in the Theme Locations box (and then clicked Save). This ensured that my menu would appear on my blog (believe me, I've missed that step before and wondered what was going on).

You can see the menu on the sidebar in Figure 5.18.

The last bit of fun we're going to have here in the themes department (and before we get to the good stuff—writing!) is talking about widgets. I talked a little about widgets in Chapter 2, but here I'm going to show you how they are used on a WordPress-based site.

FIGURE 5.17

The custom menu configuration screen.

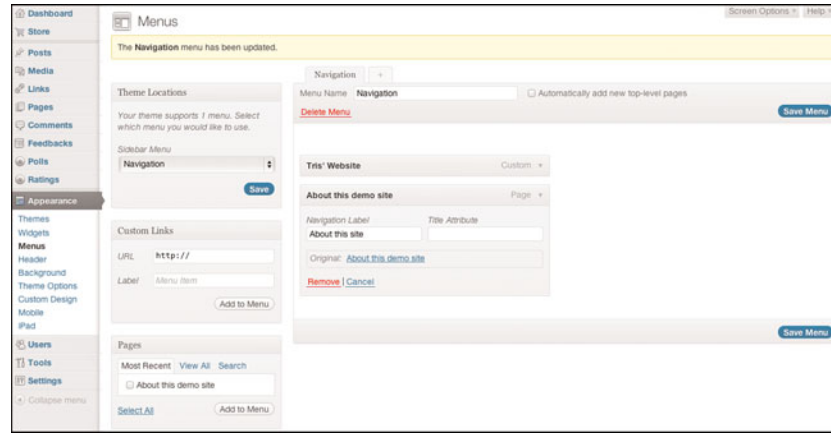


FIGURE 5.18

My custom menu in place on the sidebar.

Widgets

Like everything else theme related, you'll find the Widget screen under the Appearance menu by clicking Widgets. In Figure 5.19 you can see what the default widget screen looks like *for this theme*. Like headers and backgrounds, each theme can define which and how many widgets are displayed at first.

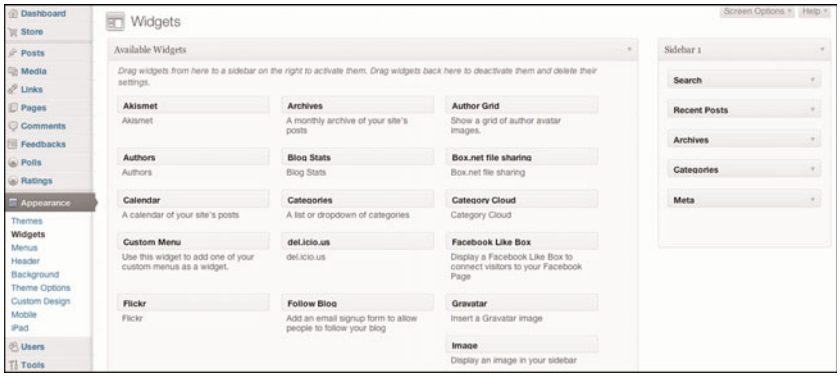


FIGURE 5.19

The default Widget screen. Oh, the possibilities!

Adding a widget to your sidebar is very easy—just drag and drop it into place! In Figure 5.20 you can see a number of widgets that I've dropped onto this theme's sidebar. I left the configuration area for the Facebook Like widget open so you could see how that looks.

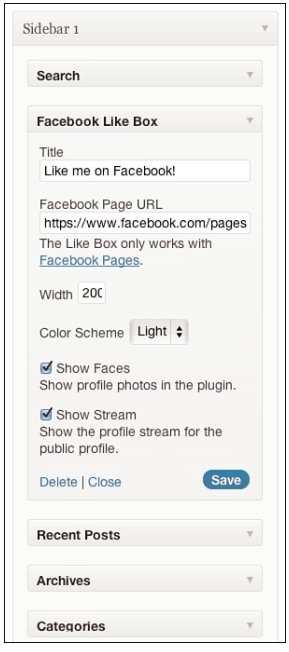


FIGURE 5.20

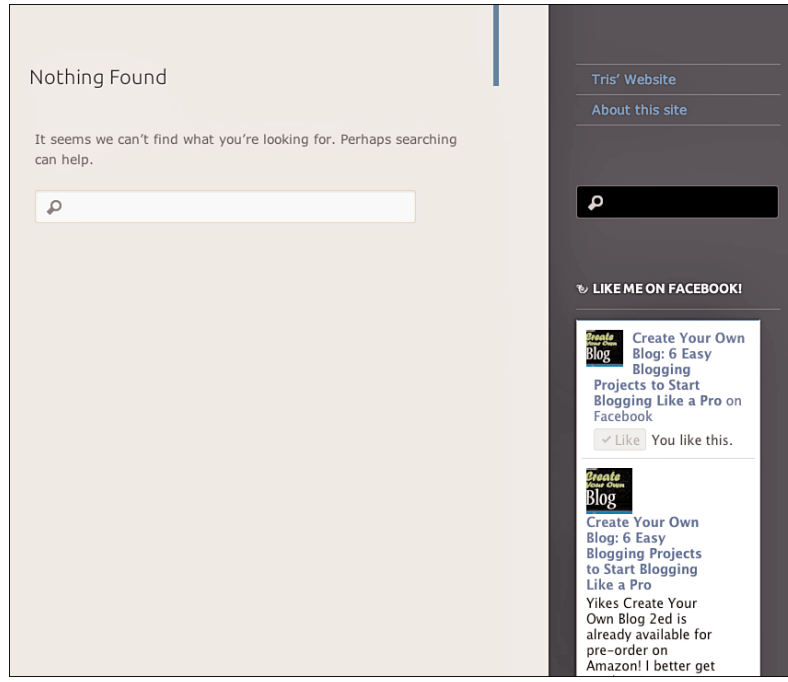
Just a few widgets in place as an example.

Some themes have widget areas only in the sidebars, but other themes have them in the header, footer, and even in the middle of the page. In Chapter 2, I said that a widget is just an easy way to contain extra code to display things like Twitter feeds, Facebook Like buttons, a list of your recent posts, or all the pages on your blog. Because the widgets move in and out like little boxes or containers, you can add and remove interesting interactive elements to your site without needing to know how to code them yourself.

Figure 5.21 shows what some of the widgets on this demo site look like in place. Again, as I said in Chapter 2, widgets are great and can you can add really neat stuff to your blog using widgets, but you can also go overboard. Too many widgets slows down how fast your blog loads. When in doubt, have a friend check your site on their computer to see if it still loads okay for them. If it takes a minute or two to completely load, you probably have too many widgets!

FIGURE 5.21

Widgets in place. Why don't you Like me on Facebook?



That's about all we need to do to your site at the moment to get you going to the next step—writing. If you're feeling a little lost with WordPress, don't worry—its Help section is great. You can refer to it anytime from the Help menu, and it should clarify something for you if one of the features has changed between my writing this book and your reading it.

With the foundation in place, let's get to writing—or at least creating content.

Focus on the Content—What to Put in a Personal Blog

Because this is a personal blog, what kind of content you post is up to you. You might have posts, videos, podcasts, pictures, or whatever suits you at the moment—whatever tells your story. This is fantastic, really, because it gives you a tremendous depth and breadth of things you can have on your blog. This range of ideas is perfect for when you get hired for your first professional blogging gig or when your boss asks you to write, set up, or own the company's blog.

NOTE

If you are like many people, you might also have a business blog at work where you can't talk about everything freely, so having a personal blog frees you to do that. I do this myself because there are things that I want to write about that just aren't appropriate for my work blog (even if my personal blog is admittedly somewhat of a business blog, too).

If you intend to run both personal and professional blogs, it won't take long to realize it's a bit of a high-wire act. I was fortunate in this regard because my bosses accept that I have both kinds of blogs; because I keep those lines very clear, they don't censor me at work or at home. Okay, sometimes I slip a bit from one side to another, and so will you, but we are all human, after all.

What do you put on a personal blog? Well, the sky's the limit. Throughout this chapter, I'll cover the different ways you can fill your personal blog with content. Let's start with the simplest; the basic blog post.

Writing

Chapter 3, "Creating Content for Your Blog," discusses writing in a general way, but in a personal blog, giving readers a look into your life is what brings people back to read more posts. Some of my favorite blogs have been ones where the posts were about the lighter side of family life, or a person's struggle with cancer, or a recovery from an accident. A very popular blog told the stories of a paramedic in London, UK. He related what life was like for him when saving lives, witnessing tragedy, and even the drudgery of his job. This was a great read.

What pulled it all together was the writing style or voice. Personal blogs are more informal. This isn't where you'd expect a long treatise on the meaning of life; it's where you might find the funniest street signs you see on your way to work. How about the guy you buy your paper from? There can be great stories there.

TIP

It's hard to just sit down and pound stories out on command, so if you're trying to capture these kinds of stories, try to jot them down as they happen.

Don't worry that your writing isn't "good enough," because it is good enough; just write your stories. No matter what your stories are, write them with passion and realism, and people will enjoy them.

Also in Chapter 3, I gave basic instructions on how to write posts on a WordPress-based blog. In this chapter I'll add to those points as needed—primarily in the sections related to images and videos—but for the most part I'll talk about "the other stuff" that makes a great personal blog.

Topics

One of the unfortunate examples of blogger stereotypes is the infamous "cat blog," which refers to personal blogs that are just writing about and having lots of pictures of an owner's cat (or dog). Okay, it's true. Cat owners often do mention them from time to time, some people far too often.

You can gather a lot, though, from the way people write about their cats. They love their cats and want to share their cats' lives with the world. The topic is close to them and, most of all, personal. It's something with which other obsessive pet owners can identify. This is the key for your blog. You're not writing for the people who have no interest in your passion, but rather those who share it. It doesn't matter if the topic is cats, crocheting, or reflecting on the nature of humanity; topics for your personal blog are entirely of your own choosing.

With that said, let's take a look at some popular categories of personal blogs.

TIP

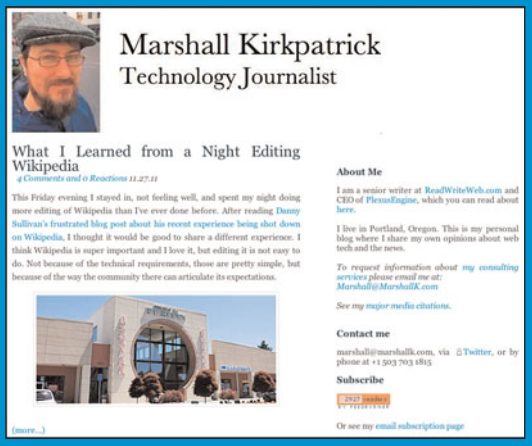
Ideas for topics and posts come at the strangest times and places. Keep a small notebook and pen handy to jot them down! You could even email them to yourself, and that's really geeky.

Hobbies

We all have hobbies, even geeks like me. Often it's a hobby that you're really passionate about (such as woodworking, stamp collecting, fishing, wines, cooking, trains, or photography) that are often some of the best and most rewarding topics for personal blogs. Write your blog like you'd talk about it to another enthusiast. Share tips, tricks, pictures of your latest creation, and in-jokes that only a true aficionado would get.

On my personal blog (which does get professional often), I have talked about my passions for cooking and photography. I've shared recipe creations and photography tips/finds.

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE PERSONAL BLOGS



There are a ton of personal blogs out there that I like and respect, but the following are a few of my favorites:

- **Joey deVilla "The Adventures of Accordion Guy in the 21st Century"—www.joeydevilla.com**
- **Marshall Kirkpatrick—marshallk.com**
- **Erin Kotecki Vest "Queen of Spain"—queenofspainblog.com**

Spend some time reviewing these blogs, because they might give you some ideas for what to do with your own blog.

The comments I get on those posts are something that I truly look forward to. How often do you get to "geek out" on your hobby?

Write your blog like you'd talk about it to another enthusiast. Share tips, tricks, pictures of your latest creation, and in-jokes that only a true aficionado would get.

I know that often the other people in our lives get a wee bit tired of hearing about how you just found a great way to store all your sandpaper so you could find them and keep them sorted by grade, or about the awesome new pattern for knitted laptop covers you found. However, an audience of like-minded hobbyists never gets tired of those things. Whether it's just one facet of your personal blog or the primary focus, talk about your hobbies. Make this your little corner of the world where you can wax poetic on good-fitting lens caps and not feel like it's strange at all. (It isn't strange, by the way. I hate poorly fitting lens caps!)

Life

Yes, "Life" is a broad category, I know, but life is like that, isn't it? Whether you talk about love found or love lost, your partner, or your kids, sharing the stories of your life is something that can be very therapeutic. Savoring the victories and sharing the defeats is something everyone can relate to and enjoy reading. Not in a shallow, schadenfreude kind of way, mind you, but rather in that more positive and constructive way all individuals like to share their lives.

In my personal blog, for example, you can find entries about dealing with divorce and loss, mourning and marking the anniversaries of my father's passing, and marking the rite of passage of my first "heart scare." These are the real, gritty parts of life, which are the things that connect humans and people. Don't shy away from them; embrace them. Yes, there is a limit to what you should share, and I'll delve into that later in this chapter. There are some things that you might not feel comfortable sharing or that you feel comfortable sharing, but the *other people* in your life don't. Respect that line and try to stay on the "good" side of it. Yes, you will slip now and then, but if your heart is in the right place, it might escape unscathed.

One note that I reiterate later is that when you publish something online, it's there forever. Delete isn't really delete, because the content is cached and stored all over the Internet. As my friend and journalist for the *Vancouver Sun* Gillian Shaw says, "Don't put something online that you don't want to see printed on the front page of the paper."

Just "Stuff"

There is a lot of space between life and hobbies, so I've called that space "stuff." It's not the most eloquent descriptor, but it works. This category includes movies, music, books, and day-to-day issues that are general chit-chat. For like-minded people, it's always good to read about what someone thinks about a movie or book. Where else can you post those silly pictures you find online or those bad jokes that proliferate on the Internet like rabbits?

Privacy

When you choose to blog, you are choosing to live a portion of your life in the public eye.

Sure, most of the things you write are innocuous, but sometimes they aren't. Again, that's fine because you're choosing to reveal those things about yourself. What about the other people in your life? Yes, there's the rub. Although deciding your own level of privacy online, and that "line" will float and change over time, is relatively easy, you have to also consider other people and how they might or might not be included in your writing.

"Don't put something online that you don't want to see printed on the front page of the paper." —Gillian Shaw, Vancouver Sun

Relationships

Because this is a personal blog, delving into the world of relationships seems like a natural topic area. Many of the women I know write about their (mis)adventures in dating, being married, or being a parent. Interestingly, not as many men write about the same things, with the exception of parenting. In any case, my friends who write about their relationships do so either with the full knowledge of their partners or write so their partners (or dates) remain anonymous. For married couples who *both* blog, there is an even more interesting dynamic, but again, there are agreed-upon rules. Don't be surprised that the first question you're asked when you announce, "Honey, I'm starting a blog!" is "What are you going to write about?" which isn't really about your topic per se as much it is asking, "Are you going to be blogging about me/us/the kids?" This is the moment to have the ground rules established.

When you write about your partner, show him or her the post before you post it. If your partner wants something gone, make it gone.

Even if you're going to be blogging about your pets, model trains, or knitting patterns, because blogs become a personal outlet, the other people in your life creep into your writing. Figure out early on how comfortable your partner is with being included in your writing. When you write about your partner, show him or her the post before you post it. If your partner wants something gone, make it gone. Even if you're just referring to him or her as "my dear hubs" or "my darling wife" or "the love of my life," give your snookie-poo a chance to say no. As time goes on, the rules and lines might change. This is a natural evolution, so don't push it at the beginning. Respect the boundaries that have been established, and if later on you want to push them, ask first.

Children

Where kids are concerned, it's a horse of a different color. The world today is not like the world I grew up in—not at all. My personal line is that pictures of my children online are private to friends and family only. I don't use their full names, and I avoid discussion that makes them personally identifiable online. Other friends of mine have pictures of their children online and use their names. The line you draw is up to you and your partner. Where children are concerned, you're not just talking about personal privacy but their personal safety. When your children are old enough,

they can participate to a degree in the discussion. My daughter has veto rights on pictures that I put up even for friends and family to see. In the end, you are going to have to make your own decision. Honestly, don't take it lightly.

Comments

Chapter 4, "Building a Community Around Your Blog," explores more about comments in detail, mostly in terms of how they relate to building a community. For a personal blog, commentary is continuing the discussion or the story. As I said in Chapter 4, although individuals might leave comments that are inappropriate or abusive, the best way to engage them is to not engage them at all. Sadly, these sorts of comments are one of the dark sides of the Internet. I've known bloggers who have had serious run-ins with people who crossed the line, but these have been the glaring exceptions and not the rule. I have found comfort, solace, support, congratulations, and good laughs from the comments left on my blogs over the years. Rarely have I ever had a comment that strayed into the realm of troll, and when they did, the comments were so asinine that I let them stand as a testament to their own stupidity.

Although I started this section with the caveat of the bad things that commenters can bring, let me close with the good. I have found that when I have written deeply personal posts, ones that talk about life struggles or successes, the comments have always been the best parts of the posts. They have not only shown me the depth and warmth of the human spirit, but also that as a writer that I moved people. When the story I tell elicits the emotions in my

SHOULD KIDS HAVE THEIR OWN BLOG?

This is a great question both for parents who blog and for those who don't. Pretty soon, your kids might ask about having their own blogs. Before you say no, you should know that there are safe and secure ways for your kids to blog. My favorite, and easiest, is to set up a private blog on WordPress.com. Not only can you shield a WP.com blog from search engines, you can set it so it is visible only to approved members. To everyone else, it isn't there. My daughter has had a blog like this for years. It's nice and safe and secure. When your kids are old enough, you can talk about making the blog public, but in the meantime, think of how much the grandparents, aunts, and uncles would like to read updates online. Yeah, it's pretty cool.

It's important if your children are active online, and especially if they blog in semipublic, that you set some ground rules about how they conduct themselves online, such as the following:

- **Emailing people that you, as a parent, don't know**
- **IMing people you don't know**
- **Giving out personal information, such as a real name, hometown, address, or phone number**
- **Meeting people they've met online in the real world**
- **Using webcams and voice chat**

One thing that will probably grate on your kids is having the computer in a public part of the house and not in their rooms. Yes, there will come a time when they are old enough for the computer to be in their rooms, but early on (elementary age, especially) kids' computer use should be supervised. In the age of inexpensive laptops and netbooks, this is going to get harder and harder to enforce, but it's important to make sure your child is safe online.

readers that I felt while writing it, then "I done good." People relate to and comment on things like struggles with grief and loss but also successes. I've written about missing my father, but also how he is still my greatest inspiration (this book is dedicated to him). When I've written about topics that everyone can relate to, I get the best and most heart-warming comments. Enjoy your comments. They might very well be the best part of the blog.

Multimedia

In 2009, the World Wide Web turned 20 years old, and the Internet itself turned 40. From the beginning of the Web and the first websites, it was more than just text. Images and sounds played a huge role in bringing it to life. These days, seeing a site barren of pictures seems like an error, and often it is. Although you might not think your personal blog will contain "multimedia," you'd be wrong. Pictures, videos, music, and podcasts are all forms of multimedia that are getting richer and richer by the day—you're likely to find a use for at least some of them on your blog.

This section explores using pictures, video, and audio (podcasts) in your personal blog. In this chapter, I'm not going to delve into the how-to aspects of videos or podcasting—that's saved for Chapter 10, "Creating a Multimedia Blog." This chapter talks about what *most* people want to do—share things they find online (like YouTube videos) in their posts.

Pictures

Putting pictures, whether yours or ones you like by others, on your blog is one of the easiest ways to punch up your blog and add some color and spice. WordPress keeps making it easier and easier to add pictures into your posts, so the hardest thing might be taking the picture in the first place! Before discussing how you get a picture into your post, let's talk about copyright.

Make Sure You Have the Right to Post It

I know this seems like a really strange thing to say, but one of the biggest problems online is people posting and republishing images without the permission of the artist or even giving the artist attribution for the work. Clearly, this doesn't apply to photos you've taken or other works you create yourself, but it applies to pictures other people take and other art online. Often the easiest way to find out whether you can use the image is to look at the information around it. For example, I put this as part of the description of pictures I post online: ©Tris Hussey, 2009.

When you see "Non-commercial use permitted with attribution," it means that if you aren't a company who makes money through your website, you are free to re-post/use my picture as long as you give me credit. If you're a company, you're not allowed to use the image without my permission. Sometimes that permission comes with a price tag; sometimes not. I love to see my works used on my friends' websites. If someone really likes a picture I took of him or her, I can't think of a higher compliment than for that person to want to use it to represent himself or herself online. To do this, my friends ask me before posting the picture, and you should do the same for other artists.

Always remember that just because you found the picture online or in a Google Image search,

it doesn't mean that you have the right to use the work of art. It doesn't even matter if your intentions are good (for example, promoting the artist), because in most cases it's illegal. So, look at the picture and determine what the "rights" are. See whether you can use it free and clear (public domain) or have limited rights (noncommercial use only) or all rights reserved (hands off, buddy). If you're not sure, you need to ask.

Posting and Sharing Pictures Online

Putting your pictures into your blog posts is only half the battle. Since the advent of the digital camera, the number of pictures people can take and save has become tremendous. Because the pictures are already digital, moving them from your computer to blog is a pretty straightforward process. What if you want to have whole albums online, or even just a whole bunch of pictures? The answer is right there on your computer.

First, start with iPhoto (Mac), Windows Live Photo Gallery (Windows), or Picasa (Mac and Windows), which are all great solutions for managing your pictures on your machine. iPhoto is pictured in Figure 5.22.

After you start organizing your pictures on your computer, you can then start posting them online as well. Lots of photo-sharing services exist out there, ranging from Picasa and Flickr to SmugMug and SnapFish. Each of them offers its own additional services, but in the end its core service is uploading your pictures to the Internet and sharing them. Most services enable you to mark the pictures public or private, title them, and share them with family and friends through email. Some additional services include grouping pictures into sets, tagging, editing, and requesting physical prints (and other items) of the pictures. When you view a photo-sharing site, look at what you get free versus what you have to pay for. Look at how long the company has been around and how many users it has. For example, Picasa is owned by Google, and Flickr is owned by Yahoo!. Both of these Internet giants aren't going anywhere anytime soon and have tens of thousands of users each. In my opinion, either of them is a safe bet. Personally, I use Flickr and have tens of thousands of pictures stored there.

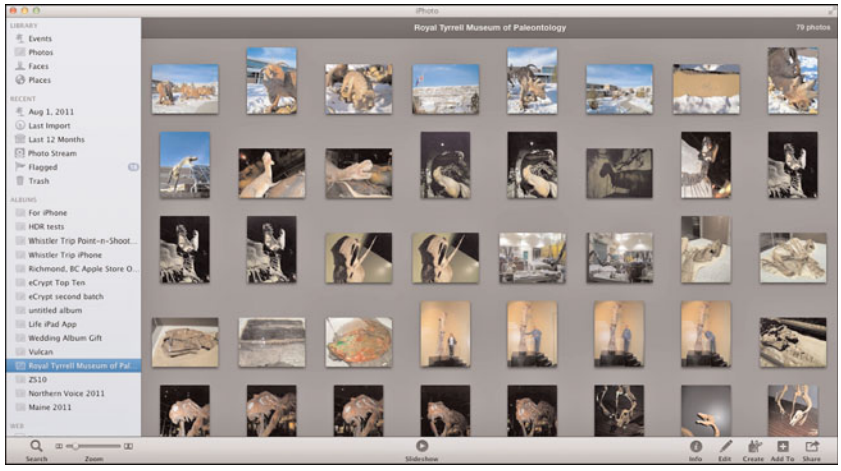


FIGURE 5.22
A look at iPhoto and my collection of pictures.

TIP

There are a lot of popular online photo-sharing sites: Flickr (my preferred), Picasa, SnapFish, and SmugMug (more for pros).

Having your pictures online at one of these services does two things for you. The first is obvious—you can point readers easily to your set of pictures about your new project. The second is actually much cooler. You can often post pictures to your blog right from the online photo service. Flickr does a good job of enabling you to post all pictures as you upload them, or posting ad hoc as you need them. You can also get easy to copy and paste code for a given picture that you can use in a blog post (I usually do the latter).

As a personal blogger, this saves you both time in uploading *and* server space because Flickr or Picasa are storing the actual file, not your server or host (this is very important for WordPress.com users). How do you get a picture into a post? That's what I'm going to show you next!

Getting a Picture into Your Post

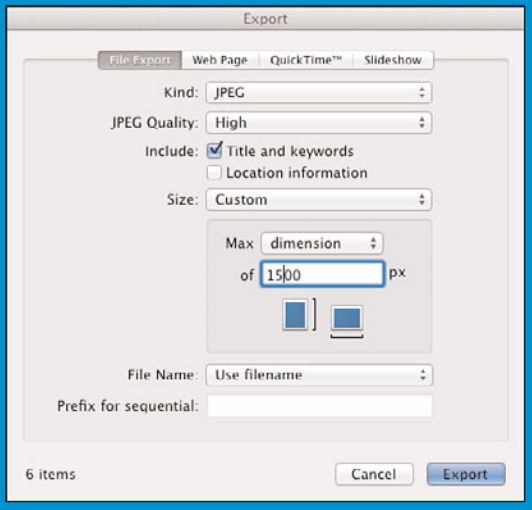
The good part is how to get those pictures into your post. Assume for this example that your picture is on your local drive. You've exported it from iPhoto or Live Photo Gallery (optional),

TO RESIZE IMAGES OR NOT

Today's images from most digital cameras have very large file sizes, like 2–5 megabytes each, and dimensions of more than 4000×2000 pixels. Many blog engines, like WordPress, automatically create smaller versions for you, but the original is still stored on the server, taking up space in your account, and the server has to work pretty hard to resize those images. For my blog posts, I always resize images when I export them from iPhoto or other photo-management tools. I reserve my full-size, high-resolution images for Flickr.com, which is designed to host and manage high-resolution pictures.

Photo management tools like iPhoto and Picasa have an option to resize the picture when you export a copy to your hard disk. For a standard picture that you'd like to have people be able to click and see a larger version, having the longest edge scaled to 1500 pixels is fine. If you are going to put the image into a post, resize images to about 500 pixels max.

This an example of what this export process looks like in iPhoto.



and you've already resized it to fit your blog (optional). From there, use the following steps.

1. Click the Add Media button in the post editor (see Figure 5.23).

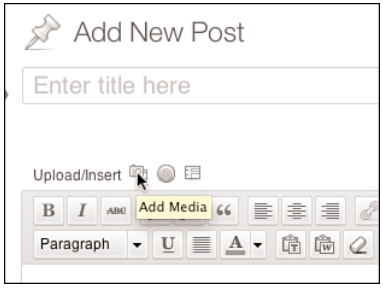


FIGURE 5.23

The Add Media button in the WordPress post editor.

2. Find the image on your hard drive. You should already know where the picture is, but if you're unsure, start your search in the My Pictures (PC) or Pictures (Mac) folders.
3. Drag the image file onto the window, and the image will be uploaded automatically (see Figure 5.24).
4. Adjust how it will appear (size, how the text wraps around it, and so on). This is where wrapping text around the image or having it stand alone comes in. What you're looking for are buttons or option buttons that say, for example, Align Left, Align Right, or No Alignment. Align Left puts the text on the right, and Align Right places text on the left (see Figure 5.25). When you're ready, click Insert into Post.

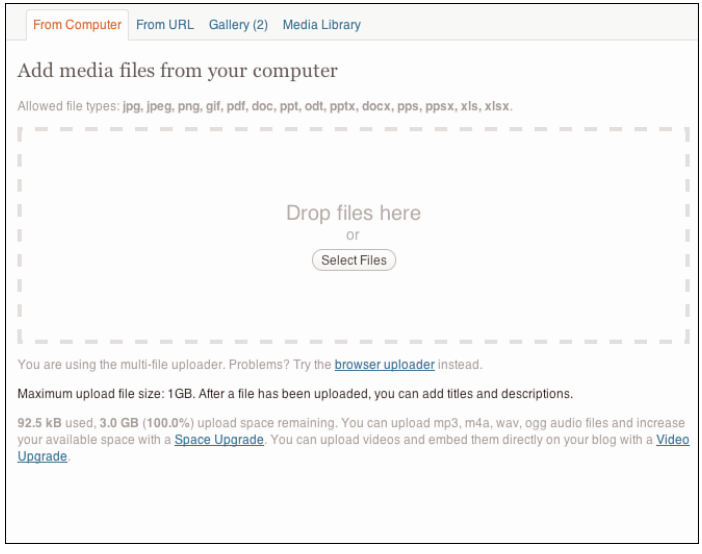
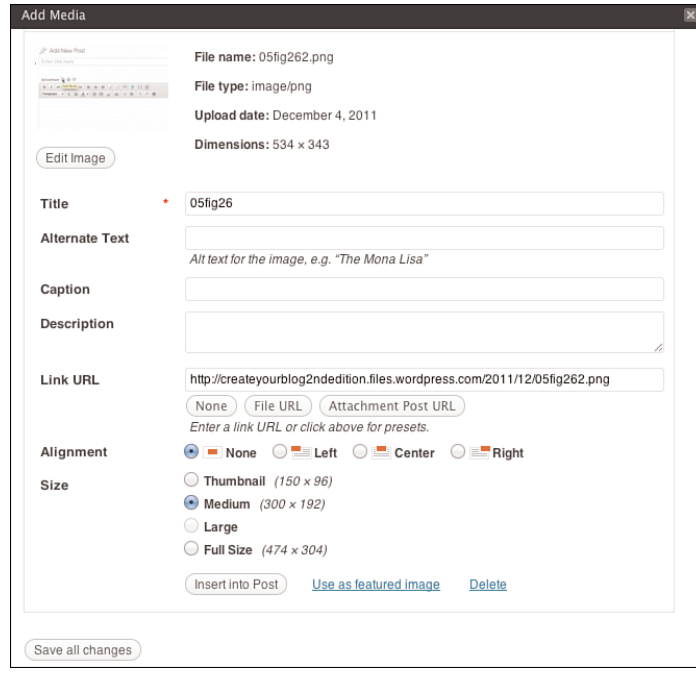


FIGURE 5.24

Choosing a picture from your hard drive to upload to WordPress.

FIGURE 5.25

Adjusting image settings in WordPress.



The result should look something like Figure 5.26.

NOTE

When you upload an image, WordPress automatically does all the resizing for you. It creates a thumbnail, small, medium, and large versions of your image so it is less of an issue than it was previously, although I still resize images myself. It's just a good habit to be in!

That's pretty much it. It's not exactly rocket science, is it? People often feel that placing images in a post is difficult, but like most things, after you get the hang of it, it really isn't. If you'd like to make it harder on yourself, be my guest (maybe try doing it blindfolded), but I don't think you really need to do that.

As you get more comfortable with putting images in, you'll understand how and where to place images to give you the kind of look you're after in your post. It just takes practice.

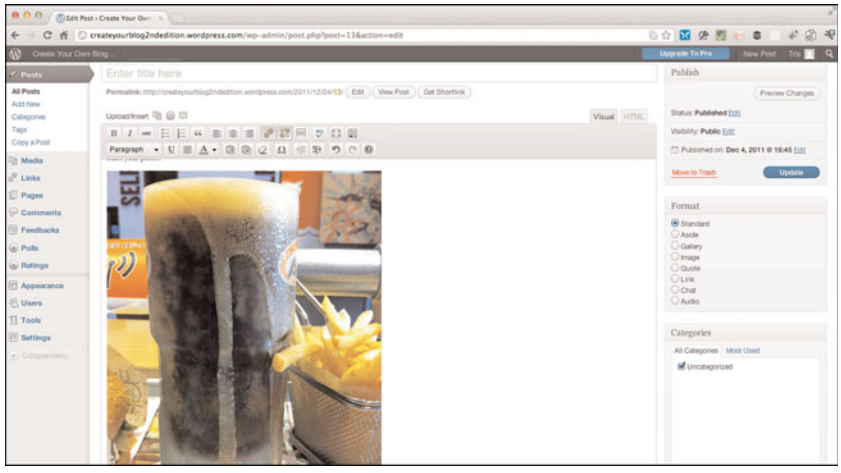


FIGURE 5.26
Image in place in a draft post.

Adding Videos to Your Posts

As I said earlier, we'll get into *how* you create video blogs and podcasts in Chapter 10. In this section we're going to talk about how to add videos to your posts.

Even if you *do* wind up creating your own videos, you'll still need to know how to put them into posts. And let's face it, sometimes we want to embed a great video into our posts that *isn't* ours, but is just awesome.

Because putting video clips into posts has become so popular, the folks at WordPress have made it drop-dead simple. Let's go through it step by step:

1. Go to the video on YouTube and copy the URL of the video from the address bar (see Figure 5.27).
2. Start a new post and click in the post where you'd like to put the video. Paste the URL you copied in step one into the post area. You'll need a blank line above and below the URL you've pasted for this to work (see Figure 5.28).

FIGURE 5.27

Video on YouTube to put into a post. We'll copy the URL from the address bar at the top.

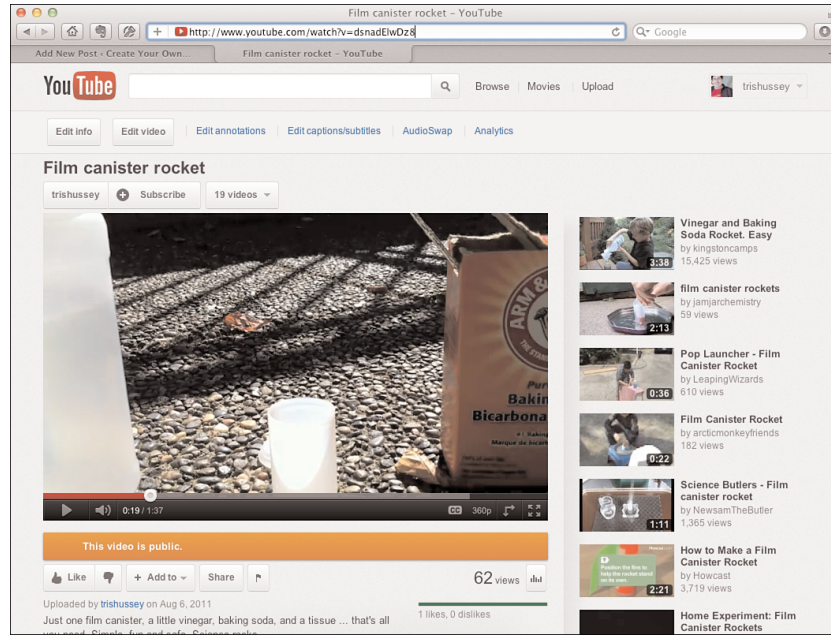
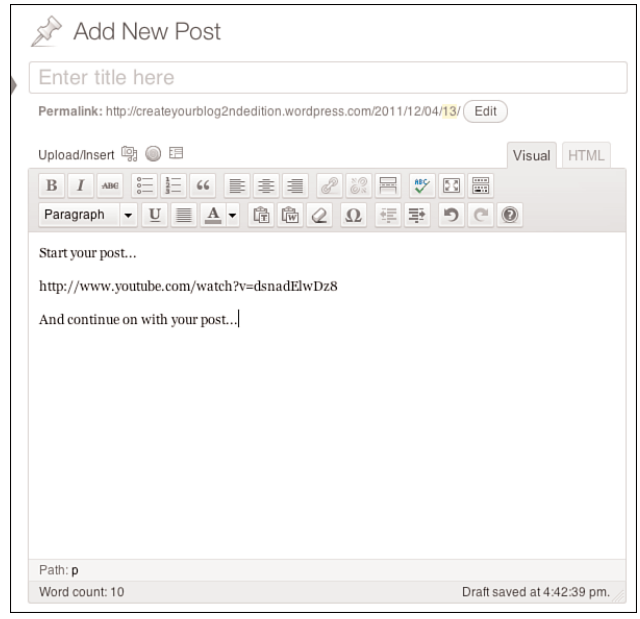


FIGURE 5.28

Pasting a YouTube video URL into a post.



3. When you're done, click Publish—and you're done! It's really that simple. You can see the result in Figure 5.29.

That's it. Really. I know lots of steps for basically copying and pasting a link. Regardless, I know lots of people who like to post short videos, just to mix things up a tad. Why not? It's pretty easy. So fire up that web cam and start recording. Movie Maker and iMovie have all the tools you need to get started.

Growing with WordPress.com

Chapter 2, "Installing and Setting Up Your Blog," explored the different ways to host a blog. Looking back at how I managed my blogs over the years, I don't think I would do too much differently. I started on Blogger, and then I bought a domain and used that with my Blogger blog until I moved to Blogware and

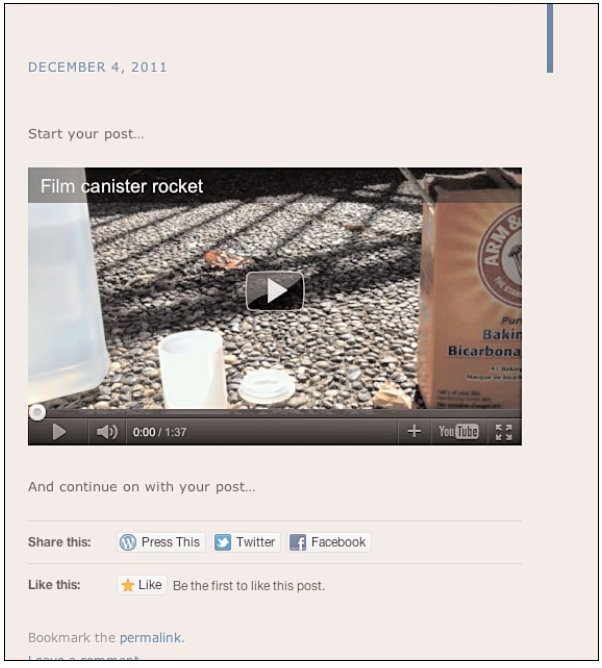


FIGURE 5.29
The result. An amazing YouTube video in a clever and witty blog post!

later to WordPress. Each step along the way, my blog grew as my blogging career grew. For most people, I suggest starting off with a WordPress.com blog. Get used to blogging and see whether you enjoy it. Dip your toes into the blogosphere a little at a time. If you think you'd like to be more serious about blogging, buy a domain name for yourself and pay for the domain mapping extra on WordPress.com.

If you grow beyond WordPress.com, shop around for a good web host and move your blog there. Moving a blog and domain is beyond the scope of this book, but trust me, it isn't hard. With each step along the path, you and your blog are growing with each other.

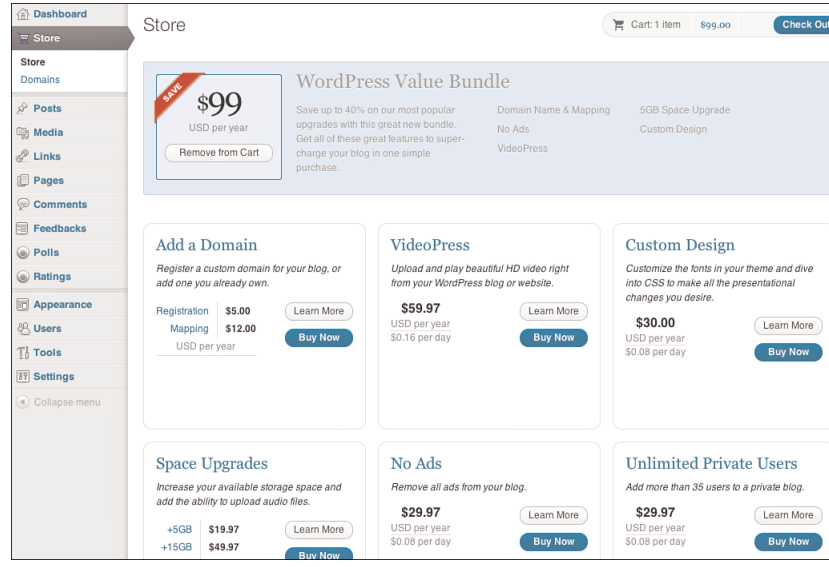
If you want to jump right in with both feet, or have a strong geek network to help you get set up, by all means buy a domain straightaway and sign up for a hosting plan. I caution you that you are putting money on the line for this. A good web host is about $10–12 a month, plus your $10 a year for a domain. No, not a lot of money, but if you find yourself not blogging much after a month or two, you're paying for a blog to just sit there. However, if you start with WordPress.com, which is free, if you don't blog for a while, you haven't spent any money to keep that blog there.

There is a "middle way" that you might consider, as well, which are some of the paid upgrades through WordPress.com. In the three years since the first edition of this book, Automattic has made WordPress.com a real contender in the hosted blog market. Frankly, if I didn't need to have a hosting account to test new tools and services, I might very well just use WordPress.com with a simple domain upgrade (between $5–$12 a year) for all of my needs. Yeah, it's that good.

Figure 5.30 gives you a look at what some of the upgrade options are on WordPress.com, which you can check out from the Store menu.

FIGURE 5.30

Some of the upgrade options on WordPress.com.



This is just something to think about.

There you have it. Everything you need to start a personal blog. Ready? Set? Blog!

Summary

Your personal blog is your own soapbox on the Internet, and building it is a rewarding experience. After deciding what you want to write about, even if it's just your day-to-day life and experiences, figure out whether you'd like to use a hosted blog service like WordPress.com or do it all yourself. After you have your blog set up, pick a theme that pleases you and get going!

Don't forget about your own levels of personal privacy and the privacy of those around you. It's a good idea to know how much you want to share online and where you're going to draw the line.

After you get going, you might like to start adding video and start podcasting. Remember it's fun and easy, and you might have everything you need to get going already! Most of all, have fun. Never lose sight of the fact that this is your space online and you are doing this to share your passions with the world, whatever they might be. That's how almost all bloggers started: They just wanted to tell their story.

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