

# Start Your Own Blog in Two Easy Steps

BY RON VITALE

What's a blog? Webopedia.com defines the term as:

“(n.) Short for *Web log*, a blog is a Web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. Typically updated daily, blogs often reflect the personality of the author.”

Thousands of people from all corners of the globe are writing blogs that describe everything from their experiences as a soldier in the Iraq War to attending their first year of college and everything in between. Most blogs are informal, witty and tailored to the personality of the author. What's important about a blog is that your online journal will allow anyone with an Internet connection to visit your page and learn whatever you want people to know about you.

Why might you want to create your own blog? In today's fast-paced world, authors are creating their own sites to help advertise who they are, what they write, and why. For a small investment in time (and money), you can have your own site up and running rather quickly. Whether you simply wish to discuss (or advertise) your writing or experiment with the online format, I have two suggestions for you: Create a blog from scratch or subscribe to a blog service.

## BUILDING IT ON YOUR OWN

If you want to build your blog from scratch, you'll need the following:

1. High-speed Internet connectivity (DSL or cable modem) and a PC
2. A domain name (a registered name to call your site: [www.mysite.com](http://www.mysite.com))
3. Website hosting space (a company that will host your Website files on their server)
4. FTP Voyager or a similar program to transfer your files to your site.

If the above frightens you, move on to the “Subscribe to a Blog Service” section. There's no shame in admitting that you're in way over your head. Yet, if you're adventurous and want to create the site on your own, read on!

## High-Speed Internet Access and a Computer

You'll want to have DSL or cable modem Internet access so that when you transfer your files up to your site it takes seconds rather than minutes. Trust me, if you're uploading many pictures or graphics, you're not going to want to wait 15 minutes for those latest files to be transferred up.

And the good news is that most writers of today own a computer. Even an old machine from five or six years ago is powerful enough to do the job. I have an old Pentium II 400MHz PC and this is more than I need.

**Cost:** High-speed Internet access costs approximately \$30 to \$70 a month. The good news is that many people already have broadband at home. With equipment, a computer can cost anywhere from \$600-\$2,000. However, if you can use your current computer to obtain e-mail and surf the Web, then you're fine. (If you upgrade to broadband service, you might need to have a network card installed, but that's a minimal investment of around \$15.)

## Domain Name Purchase

Visit [www.Godaddy.com](http://www.Godaddy.com). For \$8.95 a year, you can register the name of your Website: [www.mysite.com](http://www.mysite.com). I've used Godaddy.com for over two years and they have excellent customer service and features. If you'd rather shop around, visit [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and perform a domain name search. There are hundreds of other domain registration companies out there. Yet for a beginner who needs great customer service, I highly recommend Godaddy.com.

A short note about picking a Website name—many names are already being used; take some time to think of a creative name so that you can brand your site. For example, Orson Scott Card's Website is: [www.hatrack.com](http://www.hatrack.com). Try to think of something snazzy and short. Remember, no one will want to type in: [www.the-greatest-novelist-john-doe.com](http://www.the-greatest-novelist-john-doe.com) Short and simple is the key.

**Cost:** \$8.95 a year.

## Website Hosting Space

What is Website hosting space? A host is a computer server you can rent space off of

that's connected to the Internet. When people type in [www.mysite.com](http://www.mysite.com), the domain registration tells that person's computer to go visit the server that contains your Website files. You're not hosting your Website on your home computer, but are paying a company to host the files for you on a fast computer that's backed up regularly (in case of a computer failure) and offers 24/7 customer service. If your site goes down, you simply call their toll-free number to speak to a customer service representative, and your site is usually back up within an hour or two.

Where to go for a good hosting service? Again, I suggest visiting Godaddy.com. They have a basic plan of \$3.95 a month for 4 GB of space and 200 GB of bandwidth. (Translation: That's a heck of a lot of space and bandwidth. Unless you're as popular as Stephen King, this will do fine). I also recommend that you rent hosting space from the same company that you purchase your domain name from simply to avoid any red tape. I had to switch my domain name over from one company to another and was charged a fee to do that. Again, keep things simple for yourself.

**Cost:** \$3.95 a month. (Sure you can probably find some free Web hosting via Yahoo.com but these free sites bombard your visitors with online pop-up ads and have plenty of downtime problems. If you're serious about running a site, buy the space and cut back from having one double latte from Starbucks a month!)

## FTP Voyager

FTP stands for *file transfer protocol*. FTP Voyager is a software program that basically takes your Website files from your computer and copies them to the hosting server where your Website resides. You can purchase the software by visiting [www.ftpvoyager.com](http://www.ftpvoyager.com).

**Cost:** \$49.95 (A less expensive way would be purchasing WS FTP for \$34.95 at [www.ipswitch.com/Purchase/Products/ws\\_ftp\\_home.html](http://www.ipswitch.com/Purchase/Products/ws_ftp_home.html))

## Ublog Software

Recently, I decided to change my Website [www.losoil.com](http://www.losoil.com) from a normal static set of Web pages to a blog. I chose to buy the

application Ublog found at [www.uapplication.com](http://www.uapplication.com). The programmer who built this software is Italian and the purchase price is in Euros (approx. \$39 USD). I highly recommend this application because of its simplicity and great support. After I first started the blog, I had several questions about the software and posted my questions to the free Uapplication forum. Within half a day, my questions were answered by the programmer himself. But be warned: Ublog isn't for the novice user. Only if you're familiar with and not afraid to tamper with some code, would I recommend this product.

What about setup? The documentation files are a bit tricky to read since the programmer isn't a native English speaker, but the instructions aren't too difficult to follow. All you need do is to unzip the Ublog file and transfer the Website files to your Website host. Again, if you have any questions, you can post them on the Uapplication forum. If you're an intermediate computer user, you can get Ublog up and running without much fuss.

The positive aspect of Ublog is that as the administrator of the site, you can update your blog from any computer. Simply visit your site, log in and add a new entry. Want to add a new category or move your boxes around on your Website? Just log in, go to the admin screen and change your site with a few mouse clicks. You can easily change text colors, the style of your blog (two or three columns) and set permissions for each entry (allowing users to reply to a post you've made or lock them out). For such a low price, you receive a great blog software package and excellent features. Be sure to visit [Uapplication.com](http://Uapplication.com) or my site to see what you'd be able to do with very little effort.

**Cost:** \$39

Total cost of creating a blog from scratch (from soup to nuts) and for one year of Web hosting and domain registration would be: \$145.30. This figure assumes you already have a computer and high-speed Internet access.

Yes, there are less expensive ways to get a blog up and running, but I wanted to pass on some valuable information as well as attempt to inspire you to learn something new. You do not have to be a Web guru to get your own blog up and running. With a little patience and practice, you can build your own site from the ground up.

### Subscribe to a Blog Service

If you want to subscribe to a blog service, you'll need the following:

1. A PC connected to the Internet (56K or high speed, it doesn't matter). And that's it.

Not all of us like computers or have the time to learn all the skills involved to build a blog from the ground up. But some of you still might wish to experiment with having an online journal without all the hassle. Fear not, there's a site for you. Visit [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com). And to remain true to the article's catchy title, the two simple steps are:

1. Create an account on [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com).
2. Start posting your journals. That's all it takes to get started.

Here are the details on [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com): Becoming a member is free and joining for a year is only \$25. What's the difference between a free and \$25-a-year account? Not much. A paid account allows you to have polls in your blog, access to more custom styles and several other nifty features. According to the site, they're asking for the \$25 fee to help pay for Website hosting fees and bandwidth. For \$25 a year, I think the payment option is extremely fair for the Web services you'll obtain.

For novice Web users, not only does [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com) allow you to start your online blog right away without your knowing any technical "domain this" or "ftp that," but there's a large community of writers who have accounts. Creating a [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com) account will allow you to associate with these fellow writers online (as well as read through their daily blogs). I did a quick search for "writer" groups and 94 matches came up listing 494 individuals who selected writing as an interest of theirs. Granted not every group may be worth joining, but I suspect you can meet several writers with similar interests.

If you're looking for a place to get your feet wet online and learn how this whole blog thing works, I suggest that you give [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com) a try. Why didn't I take this path? Personally, I'm not a big fan of cookie-cutter sites. I'd rather teach myself how to build a site from scratch and I wanted to pick my own domain name rather than having something like: <http://www.livejournal.com/users/yourusername>. For me, the experience I've gained in learning how to run my own Website and maintaining it is well worth the initial investment.

But on the other hand, you cannot beat

the cost of [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com) and the ease of using the system. All you'll need is a computer connected to the Internet. Since most of what you'll be transferring up to your [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com) account will be text, you technically don't even need a high-speed Internet connection. [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com) is an inexpensive and simple way of creating your own blog on the fly.

**Cost:** \$25 a year

### JOIN THE BLOG REVOLUTION

With the knowledge that you have gained, I hope each of you take some time to consider running a blog. Granted, there are more blogs online than you can shake a stick at, but consider joining the blogger generation to help drum up interest in your writing or simply to experiment with online writing. Either way, blogging can be fun and a good cure for those writer's block blues.

### SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Listed below are three writers who have chosen to experiment with blogging. Each author has taken a different approach toward a blog. For more examples, visit Google and do a simple search. You're sure to find hundreds, if not thousands more to review.

*Neil Gaiman*

<http://www.neilgaiman.com/journal/journal.asp>

*William Gibson*

<http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/blog/archive.asp>

*Tobias Buckell*

<http://www.tobiasbuckell.com/> ■

*Ron has his M.A. in English Literature from Villanova University (Pennsylvania). At present, he works for the American Association for Cancer Research and is the Manager of Internet Services. He recently placed 5th out of 143 stories in the 2004 Science Fiction Writers of Earth (SFWeE) contest for his story "Toynbee's Gate." While looking to find a publisher for his fantasy novel Dorothea's Song, Ron is keeping himself busy by writing his second novel Amelion's Song and on learning how to be a father to a rather curious toddler. This article marks his first professional sale.*

