

How to Share Information and Ideas Worldwide Completely Free Using the New Information Wonder Called Blogs

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**Kingsley Oghojafor at the hotel Le Loft in Bamako, January 2006.
Photo M.B.**

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For various reasons it proved impossible for him to participate in the training the trainers-workshop in Nairobi, where his role would have been to teach journalistic work and to share his computer skills. This article on blogs is a later contribution to the workshop's reading materials.

Introduction

Are you an individual or member of an organization, association or club that has any information to share with the world via the Internet but you don't have the funds for buying a domain name for a website, hosting the website, paying a webmaster and generally maintaining the website?

You can still get your voice heard on a daily, weekly or however frequent you want, to as many people worldwide as possible without spending a dime in the process. This is possible with the new technological wonder called blogs.

Gone are the days when only the big companies or individuals with the funds could own and manage websites for making their voices heard worldwide. In those days the fact that one had to buy a domain name, design and host a website with a hosting company, pay yearly domain and hosting fees, hire web designers to handle uploading content to the website, etc all made the entire process of making your voice heard via the internet painfully expensive and stressful.

At such times even little associations and organizations that had helpful information to share with one another and the world had to grapple with either publishing the information offline in hardcopy or spend money to create and maintain a website.

But with the coming of blogs and the availability of free blogging software to make the process easy and convenient to handle, almost anyone with the most basic computer and internet knowledge can have his or her own blog and get his or her own voice heard all over the world - without spending a dime for buying domain name for website, designing the website, hosting the website, paying a web designer, etc.

Little associations, clubs and organizations without the funds for publishing hardcopy or creating and managing a website can now have their own blog on the Internet where they share information with their members and even people all over the world.

This article tells you more about blogs, the advantages of using blogs as against using normal websites, and goes further to take you through the step-by-step process of setting up your own blog within minutes using completely free blogging software such as Blogger.com.

First things first, what exactly is a blog?

According to Wikipedia, a blog is

"... a website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order".

Going further, it said

" Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries"

"A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual although some focus on photographs (photoblog), videos (vlog), or audio (podcasting), and are part of a wider network of social media."

So, a blog is simply a kind of website that is easy to use with content arranged in chronological order with the most recent "blog post" (or entry) at the top of the main page and the older posts towards the bottom.

The term "blog" is just a shortened form of weblog or web log. Posting content to, maintaining or authoring a blog is called "blogging". And an individual who posts the content or maintains a blog is called a "blogger".

Before the advent of this new Internet wonder if one wants to make his voice heard on constant basis, he or she would need to have a website. And the stress, financial involvement and skills required for setting up and managing a website made it almost impossible for ordinary individuals to own websites for non-profit making purposes.

There are a lot of individuals all over the world that want to share valuable information with other people but don't have the funds for managing websites.

There are also organizations, groups, and associations that would love to share information such as their newsletter, day-to-day activities, etc with other people but also can't afford to maintain a webmaster and pay the costs of managing a website.

But with blogs, anyone can make their voices heard all over the world via the Internet without spending a dime to own or host a website.

Blogs have so many advantages that millions of people are reported to be blogging. With the ease and convenience of blogging, millions of people all over the world now own and manage their own blogs. According to Wikipedia, as of November 2006, blog search engine Technorati was tracking nearly 60 million blogs!

Below are some of the advantages of blogs over usual websites:

-- Completely free to own and manage. Unlike usual websites where you had to buy a domain name, pay for hosting and get a web designer to design and manage the uploading of content to your website, blogs are free and very easy to use.

-- You don't need web designing skills. everything is managed and handled for you whether you have any web designing skills or not. all you do is just type in your content using a "Microsoft word" like interface and your content is automatically converted into readable content on your blog. You can format the information anyway you like... all without having any web designing skills.

-- Blog content is automatically archived without your involvement. You just select the way the content should be archived and the blogging software will handle it for you. Readers can click on your archive to see content for previous week or month.

-- You can also automatically create category for your blog content. Anytime you want to post any information you then decide and choose which category you want the information to be posted under in your blog. Readers can decide to read content in categories that they are more interested in, instead of going through the entire blog.

-- Blogs, like usual websites, can be managed from anywhere in the world. You don't have to design the page from a particular computer like most usual websites. If you live in England and you are on a holiday in Finland, you can post content to your blog from any computer.

-- It's very easy to set up that even a child can have his own blog. This is the major reason why millions of people now have their own blogs. There is no web designing skills needed to create and maintain your blog.

-- Search engines love blogs more than usual websites. The fact blog content develop over time with content added daily, weekly or as frequent as convenient, search engines' robots keep re-visiting them to index the content for searchers to find information if contained in the blog.

-- Makes it possible for readers to add their comments unlike usual websites where this is not possible. Readers can instantly comment on any information they find on your blog. No matter where they are located in the world, they can let you know what they feel and their comments can be posted automatically for other readers to see.

-- Students, teachers, lecturers, librarians, social workers, information professionals, etc can all let their voice be heard all over the world and can build their own community of people through their blogs... all without having to pay money to create or manage.

-- Sharing information has never been easier. Gone are the days when the internet was dominated by the heavy players with money for website designing and hosting. now almost anyone with the most basic computer and internet knowledge can have his or her own internet presence via blogs

-- You can even use your own name or organization's name to create your blogs. for example, with Blogger.com or Wordpress.com blogs you will have the liberty to choose your own sub domain such as -

<http://MikeMorris.Blogspot.com> ,
<http://InformationForSocialChange.Blogspot.com> etc

-- If you want to earn some money to cover for, say, your internet access costs, etc you can profit from your blogs by putting adverts on the pages. Google.com makes this process very easy by providing bloggers with their pay-per-click advertising model. Popularly known as Google AdSense, this pay-per-click advertising model allows web owners, including bloggers, to put codes on their pages which are then converted into adverts related to the content on the pages. The owners of the blogs get paid anytime readers click on these ads. Whether or not the readers actually buy from the page they visit when they click is inconsequential.

For bloggers that have many readers they can use this to earn some money for offsetting certain costs such as cost of Internet connectivity or even as a source of getting extra money.

-- Information sharing is now possible for those who really should be sharing information - information professionals and social workers - not those that have the funds and means to manipulate the information they share. If you are a librarian and have a particular interest in a topic which you will love to write about constantly, a blog will help you get your voice heard, not only within your immediate environment, but also all over the world. The only thing needed for anyone to get access to the information on your blog is to type in your blog address in any Internet connected computer.

-- At last, the web can now be enjoyed completely free by those that it was made for in the first place. When Tim Berners Lee invented the web he made it and gave it for free so that everyone could have access and benefit from using the Internet. This incredibly talented man created the web in his spare time for his private use but was magnanimous enough to give it to the whole world completely free. He strongly believed the Internet should be free for everyone, that's why he didn't ask for any money for people to use the web. If he had asked for as little as a dollar for access to the web, he probably would have been ten times richer than Bill Gates today.

Update - Tim Berners Lee is now known as Sir Tim after he received a knighthood (Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire -KBE-) for his services to the global development of the Internet.

There are now many blogging software that allow people to create and manage their blogs completely free. Below are the 2 of these that I highly recommend. Not only are they completely free to use, they are very easy to use that even a 10 year old can create her own blog within as little as 5 minutes.

-- <http://www.Blogger.com> - owned by Google.com. Very powerful, yet completely free to use.

-- <http://www.WordPress.com> - also very powerful yet completely free to use.

These blogging software have made the entire process of blogging very easy and the fact that they are completely free makes more and more people to own their blogs daily.

In case you still have doubts about starting a blog because you think it's complicated, below is a step by step guide on how to get a blog up and running with Blogger.com. Follow the below steps and you can get your own blog up and running within minutes with Blogger.com.

Step one - Open up <http://www.Blogger.com> . You will be presented with the home page where you can create your own blog account. If you are new to Blogger.com, I recommend you click on "Take A Quick Tour" first so as to familiarize yourself with how to create and manage your own blog account using Blogger.com.

The tour will take you through the process of creating and managing a blog with Blogger.com. Most people who have gone through the tour have experienced absolutely no problem, not just in creating their first blog with Blogger.com but also managing the blog on a daily basis.

The tour is not just plain text but also contains graphical illustrations on how to handle blogs on Blogger.com.

When you have gone through the tour, next you should follow the 3 easy steps to create your own blog. To get started with this, click the arrow at the bottom right on the screen titled "Create Your Blog Now".

Step two - You will be taken to the "Create An Account" page. This is the page where you will need to create an account for managing your blogs with Blogger.com.

You will be required to choose a username and password as well as the name you want to be displayed on your blog. You will also need to input your email address. Finally you type out the "word verification" and to accept the Terms of Service".

Then you click on another arrow at the bottom right that says "Continue".

Step 3 - Next step is to "Name your blog" with a blog title and blog address. The blog title should be any title or name you want to give your blog. The blog address (URL) will be the sub domain that will be used to access your blog. This will be anything like <http://YourBlogAddress.blogspot.com>. This is the address you will give to people for them to access your blog on the Internet.

When you are done you should click the arrow at the bottom right that says "Continue".

Step 4 - You will then be required to "Choose a template". This is the look of your blog. There are lots of templates to choose from depending on your preference. You can "preview" any particular template to see what it looks like before choosing it. Note that you can still change the template in future if you don't like the one you have chosen. When you have chosen a template for your blog, click the bottom arrow that says "Continue" .

Your blog would have been created at this point and you are now ready to start posting content to your blog. But before posting content you should create your personal profile that will appear on the blog which readers will see.

Posting content to your blogger blog is as simple as typing an email or using any word processing document. You don't need to know HTML or any web designing jargon. Just type the information you want to appear on your blog and Blogger.com will handle all the HTML and other web designing jargons. What will be displayed on your blog will be your information displayed with the HTML well taken care of. HTML is "Hypertext mark up language". This is the language in which web pages are displayed (including blog pages).

But with blogger.com software you won't be bothered with any HTML issues. Just type in your information and it will be displayed properly on your blog.

You will be able to add certain features to your content. The interface for posting your content is like your usual word document with options for bolding, italicizing, underlining, formatting and other features.

When you have made your first post, you simply click on either the "Save As Draft" button at the bottom of the page, if you want to save the content to post at a later date or the "Publish" button if you want the content to be published right away.

Congratulations, you have just made your first blog post and can be called a blogger.

So, if you have any information you want to share with the world, it is as simple as has been described above. You don't have to pay Blogger.com a dime for this. It is offered to you completely free.

Note that you can also post pictures and even videos on your blogs, completely free. Many people even use blogs mainly for sharing pictures with others within their immediate environment and even beyond.

Apart from just blogging for the sake of blogging, you can gradually create a community of like thinkers as your readers can leave comments in your blog and even tell others about your blog by simply giving them your blog address.

After creating your blog you should endeavour to post to it as frequent as possible. To get readers to visit your blog you tell as many people as you want to know about it so they can visit, read your content and leave comments if they want to.

Organizations can use blogs for posting relevant information to their members, sharing their newsletter information, etc.

Even schools, clubs, etc can have their own blogs and share information, either among the students, members or other readers worldwide.

Specifically, individuals, organizations, associations, clubs, etc in the third world that don't have a lot of funds can greatly benefit from blogs in making their voices and activities known all over the world. The barrier of costs of registering a domain name for a website, hosting the website, paying a web designer and generally managing a website have all been eliminated with the introduction of blogs.

I am sure Sir Tim who invented the web will be a very happy man knowing that not only is it a reality that people do not pay to access the information on the web, they also don't have to pay to put information on the web -- all thanks to blogs.

It is pertinent to add here that you can still spend money to buy a domain name for a blog and even still pay money to host the content of your blog on your own host server instead of using the sub domain name and host server provided by Blogger.com. If you have the funds to do this, go ahead. But if you would rather do this completely free, then stick to the above step-by-step guide to get your free blog account started.

Conclusion

Almost anyone can now benefit from the wonders of the Internet by not only having access to just about any information for free, but can also join in sharing information with other people within their nearest environment and

even all over the world... without spending a dime. All thanks to the new wonder called blogs.

The only most important requirement for taking full advantage of blogs is to get a basic knowledge of how to use computers and the Internet. If you can type and receive emails without any problems, then you can have your own blog and get your voice heard... all over the world.

References

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