Things to consider as your blog goes public

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Taking your blog public

Ok, so you've signed up for a blog. Now what?

Many people, after writing their first few blog entries, sit back and wait for the comments to appear. After all, other blogs they have visited have all sorts of comments on every entry! Other new bloggers, after writing a few entries, notice comments popping up from people they don’t even know! Where in the world did those comments come from?

Before a new blog has many entries, the writer needs to make some decisions: Who do I want reading this blog? Do I want random people to be able to find this blog? Do I want a lot of traffic, or just for friends and family to read? Do I want people to know my real name, or do I want to be mostly anonymous?Those who don’t want to easily be found should keep the following in mind:

1. Don’t share your real or full name, or the full names of your family members. If someone wanted to find my good friend Kelly’s blog, all they would have to type in the Google search box is Kelly’s name and the names of her two boys. (Of course, Kelly is ok with this.) Also, be mindful when filling out your author profile, because this info is often available to readers.

2. In the same vein, when signing up for a blog, don’t use your real name as your username. Choose a nickname instead (mine is “jenjen” for my Typepad account.)

3. Don’t mention where you live or major identifying information. Everyone should be careful not to post pictures of houses with house numbers visible.

4. If you talk about popular subjects or proper names, Google and other search engines may list your blog in response to a related query. For example, if I blogged about Bree Clarkson and used her full name, a Google search for Bree Clarkson might bring up my blog entry. However if I wrote “B*ee C*arkson” each time I mentioned her name, my blog would be less likely to show up in searches.

5. Many blog services allow you to password protect your entire blog, or just certain entries within your blog. Typepad allows you to designate whether or not your blog is public. Non-public blogs will not be listed in directories or indexed in search engines, but can still be found through links and typing in the URL. LiveJournal users have complete control over who can and can’t read their blog.

6. You can use a stats counter like SiteMeter, Branica, or StatCounter to track things like how people find your blog (including seeing the words combinations typed into search engines), the ISP numbers and locations of readers, and how often they are on your blog. Keeping a watch on these things may help you decide if you need to change the privacy level of your blog.Those who DO want traffic to their blogs should know there are five main ways new readers will find your blog.

1. Personal invites – sending friends and family the link in an e-mail.

2. Message board signatures - if you belong to online message boards (and really, who doesn't?) and would like those members to have access to your blog, you can include a link to your blog in your "signature." (A message board signature is a line of text and/or pictures that shows up under every post you make.)

3. “Buddy lists” – when someone likes your blog, they will add your blog link to a list on their blog’s sidebar. Many people who want to find new blogs to read will look through these lists on a blog they already enjoy. http://wholinkstome.com is an easy way to see who has linked to your site.

4. Comments – it stands to reason that if you want others to be involved in your blog, you need to be involved in a few. Just like friendships, blog relationships are a two way street. Look around and find some blogs you like and leave comments, making sure you include your blog addy in the appropriate field. Below your comment, readers can click on your name to get to your blog. Many bloggers will visit the blog of a person who leaves comments on theirs -- but some don't, and you just need to accept that. LOL. If you comment on Blogger blogs, you might want to sign up for a Blogger blog simply so when you sign in and your comment shows up, they can click on your picture to view your blog -- which can then link to your real blog.

5. Search engines – Google and other search engines will pull up your blog in response to all sorts of random searches. For this reason, be very careful about the topics and phrases you use on your blog! Sometimes someone looking for info on a subject you write about a lot (like scrapbooking) will find your blog and stick around because they like what you have to say.

6. Blog Rings – When you join a blog ring, you insert code in your sidebar which shows a small box that links to the other members of the blog ring. You are, in turn, linked to everyone who is part of that ring. There are blog rings for nearly every category imaginable, including digital scrapbookers.

7. Blog Directories – containing categorized, searchable lists of blogs, blog directories such as Blogarama, Blog Pulse, and Blog Wise allow you to list your blog in any category that fits. People searching through those categories will see your blog. To be on a list, you will need to sign up.

For those bloggers who are hoping for lots of readers, remember that it takes time to build a solid readership, and it takes keeping blog content interesting and up to date to keep people coming back.

—Happy Blogging!