

Blogging Toolkit: Selecting Software

Though there are dozens of blog software programs to choose from, you can narrow your decision by answering a couple of questions:

1. Do you have on-site tech support? If not, will you be able to hire a programmer to install the blog for you?

You'll need someone with programming experience – or a hosting site that also handles blog installation – if you want to add the more advanced **user-installed** programs. There's no need to install something more complex if your needs are simple, but keep in mind that user-installed applications allow for greater flexibility and customization and can also serve as robust content management systems.

Examples:

Word Press

<http://wordpress.org>

Free; good community forum; excellent choice if you have some tech support.

Moveable Type

<http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype>

IT support needed for install; excellent blogging tool.

Nonprofit accounts start at \$149.95 (one-time licensing fee, discounts on upgrades) up to \$324.95, depending on number of authors. No limit on number of blogs you can create.

Drupal

<http://www.drupal.org>

Free; powerful CMS and designed for multiple bloggers and blogs; IT support needed.

If, however, your organization wants to set up a blog right away and doesn't want to be troubled with maintaining the backend, then consider a **hosted service**. The companies that offer these blog platforms maintain the server and the software. Users log in to a website to post entries and manage their blogs.

Examples:

Blogger

<http://www.blogger.com>

Free; generally used more by personal bloggers or organizations just starting to experiment with blogs; though with Google as the new owner, more dynamic publishing options are now available.

TypePad

<http://www.sixapart.com/typepad>

Offers customization and excellent features. Pro level (recommended) costs \$149.50/year; no limit on number of authors or blogs.

WordPress.com

<http://wordpress.com>

The hosted version of WordPress, it offers many of the same features of TypePad but does not support javascript ads. Free, but paid upgrades (only about \$10) needed for individual domain names and extra storage.

Note: Regardless of your software choice, whoever is doing the actual posting needs only basic online skills to write, edit and post blog entries.

2. Have you identified what you need the blog to do?

Only certain programs, for example, will permit password protection, or allow for multiple authors, or make it easy to domain map your URL (customize the URL to your preferred address). And if you're using a user-installed program, the software must be compatible with your web server.

Here's a list of other key features to consider:

Archives – can you archive posts by day and month?

Categories – can you organize posts by topic?

Multiple blogs – do you need more than one blog for different topics or individual users?

Design – is it important that the blog "match" your site or include various design/layout options?

Useful Extras – some blogs include built-in (or easy-to-add) features for sharing and promoting content – such as email this post to a friend – or a bundle of social networking sites, so it's easy to tag entries to delicious or share at Facebook, Newsvine, Digg, etc.

If those features aren't available, you may be able to incorporate them by registering with an outside company, such as **FeedBurner.com** – a Google-owned service that helps users promote and distribute content. FeedBurner also includes an **e-mail subscription** feature – blog entries are emailed automatically to subscribers at a set time each day.

COMPARE BLOGGING TOOLS

- For a small donation, **Idealware** will send a review of seven blogging tools (Blogger, TypePad, LiveJournal, Movable Type, Expression Engine, Text Pattern, and WordPress). The report includes a summary of what to look for; a comparison chart; and detailed reviews of each tool. Idealware considers ease of getting started, ease and flexibility of configuration, ease of posting, and more: http://www.idealware.org/blogging_software
- Article: "Time to Check: Are you using the right blogging tool?"
Susannah Gardner, Online Journalism Review
<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/stories/050714gardner>
**2005 comparison, but includes a handy glossary of blog terms*
Related software comparison chart updated in 2006:
http://www.ojr.org/ojr/images/blog_software_comparison.cfm
- Extensive list of open-source, proprietary and web-based software
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog_software

LEARN MORE

- **TechSoup**
<http://www.techsoup.org>
A great resource for nonprofit technology information, services and products. Also visit their related project on nonprofit social networking tools: <http://www.netsquared.org/>
- **"Weblogs and the Nonprofit Sector"**
<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/webbuilding/page5103.cfm> (oldie but goodie)
Marnie Webb explains how locally focused nonprofits can gain exposure and support by teaming up with larger organizations that need local expertise. Blogs are central to this fictional case study.