

Setting up your blog (and getting people to read it)

Here we will cover

- Installing WordPress with Heart Internet
- Adding a new template/ theme (and where to find them)
- Advice on writing your blog
- Driving traffic to the blog

The value of a blog to any website, be it business or personal is well documented so we won't cover them again here, but all over the internet you will find examples of blogs driving a site's business success (www.seomoz.org/blog) as a resource for customers (www.heartinternet.co.uk/blog), as a standalone revenue driver in its own right (www.techcrunch.com) or as a personal mouth piece (<http://www.order-order.com/>).

Please note, at Heart Internet we are using the latest release WordPress 2.7.1 for our own blog and for our customers to install. All references to the administrative area relates to version 2.7.1.

Installing the software

The easiest way to get your blog software up and running is to use a one click install solution. Happily if you are one of our Home Pro/ Business Pro web hosting or reseller hosting customers you can log in to your eXtend control panel to do this. Scroll down to the 'CGI scripts' area and double click on the WordPress logo. Simply choose the directory you want to place all the files and click 'Install now'. Follow the on screen instructions to finish the set up and you are done.

Add a new template/ theme

You can find a library of free WordPress templates on the WordPress site here <http://wordpress.org/extend/themes/>. It is worth taking some time to go through a large collection of these to make sure you find the one that fits all your criteria.

Other sites with templates include:

- <http://topwpthemes.com/>
- <http://wordpressthemesbase.com/>
- <http://www.amazingwordpressthemes.com/>
- <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2008/01/08/100-excellent-free-high-quality-wordpress-themes/>
- <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/05/18/100-amazing-free-wordpress-themes-for-2009/>

Once you download a theme and add it to your directory you will be able to change how your blog looks in the 'Appearance' section of the WordPress admin area.

If you want to integrate a blog in to your existing site, this involves applying your CSS to the template but this is still relatively straight forward if you follow the documentation found here http://codex.wordpress.org/Main_Page. When we re-designed www.heartinternet.co.uk our designer literally just changed the CSS file the page linked to and after a little cleaning up it was up and running in a couple of hours.

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Writing your blog

The two big questions to ask are “Why should anyone read the blog?” and “Why would they want to come back and read it again?” Press releases covering new product launches, promotions or staff hires are fine in moderation, but not if that is all the blog is about. People simply won’t read it.

With so much information to be read online to gain traction with a reader a blog has to be one of the following...

- Informative/ insightful: What does X mean for Y?
- Interesting : A look back at X years of Y
- Amusing: Top X you won’t believe aren’t Y
- Original : Our exclusive research has shown XYZ
- Attention grabbing: Killer robots soon to be deployed

Another trap blogs can fall in to is sacrificing quality for quantity believing the more posts published the better regardless of what they say. A great example of never saying anything unless there is something to be said is Jakob Neilson’s site www.useit.com but each article brings some useful insight in to usability for webmasters to apply.

Popular topics to try include:

- Top X lists
- Interviews with known industry figures/ site owners
- Competitions
- “How to...” guides
- Free resources
- Industry commentary

Recommended reading to help write your blog...

- <http://www.probblogger.net>
- <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writebetter/>
- <http://www.dailyblogtips.com/>

Driving traffic to your blog

The easiest way to drive traffic is if your blog is part of a much larger site. Linking to it from the home page is a no brainer and you should also consider adding a feed to the home page that shows the latest post titles. Also, if you send out newsletters to a customer base link to stories from your blog rather than duplicating the work.

If you have a standalone blog, rather than attempting to build a your own community from scratch consider engaging in existing communities, be it through forums, niche social networks or even leaving post comments on already popular blogs. If you are confident in both your writing skills and knowledge approaching sites to write for them is a great way to get exposure, position yourself as an expert and gain a high quality link to your site. For example, if your blog was about online marketing <http://searchengineland.com/> would be a logical site to approach with an idea.

A search on Google for “blog directory” brings back approx 84M results so it is definitely worth picking the top blog directories, and finding any that pass link juice, to submit your blog to. Google has a dedicated blog search option for users and you can submit your blog for them to spider here: <http://blogsearch.google.co.uk/ping?hl=en>

Other ideas to try are:

- Contests are always popular and can help to create interest in your blog
- Distribution through <http://www.blogburst.com/>
- Submit posts on article directories e.g. <http://www.articledashboard.com/>