

The Power of Publishing

How Blogging Changed Publishing and Journalism Forever

"Every college journalist should have a personal blog. And a Twitter account. Period."

That is how this chapter started in the previous edition of this book, released in 2016, and the chapter was actually titled: "Blogging and Microblogging: Publish, Distribute and Connect." While the term "blog" is now somewhat antiquated, digital publishing in the always-on-deadline world of the current news cycle is a mandatory skill for today's journalists.

Once upon a time, working reporters with beats maintained blogs in addition to filing traditional stories. Now it is more common to simply publish first to digital and continue to update the story there.

Maintaining a blog used to be the most effective way for a journalist to connect with an audience. Social media platforms, especially Twitter, changed that and brought many new options and opportunities to a journalist's toolbox.

"In Internet time, 'blogging' seems to have become an antiquated term," wrote Matt Thompson in a previous edition of *Journalism Next*. "Some would say it's also an antiquated idea—a retirement home for early adopters stuck in the era of the Internet Superhighway."

"I'd argue quite the reverse," continued Thompson, who was an innovative force at NPR before taking over as editor of *The Atlantic*. "Blogging's become such a basic pattern for information on the Internet that it feels almost weird that it still has a name."

Blogs have been subsumed by the move to simply create "platform-native" content, meaning the content fits with the platform it is published to: a website, an app, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. There is no longer a separate space on the Web reserved for blogs as there once was.

In addition, the interactive aspect that blogs brought to news and journalism now largely takes place on social media platforms.

"The interactive nature of the blog was a prelude to how things would be on social media," says Mike Sando, an NFL columnist for ESPN.com and the former author of a wildly popular blog called *Seahawks Insider* at The News Tribune in Tacoma, Wash. in the mid-2000s. "I had a willingness bordering on eagerness to interact. It's fun sharing what I know with others and learning from their points of view."

Twitter was once considered a form of "microblogging," since the content is published in small doses compared to a traditional blog. The concepts are similar, as are the benefits, so we will tackle both forms of digital publishing in this chapter.

The content publishing world continues to change rapidly. While the basic platform of Twitter remains a constant for journalists and news junkies around the globe, the array of digital publishers and the diversity of content being published online is dizzying. The scope goes far beyond news organizations as "content marketing" has driven every type of company to become publishers, too. For example, publishing platform-specific content that their audiences devour has helped Lego gain more than 6 million subscribers on YouTube, Oreo with more than 42 million followers on Facebook and Starbucks with more than 11 million followers on Twitter.

We will discuss other social media platforms in Chapters 3 and 9 for their audience engagement and crowdsourcing characteristics, but we tackle Twitter in this chapter for its unique ability to combine rapid publishing and social networking that allows journalists to connect more closely with other journalists and with readers. It is a powerful way to create and consume information in real time and is constantly being updated. This gives a journalist the best sense of what is happening right now online. And it is the fastest way for a journalist or news organization to report breaking news and promote other work.

Once upon a time, blogging helped journalists to develop community and publish information beyond the traditional news cycle and in something other than the traditional story format, both of which help enhance their authority on a beat. Blogs also helped news organizations establish deeper relationships with readers and leverage the wisdom of the crowd to broaden coverage.

Social media changed all that, of course. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube became fertile breeding grounds for finding consumers of all kinds of content, including journalism.

That separate space for a different kind of publishing no longer exists in the mainstream as it once did, but the power of publishing can be most easily found by following the model that helped early digital writers find large and engaged audiences. Many of today's working journalists do not maintain separate blogs due to the overwhelming demands of publishing to so many other platforms, but as a college journalist, you probably do not have that burden.

"I don't get too upset over folks calling us a blog or our reporters bloggers," says John Cook, cofounder of GeekWire, a technology news site based in Seattle, which began as a blog. "After all, GeekWire is a relatively new phenomenon, and therefore I usually cut some slack when folks struggle to define us. Part of our job—especially in this era—is to educate people about true journalism, and what sets it apart from random opinion-tossing.

"My typical response when I see folks struggling to come up with the words to describe GeekWire, and I know the b-word—blog—is coming? I usually interject and say matter-of-factly: We are an online news site and community covering the technology industry."

Today, blogging is still important for young journalists because it means learning a new content-management system, building an audience for your writing and reporting and cultivating a collaborative community once you have that audience. Those skills will set you apart and help you advance in your career, whether you end up blogging as part of your job or not.

A good blog was a continuing conversation. Especially in the days before social media. You would facilitate it, but if it worked, your audience may dominate it. If that happens, you win, the news organization wins, and most important, the readers win.

"Readers are our friends," says Ben Mutzabaugh, who blogged about business travel for USA Today for more than 10 years and still has more than 186,000 followers on Twitter (@TodayInTheSky). "In print, it's easy to feel you are at odds with readers because people will find one little thing wrong. So, as a journalist you get defensive. The readers on a blog chime in and help you. They want you to get the story right. Readers help make the blog stronger than any single author could make it alone."

The rules are different with blogs. Blogging reporters can play off other information they find online, even linking to stories and blogs that might have been thought of as competition just a few years ago. Online, all relevant information is an essential part of the virtual-community conversation on a given topic.

In the mid- to late-2000s, most news organizations realized the importance of effective blogging. But what once the cornerstone of coverage for news organizations of all sizes became simply “publishing” a decade later. Understanding how to blog is akin to learning how to publish effectively, in a way that draws and engages an audience. It is much more than just typing in a box and hitting the “publish” button.

Still, the way that blogs morphed into publishing, especially for news and journalism-based organizations, can cause a bit of an identity crisis at times.

Cook, a former business reporter for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, leveraged the success of his newspaper blog into what became GeekWire, which he cofounded with Todd Bishop. What started as a blog evolved into a media company, a community and a small team of writers covering the startup and technology industry in Seattle for a global audience. Their primary purpose is digital publishing, but new terminology has yet to really take hold to replace the word “blog.”

“The uncomfortableness in the room is palpable,” Cook said. “Someone connects with me at a luncheon, interview or industry event, and they try to explain to a friend or colleague what it is we do at GeekWire. They stumble, and hunt for the words, and just can’t quite muster the right things to say before uttering ... ‘It’s a tech blog.’

“Ugh, here we go again. The good news, it’s becoming less common for people to refer to us or our staff of news reporters as bloggers—which in my view devalues and diminishes the hard work we do each day to tell stories, chase scoops and interview sources—you know, what most folks call old-fashioned journalism.”

The irony now is that a blog was really just a simple form of digital publishing, but many news organizations and journalists once considered it controversial. The term blog was seen by some as always having opinion or being unprofessional and not credible. Similar to other forms of digital publishing, it was the message, not the medium. The content, not the platform. Blogging would help many reporters innovate in how they covered a beat and built a loyal community of readers whose interactions contribute to your coverage.

In this chapter you will learn the following:

- How to use Twitter effectively
- How some journalists and news organizations have used blogs

- How to get started with a common blog platform
- How to build and manage a community of followers and drive traffic to a blog

? WHY BLOGS ARE IMPORTANT

Blogs forever changed the way that information is shared in our society. They were fast. They were interactive. They were innovative. They could be influential or incredibly boring—it all depends on the writer(s) powering the blog. A blog is simply a different way to publish content. It is a technical term that refers to a content-management system, not necessarily a writing style.

Three characteristics define a blog:

- It is a frequently updated website with entries displayed in reverse chronological order (that is, the most recent stuff is on top).
- Each entry, called a post, has a headline and a body. Most entries include links to other news and information on the Web, and many contain photos or other graphics.
- It contains a link for comments that lets readers post their thoughts on what the blogger is writing about. Not all blogs allow comments, but most do.

► Why blogs are important

The first information revolution, in the 1990s—when everyone started creating websites just to have them—gave way to a more authentic information revolution between 2001 and 2005, with the advent of blogs.

The internet of the 1990s purportedly enabled anyone to become a publisher. But it turned out that “anyone” needed to know a little bit about computers and specifically how to build a Web page. As a result, most individual publishers were computer-code jockeys or graphic artists and designers, many of them more interested in pushing the cosmetic limits of this new medium than in polishing the content. In essence, individuals’ websites at that time were style over substance. Lots of flashy websites were built, but once you visited them and saw the pretty graphics, there was little reason to return.

Blogs flipped this model on its head. They were not always pretty to look at, but they could be published by anyone who can click a mouse and type. The software made this kind of publishing so easy that you could update a blog several times a day with about the same effort required to send email.

►► ***Blogs changed Web publishing***

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, blogs became an effective way for people to share their responses to events and discuss what they thought was happening to the country. The personal connections those early bloggers created with readers, at a time when nerves were still raw and people were reeling, ushered in a new era of interactivity between writer and reader. And the energy created by those post-9/11 blogs morphed into passionate discussion and debate during the run-up to U.S. military action in Iraq, and they evolved further in 2004, as election season shifted into high gear. Presidential candidates and the Republican and Democratic national committees hosted blogs, altering the perception of a blog as a grassroots communication tool and further mainstreaming the medium.

Blogs continued to gain momentum, readers and participants throughout the rest of the decade. Some blogs became media companies and developed into essential information sources, which made the term blog that much more murky. TechCrunch, Mashable and TreeHugger all started as one-person blogs but evolved into companies with dozens of employees. And all three were acquired for millions of dollars by other media companies. Meanwhile, mainstream news companies such as The New York Times featured dozens of blogs to complement their other digital coverage.

►► ***Blogs changed journalism***

Dan Gillmor is credited with launching the first blog for a mainstream news organization, the San Jose Mercury News, in 1999. In the years following, thousands of blogs were launched on the websites of newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations and as independent journalism startups.

The blog-publishing platform fit journalism. Its simplicity, immediacy and interactivity improved journalism throughout the first decade of the new century, bringing journalists and their audiences closer and removing the constraints of time and space that once limited a journalist's ability to report a story and engage an audience.

News organizations used the medium for experimentation, launching new blogs aimed at ever more targeted niche audiences. The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times and CNN, for example, had anywhere from 20 to more than 60 blogs on their respective websites between 2008–2014. The

topics covered spanned a wide range, including food, motherhood, old age, applying to college, chess and what is on TV.

If this seems confusing now, you have to remember that, once upon a time, most news organizations only published new stories on their website following the printing of the newspaper or the broadcasting of the newscast. That meant that other digital content needed a home and blogs were an easy fit.

One lesson any journalist learns through blogging is what it is like to feel the power and responsibility of being a publisher. You decide how often to publish to your blog. You decide what form the content will take. You decide the layout of your blog. You decide how to interact with the audience. And you decide how to edit the content and what the headlines say.¹

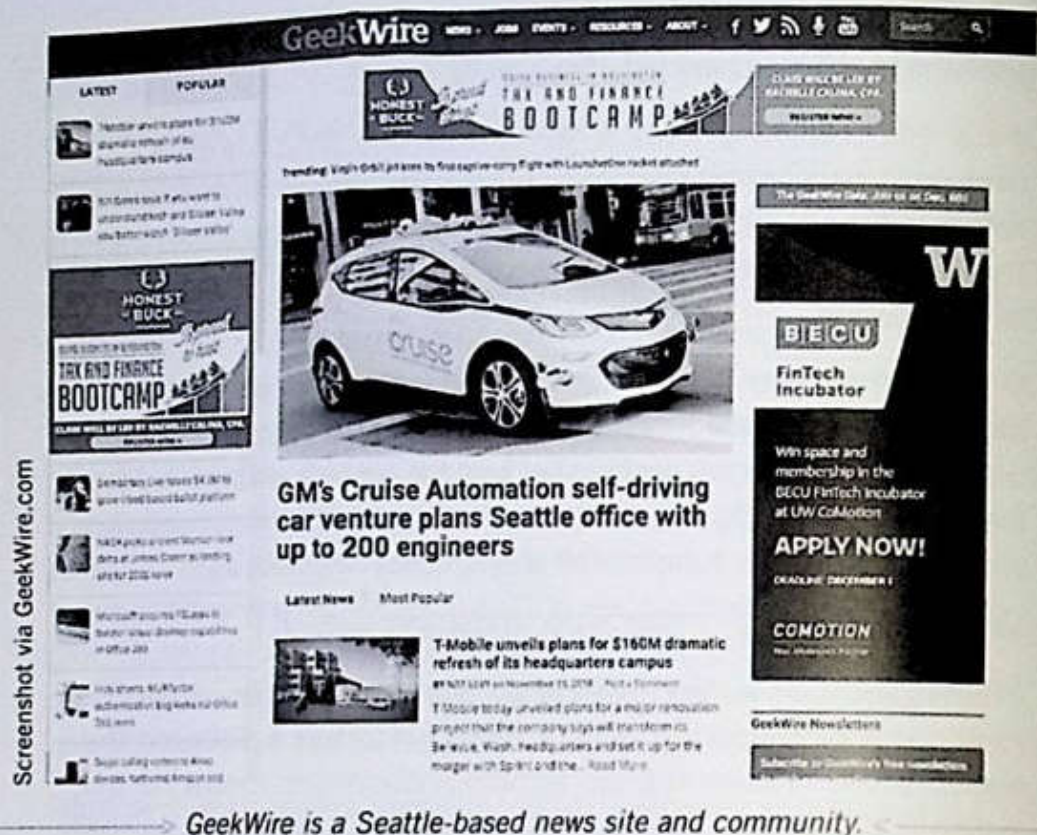
And if no one reads your blog, guess who is responsible?

Growing your own audience—especially from scratch—is one of the most challenging aspects of doing journalism in today's digital world. The audience is so fragmented across so many platforms and screens that it is increasingly difficult to cut through the clutter. Digital publishing, especially the form that started as blogging, presents the best opportunity to experiment, test and try new approaches to reach, and build, an audience.

John Cook started his blog while working as a business reporter at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in the early 2000s. His Venture blog was a place to pour out his passion for innovation in journalism. Over the years, he wrote memos to top management, pleading with them to dedicate more resources to the online part of the operation. He and a colleague, Todd Bishop, even drafted a business plan for launching a technology news website at the P-I. But when management turned a deaf ear to their proposal, they started considering other options and eventually quit their jobs at the P-I to strike out on their own, and now, they have more than a dozen reporters *working for them* at GeekWire. (Eventually, more than 100 P-I journalists lost their jobs when the newspaper ceased print publication and began publishing online only.)

"I could see what was happening to the industry and just wanted to keep moving forward and find new ways to cover my beat," Cook said. "The blog allowed me to do that without having to worry about the rest of the operation."

Blogs also helped independent and grassroots journalism operations come to life. In many cities around the U.S. in the mid-2000s, dozens of hyperlocal news blogs unaffiliated with traditional news organizations emerged to



cover specific neighborhoods. Some have survived, including the West Seattle Blog, which has been widely recognized as one of the best hyperlocal news sites in the nation.

Tracy Record started that blog in 2005 to share random thoughts about her neighborhood. A lifelong journalist who was working in the newsroom for the local Fox affiliate at the time, she named it West Seattle Blog and started out writing just a few items a week.

Then, in 2006, a storm knocked out power and brought down trees throughout the region. Traditional news websites supplied readers with an overview of the damage, but residents had nowhere to turn for truly local updates. Record started posting frequently on her blog, providing firsthand reports from the neighborhood, and word of her blog spread.

Suddenly, she had an audience, one that continued to grow, thanks to Google searches for "West Seattle." In 2008, she quit her job at the TV station, and with her husband, she turned West Seattle Blog into a full-time operation that pays their salaries through local advertising.

"I don't have an entrepreneurial bone in my body," Record says. "But I do like to work long hours and always want to know what's going on." Because people had nowhere else to turn for truly local news in West Seattle, her self-created job of running a local news blog has turned out to be a good fit.

UPDATE: Election for Mayor Johnson

WEST SEATTLE BLOG
NEWS 24/7

Home | ADVERTISE | CATEGORIES | CONTACT | CREDIT WATCH | JUNE | LAST THING BEFORE SUNDAY | TRAFFIC | WIC | WEATHER | WEST SEATTLE HOUSING GUIDE | FINANCIAL

Spotlight Stories



NEW SERVICE STARTS today for 800/211



NEW TIMELINE MAKES driving, mostly where



WEST HOLIDAY GUIDE: Lights, Santa, more!



Click for a 60-second Housing Report

00:59

TODAY'S HOUSING REPORT

NEW SPONSORS

CLICK!

FOLLOWUP: Southwest Pool closure continues for power-outage-damage repair

IN DECEMBER AT 10:00 PM, THE SWP... THE SWP... THE SWP...

11:55 AM AT 10:00 PM, THE SWP... THE SWP... THE SWP...

NEWEST COMMENTS

- I've been reading this blog for a while...
- I've been reading this blog for a while...
- I've been reading this blog for a while...

The WestSeattleBlog is one of the leading independent hyperlocal news sites in the U.S.

As these examples show, innovation and experimentation are easier with a blog. Its flexible format enables an author-publisher to forge a personal identity with a unique voice, maintain a pace that matches the audience's needs and write with a style and focus that can adapt to new interests or pursuits. And even though the term blog may be antiquated these days, it can be an effective training ground for anyone just getting started in the world of digital publishing.

What Is It?

THEN CAME TWITTER

If blogging started as an online journal, think of Twitter as an instant messaging journal. Once known as a "microblogging service," Twitter hit the internet in 2007, and quickly changed the game by allowing users to publish brief text messages, originally limited to 140 characters, with links to other websites, photos or videos. Before smartphones and apps became ubiquitous, users would publish on Twitter in a variety of ways, including text messaging to a phone number shortcode or simply through posting to the Web.

The messages can also be consumed in many ways, including on mobile devices, via email and on websites such as Twitter.com. The services make it simple for you to subscribe to, or follow, an individual and receive that person's updates in various forms and to secure your own messages and

restrict access only to those individuals you want reading your updates. You can also be notified by text message if there are Twitter accounts that you want to be informed immediately when new content is published.

► **Twitter's popularity has peaked**

The ease of publishing, combined with the ease of consuming, contributed to rapid growth for Twitter after it launched in 2007. In 2018, the company claimed to have 326 million monthly active users worldwide, a figure that plateaued in 2015 after several years of sizable increases.

Part publishing and communication platform, and part social network, Twitter is simple to use. It is easy to publish, and when you find someone worth reading, you can easily follow that person, meaning you will automatically receive updates from that person on a website or on a mobile device.

More than 500 million tweets per day are posted on Twitter, where 80 percent of its users are on a mobile device.

Social scientists call this "ambient awareness" or "ambient intimacy." It is the ability to maintain a constant connection with others without a direct communication tool such as phone or email, which is one-on-one. Ambient

awareness allows for one-to-many communication, making it persistent but passive. If a friend or colleague does not have time to stay tuned to your every thought or move, that person simply does not check your updates—much more polite than ignoring an email or a phone call. But the updates remain there, so whenever the person has time and interest, he or she is easily able to find out what you have been up to.

"Each little update—each individual bit of social information—is insignificant on its own, even supremely mundane," Clive Thompson

DRILLING DOWN

Organize Feeds With Hootsuite and TweetDeck:

To consume massive amounts of real-time information efficiently, use Hootsuite or TweetDeck to organize Twitter and other social media feeds into columns that make it easy for you to track updates as they happen. All news organizations rely on these tools to keep tabs on what is happening on social media. On many assignment desks, these tools are as critical as a police scanner.

wrote in *The New York Times Magazine*. "But taken together, over time, the little snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait of your friends' and family members' lives, like thousands of dots making a pointillist painting. This was never before possible, because in the real world, no friend would bother to call you up and detail the sandwiches she was eating. The ambient information becomes like 'a type of E.S.P.' as [Ben] Haley described it to me, an invisible dimension floating over everyday life."²

► Why is Twitter important?

To understand why Twitter is important to journalists, you need to understand how it started. It is the product of three previous forms of short, text-based communication: Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Short Message Service (SMS, or text messaging) and instant messaging (IM). Twitter's founders sought a way to blend these different forms of communication to keep tabs on friends. But the service has exploded beyond any of the projected uses its inventors envisioned.

Around the same time that Twitter launched in 2006, Facebook unveiled its own microblogging feature. News Feed pushed any update to a person's profile out to all the person's friends without any additional action by the individual. This feature brought ambient awareness to average users of the Web and in some ways probably paved the way for the microblogging movement and entered us all into the era of status updates.

Twitter's first spotlight moment came at South by Southwest (SXSW), a festival of music, media and technology that regularly draws many thousands of people to Austin, Texas. Attendees at the March 2007 SXSW found Twitter a useful tool for tracking the conference happenings and organizing meetups with friends. The company spurred the spontaneous usage by displaying the stream of messages relating to the conference on large flat-screen television monitors.

At the end of the conference, Twitter won the award for best mobile application. And the rest, as they say, is history.

The main way that Twitter (and Facebook and Instagram) have changed journalism is that these applications signaled the emergence of the "real-time Web." By unlocking so much information that previously would not have been published, these platforms created an expectation on the internet for immediacy, which seems obvious in retrospect. Even Google, the world's top search engine, has continuously added real-time features for years to keep up with Facebook and Twitter, especially for users looking for news content.

In the past, a user had to wait for a news organization to publish a story on a breaking news event such as a plane crash. With Twitter, and increasingly Instagram, users on the scene start spreading the word immediately. And marketers do not have to wait for a survey or brand study to see how their products are being received. They simply run a search on Twitter for their product name, and because the vast majority of Twitter users do not protect their posts, they can read what people are saying about them right now. (There are also many software tools available to track, analyze and report the conversation around brands and topics in social media.)

As Clay Shirky noted in "Here Comes Everybody," the new concept is publish first, filter later.³ We had already moved, years ago, from an information ecosystem that featured a scarcity of information to one that offers abundance. This fundamental shift created the opening for social media to emerge as a community navigation tool, providing information that people want right now and helping people find what they are looking for.

Some journalists have a hard time thinking about writing a news story 140 or 280 characters at a time. But it can actually be an excellent frame to work

within, as Paul Bradshaw discussed on his Online Journalism Blog.

Box 2.1

SHORTY AWARDS

The Shorty Awards, highlighting the best microblogging on Twitter as chosen by Twitter users, were first held in January 2009. The winners had to limit their acceptance speeches to 140 characters. See www.shortyawards.com.

"One great thing about Twitter—and this is why it is so useful for student journalists—is that after a while it trains you to look for interesting things around you (and think how you can

communicate that in 140 characters)," wrote Bradshaw, a journalism lecturer in Birmingham, England. "Those who write off the minutiae of Twitter need to realize: it's the writer who makes it interesting."⁴

News organizations, with stables of writers paid to make things interesting, have flocked to the new medium. In addition to making it easy for people to participate in the live Web, a microblogging platform such as Twitter is an important social media tool that is critical for every journalist in the digital age.

If news organizations were proficient in social media, the jobs of social media managers at news organizations would be obsolete. If all newsroom staffers knew how to use social media as well as they know how to use email and

other communication platforms, social media would be considered a core competence, not a specialty. That day is much closer than it was when the first edition of this book was published in 2009, but we are not quite there yet.

These tools are especially powerful for helping journalists tap the power of the crowd, as discussed in Chapter 3.

"Social media platforms such as Twitter enable budding reporters to be part of a more open journalistic culture," wrote Alfred Hermida, an assistant professor at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of British Columbia, and founding news editor of the BBC News website. "Traditionally, the work of journalism has been hidden behind the walls of the newsroom. Through social media, journalists can be more open about their work, offering insights into the process of news, and connect with audiences in a way that simply wasn't possible a generation ago."⁵

In 2011, the "Arab Spring" emerged as one of the most powerful examples of social media mixing with journalism. Twitter was the best place to find out what was happening—as it was happening. Instead of waiting for reporters to gather information, write stories and submit them to editors for posting online, the people—formerly-known-as-sources—were posting their observations, experiences, thoughts and fears immediately to Twitter for the millions of people using the service to read. NPR's Andy Carvin used these sources to cultivate and curate an informed stream of real-time updates as citizens of Egypt, Tunisia and other Arab countries fought (often violently) for their freedom.

The Washington Post called Carvin "a one-man Twitter news bureau" in describing how he chronicled fast-moving developments throughout the Middle East. "By grabbing bits and pieces from Facebook, YouTube and the wider Internet and mixing them with a stunning array of eyewitness sources, Carvin has constructed a vivid and constantly evolving mosaic of the region's convulsions."⁶

"I see it as another flavor of journalism," says Carvin, who left NPR in 2014 to join Pierre Omidyar's new journalism venture, First Look Media, and now teaches at the University of British Columbia. "So I guess I'm another flavor of journalist."

Carvin's skill on Twitter went beyond republishing tips and links. He questions, crowdsources and verifies information and answers questions. Most of it is done out in the open on Twitter for all to see. It served as a forerunner for how to best leverage this platform for news reporting.

"In a lot of ways, this is traditional journalism," says Mark Stencel, NPR's former managing editor for digital news. "He has just turned the news-gathering process inside out and made it public. He's reporting in real time and you can see him do it. You can watch him work his sources and tell people what he's following up on."

►► ***Effective medium for breaking news***

Twitter has become synonymous with breaking news for millions of people. For journalists, it is equally as important to be on Twitter to receive information as it is to use Twitter to send it.

It is now commonplace for news stories to break first on Twitter. That was not always the case. As recently as just a few years ago, it was rare for someone who did not work for a news organization to "break news" on a social media platform before established news organizations could assemble even their quickest coverage. One of the more famous examples occurred on April 1, 2011, when Shawna Redden used Twitter and the photo-sharing site Twitpic to share eyewitness accounts from an emergency landing of a Southwest Airlines flight after a six-foot hole opened in the roof of the aircraft just five rows behind where Redden was sitting. (Yes, it was necessary to use a third-party service for photos on Twitter back then since photos had not yet been integrated into Twitter's platform.)

Redden (@BluestMuse on Twitter) communicated with news organizations in Sacramento on Twitter, relaying information from 35,000 feet after the cabin lost pressure and air masks dropped from the ceiling. "Happy to be alive," Redden tweeted to the CBS 13 news account, responding to a question. "Still feel sick. 6 foot hole in the skin of the plane five rows behind me. Unbelievable."

She also posted a handful of photos to Twitpic, including one of the hole that caused the emergency. News organizations around the world republished the photo, just as they did the iconic image that Janis Krums captured in 2009 of passengers loading into life rafts after the emergency landing of a commercial jet in the Hudson River. In the days afterward, Redden was interviewed by "Good Morning America," Fox News, MSNBC and The Associated Press, among others.

The audience now participates in breaking news, thanks to Twitter and other social media platforms, on a daily basis. There is so much breaking news first reported by non-journalists that several companies have sprung up to help people get published—and paid—for their smartphone photos and videos.

The primary goal of using social networks, however, is not publishing. It is connecting. Learning about breaking news is one benefit of listening to those in your network, but learning about what they are thinking, talking about, reading and doing is even more important. At no other time in the history of journalism have reporters had this kind of access to their audience.

Even with ordinary citizens tweeting away about breaking news, journalists still play an important role by verifying facts and publishing updates as more information becomes available. People were already turning to news organizations' websites for the latest developments in the news, and now they turn to those organizations' Twitter feeds for even more immediate information.



Twitter/@BluestMuse

Twitter has made an impact in courtrooms, too, where the quick publishing format fits nicely into trial coverage. A federal judge in Kansas ruled in March 2009 that Ron Sylvester, a reporter for The Wichita Eagle, could use Twitter to provide constant updates from a racketeering gang trial.

U.S. District Judge J. Thomas Marten said jurors are always told to avoid newspaper, broadcast and online reports. And Twitter, he decided, was not an exception.

"The more we can do to open the process to the public, the greater the public understanding—the more legitimacy the public system will have in the eyes of the public," Marten said in an interview with The Associated Press.⁷

Janis Krums, <http://twitpic.com/135xa>



Janis Krums brought down the Twitpic servers when he posted a photo on Twitter of the famous 2009 plane crash in the Hudson River.

2 THE DIGITAL FIREHOSE

An often repeated aphorism about trying to keep pace with the news cycle in the digital age is similar to “drinking from a firehose.” It is impossible to take it all in.

The challenge is to find efficient ways to manage all the incoming inputs in a way that helps you achieve your goals. The other challenge is to contribute to the already overwhelming amount of information available to people in a way that is different from what is already out there. Finding your voice, your approach and your audience are essential skills in today’s news landscape, more so than at any time in history.

The ability to simultaneously balance finding new information and new story ideas, developing a connection to the audience and creating compelling content is an impressive feat for sure. It is the “new normal” in newsrooms around the world today.

► Crowdsourcing and building community

A microblogging platform such as Twitter is, after all, really a social network disguised as a short-message publishing platform. There is power in finding new people to follow, and thereby extending your network. There is *social capital* to be earned through actively participating in that network, where you give information and ask questions and expect your followers to do the same. Getting the most out of building a community on Twitter takes a personal touch.

For journalists, one of the biggest benefits of building a network on Twitter is learning about the audience. By following the people who follow you, you get a glimpse into what your readers are doing, thinking and reading. Previous generations of journalists did not have this luxury, and it is something that today’s journalists still take for granted too often.

Reporters have discovered that Twitter can be particularly useful in providing real-time guidance and feedback on their journalism. By posting an item announcing an upcoming interview and then asking for suggestions on questions to ask, journalists invite audiences to work with them.

Posting also works when a journalist does not have someone to interview but is instead looking for leads, background or other information on a particular subject. It is similar to interviewing the public, but in an efficient and timely manner.

DRILLING DOWN

New to Twitter? Follow first, tweet later. The best way to get going on Twitter is to start following a few people who interest you and then see who they follow and retweet (RT) and follow them. Try to build up to about 20 people to follow each week. Then really listen to what is being said and shared by those you follow.

Going forward, it is a good idea to follow most of the people who follow you (as long as they are real people and not spambots).

Once you are ready to post on Twitter, follow these guidelines:

- **Be relevant and timely:** Do not clutter your followers' streams with severely off-topic or old content.
- **Be informative:** Provide value to the stream with good or simply interesting information. Share links to other sources often.
- **Be instructive:** Tips and advice are always welcome.
- **Include links:** When 280 characters is not enough, use a link shortener such as Bitly.
- **Reflect your personality:** Be personable, but do not get carried away.
- **Build relationships:** Ask questions judiciously. Answer questions, especially those directed to you, as often as possible.

Twitter can be useful for performing public interviews. Putting out single or multiple questions into your Twitter networks in a call-and-response fashion will allow you to compile valuable research quickly and efficiently.

Sure, the collection of followers any journalist has on Twitter or other social media platform is just a slice of a potential audience. But the tips, reactions and feedback found in a journalist's feed can be a gold mine of leads to follow. It is up to the journalist to use them responsibly.

Remember, everyone has the power to choose whom they follow, your community grows only if you post messages that offer some benefit to your followers. The best postings on Twitter get "retweeted" with a simple "RT" or favorited with the heart icon. This is a recognition that you have posted something of value that someone else wanted to share or simply liked enough to take a small action.

Later in this chapter we will look more closely at how you can build your network of followers.

► Marketing and building your brand

The old business models for journalism have been crumbling; innovation in journalism today must include an awareness of new business models and marketability. Can marketing save journalism? It sounds like a heretical question because journalists have long valued their profession as more “pure” than marketing and public relations. Yet, as these seemingly disparate forms of communication start to meld, journalism can benefit from integrating new marketing strategies and tactics.

“More than ever, the hard work of growing our audience falls squarely on the newsroom,” states the first line of the recommendations in a 97-page innovation report released by The New York Times in 2014. That line is under a subhead that reads, “Make developing our audience a core and urgent part of our mission.”

“Strategies” does not mean advertising or slogans or logos. As marketing has evolved in the digital age, it has become more transparent, authentic and collaborative—which I will argue in Chapter 9 are all traits that describe good journalism today as well.

News organizations and independent journalists create social capital by becoming the “trusted center” within a structure of relationships through digital communication. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggested that social capital can be developed through purposeful actions and then transformed into economic gains. This concept is similar to the traditional business model for news of generating revenue based largely on a public service (for more, see Chapter 9).

DRILLING DOWN

Follow the 80–20 Rule:

On Twitter, use 80 percent of your posts to add something of value to the community—a link to an interesting news article, a tip on a new website or anything else that your followers might find interesting. The other 20 percent of the posts can be self-promoting, such as links to your latest articles or blog posts or asking for help.

If you take too much from your community without giving, you will limit the growth of your followers.

The opportunity of social media is especially important to younger journalists just starting out. News companies expect that interns and fresh-out-of-college new hires will possess a proficiency in social media.

"In social media, a budding journalist has an incredible platform to demonstrate their talents and engage with others in a way that just wasn't possible when I was in journalism school," says Hermida of the University of British Columbia. "At the very least, students should have a web site that contains everything they produce."

What Is It?

What's Next?

Summary

↓ MAKE A PLAN, CREATE A BLOG

Enter "start a blog" into Google and one of the first links that appears is <https://www.bloggingbasics101.com/how-do-i-start-a-blog/>. This site provides an intuitive, step-by-step description that you can follow to create your own blog. An internet search will yield many other sites as well, but most blog systems are so easy to use, you will not need any help.

Before you create your blog, take some time to think about what you will blog about. This will help you as you set up the software and will guide your early activity with the blog. But realize that you can always change course.

First, determine the goal of your blog. If you are just starting out and want to use your blog as an example of your journalistic work, pick a topic you can write about with authority. It can be cooking or jazz or knitting, but it should be something you are passionate about, so that you will be motivated to keep to a regular posting schedule.

If you are working for a news site and want to add a blog to your coverage, then set a goal for your blog that is different from the coverage you are already doing with news articles or broadcasts. It should complement, not repurpose, the coverage you are already providing.

To create a basic plan for your blog, answer these three questions:

What will you name your blog? (1–3 words)

What is a good short description of or catchphrase for your blog?

What will you write about in your blog? What is its mission?
(2–3 sentences)

Feature this information on your blog so readers will know immediately what you are all about. Stumbling onto a new blog and being unable to figure out quickly its reason for being is frustrating for users and they are unlikely to return.

► Choose a blog system

Although you can find lots of easy-to-use blog platforms—many of which are free—I recommend that you create a blog at WordPress.com. Because it is the leading platform, using it can help you in the future. You may find yourself interviewing for a job at an organization that uses WordPress, and your knowledge of how the system works will give you an advantage.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, creating a blog at WordPress.com is quick and painless; there are demos and video tutorials to help you get started. It is also free.

Once you know what you will name your blog and where you will be blogging, you are ready to start.

Name: The name you choose for your blog will display at the top of the page and also in the URL. For example, a blog called “My Cool Blog” would have the URL <http://mycoolblog.wordpress.com> on WordPress.

Theme: You can choose how your blog looks by picking from several different themes. You select fonts and colors just as you would in a word-processing program.

DRILLING DOWN

Hosting Fees: Because WordPress is used by so many news companies, you should consider paying the small monthly fee for a hosted WordPress blog. This offers several advantages, including getting experience with this powerful content-management system. Also, you will gain the ability to choose from a larger number of themes and edit the CSS on your theme, as well as install dozens of plug-ins (which are similar to the gadgets in Blogger). In addition, the fee buys you a personalized domain name without “wordpress” in it (for example, mycoolblog.com). See Chapter 1 for more information on getting going with WordPress.

For more information on hosting your own WordPress blog, go to <http://wordpress.org/hosting>. The hosting plans on this page provide one-click installation of WordPress and cost less than \$10 a month.

► Customize your blog's appearance

You can use basic CSS to customize the look and feel of your blog. But do not let that scare you away. In fact, it is a great environment in which to get your hands dirty with some rudimentary CSS.

Page elements: Simply click **Edit** next to any of the sections on the page you wish to modify. Upload your own header image and add a short description in the **Header** field.

Fonts and colors: Choose from various colors and fonts.

Edit HTML: It is really Edit CSS, because the code you will access from this link is mostly the CSS style sheet.

Pick new template: Choose from several stock templates and change your blog's look and feel with two clicks.

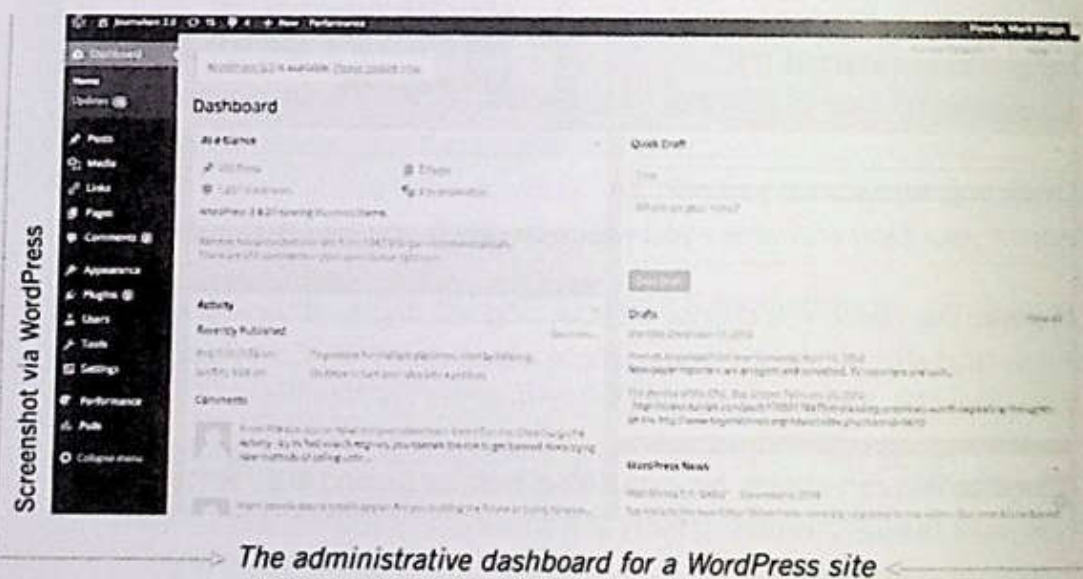
Select **Appearance** from the left navigation menu of the dashboard after you have logged in. From there, you can select a new theme for your blog with two clicks. Or modify the following sections (links appear at the top of the page, next to the **Options** label).

Widgets: Quickly add some extra functionality to your blog; examples include a search box and a calendar that shows your recent posts.

Extras: Not much to see here; move along.

Custom image header: Upload your own header image.

Edit CSS: You can experiment with CSS styles, but you cannot save the changes and make them public unless you upgrade to the WordPress



Although veteran news reporters, with years of research behind them, are at an advantage when it comes to reporting and distilling facts and information, they are at a disadvantage when it comes to crafting blog posts. All those years spent writing inverted pyramids and anecdotal leads bogged down many professional journalists when they attempted to blog.

Put the reader first: A successful blogger knows what readers want and can clearly and effectively communicate an idea, news or analysis quickly. If you write to impress the readers, you will distract them from the content.

Organize your ideas: Use a traditional outline to arrange your thoughts. Each post should be limited to as few items as possible; everything you include should complement your primary idea. Anything else just distracts the reader.

Get to the point quickly, too. Introduce the topic, provide a little background and then fill in the details.

Be direct: It is important to use short sentences, short paragraphs and even short words. Simple, declarative sentences are the most effective for blogs. Posts should vary in length but should always be direct and to the point.

Be the authority, with a personality: The narrower the topic, the better. Your audience will clearly understand the subject matter covered, and you will have a better chance to present yourself as the best source of timely information on that particular topic. Add a distinctive voice and a conversational writing style, and you have got the formula for a successful blog.

The right voice is key. It has to be comfortable for you, the author, and engage readers at the same time. Pretending to be someone you are not is a recipe for failure. You can model your voice after those you like on other sites, but eventually you will need to develop a style that works for you and your audience. You will not find your blogging voice immediately, so trial and error and experimentation are essential.

"My blogging voice varies depending on what I am writing," Cook said. "Sometimes, in complex legal stories I play it straight in typically journalistic fashion. Other times, I write in the first person. Other times, I attempt humor. The blog allows you to experiment—one of the other reasons I love it. I like to try to surprise readers. One way to do that is by changing your voice and trying new things to see what works. Fail early and move on. Overall I would say that my writing style has become much more conversational and chatty over the years. I don't think that it's a bad thing."

Make your posts scannable:

Use different typographical techniques to make your posts easy for busy readers to scan (because those are the only readers you have got). Bulleted or numbered lists, bold text, subheads and quotes set apart from the rest of the text are simple ways to boost scannability.

Link, summarize and

analyze: Attribution is important, and in a blog attribution takes the form of links. A great post is sprinkled with links to other sites, news articles and even other blogs.

Some blogs would publish entire posts that are nothing but links to other articles and material that is related.

DRILLING DOWN

Ads: If you want to try to make a few dollars from your blog, sign up for Google AdSense or Amazon Affiliate Ads. You will not get rich overnight, but you might make enough each month to buy your best friend lunch. Remember, though, if you are publishing a blog with ads, you have a commercial website, even if you are making only \$2 a month. This may limit your use of some third-party content.

Be specific with headlines: A good blog headline is effective for both readers and robots (see Chapter 9 for more information). It should be specific to the point of the post and include keywords that a user who is searching for this type of information would enter into a search engine.

Have a good attitude: Mike Masnick from Techdirt.com suggested in a Slate article that attitude is an important blogging tool. "When in doubt, write. When really in doubt, ask your readers for their opinions. Don't beg for traffic. Don't worry about traffic. Just write what you are interested in, communicate with others, and enjoy yourself."

► Use photos and screenshots

Blogs without images are lame. Would you read a newspaper or magazine if it had no pictures, graphics or art of any kind? Of course not. Do not expect readers to flock to a boring blog without visuals.

If you work for a newspaper or magazine, you have access to a treasure trove of images. And as a reporter-blogger, you will probably write about subjects that have been covered previously, so reusing file photos should be easy.

If you are on your own, you need a basic understanding of copyright and a healthy respect for other people's material. Yes, adding an image or graphic from the internet to your blog is technologically simple. But that does not make it right. Or legal.

You need to ask permission to use anyone else's photo or graphic you find on the Web, unless the creator is making it available through a Creative Commons declaration. If you are publishing a blog without ads (a noncommercial website), you probably have a good chance of receiving permission to use someone else's image, provided that you include a credit and a link.

To search for photos and images that are freely shared by their owners, try these websites:

<http://search.creativecommons.org>

<http://flickr.com/search/> (check the box at the top of the page to "All Creative Commons")

Most blogging software makes adding a photo to a post as simple as adding an attachment to an email.

Some systems will even resize the photo so you do not have to. If yours does not, and if you pull a high-resolution image from archives and need to reduce it to save your page load time (big pictures make Web pages

load very slowly), use an online service such as PicMonkey, Ribbit or FotoFlexer to resize it quickly without having to download and learn new software. (For more information on handling digital photos, see Chapter 5.)

DRILLING DOWN

The Screenshot: To add some visual interest, insert a screenshot of a blog or website you are writing about. There are many different ways to make a screenshot; it depends on which computer and operating system (OS) you are using. Do a Web search for the word "screenshot" and your OS (Windows or Mac), and you will find several good how-to explanations.

► Post early, post often

One of the biggest challenges with traditional blogging is the need to post regularly. While there is no hard-and-fast rule to follow with frequency, the more you publish the more chance you will have to grow an audience.

A blog's mission will determine how often it should be updated. Posting multiple daily updates is not a reasonable goal for a one-person blog, so here is a more practical guide, especially when you are starting out:

Post approximately once a day: If you can keep your posts short, you can easily add at least four or five a week. Hitting that minimum is important if you plan to build an audience, and maintaining it forces you beyond your comfort zone; it requires you to consider writing about some new and different angles that will help you broaden your area of expertise.

It is important to find the point in your day when you are most inclined to blog. Maybe in the morning with a cup of coffee or the afternoon when you are fully awake. Whenever the words flow most easily, schedule yourself some time to blog. Then stick to that schedule for 30 days. It is the best way to make blogging a habit.

If you work for a news organization as a reporter or columnist, you will post even more frequently. After all, if your beat is worth covering, there will be plenty of action to write about.

I'm too busy! Sure—we all are. But successful bloggers found ways to make their blogs work for them, saving them time, instead of simply becoming an added burden. Here is how:

Use the blog as a notebook, compiling your notes and story ideas as drafts in a blog system, and then making them public one at a time.

Seek public feedback and use it to focus your future writing.

You will discover that you often do not know enough about a particular topic to feel comfortable writing about it. Do not let this stop you. Instead, use it as an opportunity to learn enough to write about something new.

► **Participate in the community**

Take advantage of your blog's interactive and community-building potential to increase your exposure and your audience. One of the most powerful features that blogs brought to publishing was the ability to comment directly on the post. I used to say that no one should start a blog unless they are willing to allow—and manage—comments. Times have changed, though, and now so much conversation happens in social media that adding another place to manage the potential trolls and unseemly content is a tough ask.

If you decide to allow comments, you can cultivate comments by adding your own to any discussion that needs clarification, redirection or simply a vote of confidence. For example: "Great comments, everyone. Keep them coming!"

You can highlight astute observations or pertinent questions by turning them into full blog posts. This will give you easy blog fodder and let your readers know that they matter to you. That is important, because one of the reasons blogs are popular is that they embrace interactivity and give readers a sense of participating.

Comments can enrich your blog; they can also spoil it. Do not let a few bad apples ruin the conversation for everyone else. Shepherd the comments so people stay on topic and are respectful. A good comments section is akin to the animated conversation in a pub on a Friday night. But sometimes people get out of hand and deserve to be thrown out.

Whatever the focus of your blog, you can be sure that some other blogs or sites cover the same, or similar, topics. In the old-media world, these other blogs and sites would be seen as competition, to be kept at arm's length or ignored altogether. In the new-media world, however, it is better to jump in and join the community. Here is how:

Read other authors and sites: They will help you stay on top of current news and developments related to your blog's focus and also help you find new blogs to follow.

Comment on other blogs: When you submit comments, sign your name and include your blog's URL so that blog readers know where to find you.

Link to other blogs in your posts: When you link to blogs because they have interesting posts, write to the authors. Compliment them and notify them that you are linking to them. You are paying them a sincere compliment, and most likely those bloggers will check out your blog and possibly return the favor, earning you some new readers.

► **Use RSS feeds to beat the competition**

Once you have a blog, you need something to blog about. Once you have something to blog about, you need a community to participate in.

Remember RSS (Really Simple Syndication)? It is an essential tool for any blogger because it provides the most efficient way to follow a dozen, or several dozen, blogs and news sites, giving you endless material to comment on—and link to. It is also the best tool for finding new blogs and news sites to follow.

In Chapter 1, you learned how to set up an RSS reader to find new content. Build a comprehensive list of RSS feeds from blogs that you want to follow, and as you find new blogs and websites of interest, add them. You should also use RSS for news searches so you can efficiently track anything new on the topics you are interested in blogging about.

Start by compiling a list of 10 topics you want to blog about. They could be company names, names of people or a small geographic area such as a town or a neighborhood in a city. Then set up RSS feeds for those searches and let the robots do the work for you.

DRILLING DOWN

Create Linkposts: Those links you have been sharing on Twitter can be the foundation of an easy blog post. Create a new post by simply rounding up a handful of links to articles or blog posts you find interesting, add some insight or analysis to each one, and publish.

What's Next?

↓ BECOME A PRO ON TWITTER

You probably already know how easy it is to get going on Twitter. It takes just a few minutes to register for a new account, upload a profile picture and post your first tweet.

Even if you have had a Twitter accounts for years, take a moment and think about what you are going to do with it going forward. Not everyone has the same goal, of course. And while you do not have to stick rigidly to one approach, it is helpful to know what you are hoping to accomplish:

- Are you a reporter hoping to build community with readers?
- Are you an editor aiming to build a network of readers around a specific topic?

- Are you a journalist hoping to network with other journalists?
- Are you an aspiring [insert dream job here] looking to build your personal brand?

Identifying what you want to accomplish will help determine your Twitter accoutrements (your handle, background image and profile picture). If you are part of a news organization, your username should be consistent with the organization's brand. If you are hoping to build a personal brand, then use your full name. If you want to network with others around a shared interest, you can have a little fun with your Twitter identity, but you should still add your real name to your profile.

Now is the time: if you do not already have a Twitter account, or want to create a new one for your "professional" activity that is separate from your personal postings, go to [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) and sign up.

► **First the Twitter basics**

To participate in any community, you first need to know the language. And we can all be thankful that there are only a handful of "insider" terms you need to know to be a functioning member of the Twitter community.

DM: Direct message, which is a tweet that goes directly to one Twitter account and is visible only to that account.

@: It precedes a Twitter ID in a reply (for example, @markbriggs).

Tweet: As a verb it means sending a message on Twitter; as a noun, it means the message sent or received.

RT: Retweet, meaning copying someone else's tweet and posting it so your followers can see it, too.

Hashtag: A common label for any tweet that should be tied together with others' tweets, preceded by a # symbol; this is especially effective for a news event or a conference (for example, #sxsw for the South by Southwest conference).

There are four main things you can do on Twitter: post a message, read other people's messages, read reply messages that other people intend for you and send and receive direct messages, which are private. (We will cover searching on Twitter separately.) Here is a look at each activity:

Post: It is easy, but there is a 280-character limit.

Read: It is easy, too, since the messages of the people you follow automatically display on your Twitter home page (after you sign in).

Reply: Reading reply messages is easy, too: Just click “@Replies.” If you want to reply to someone, simply add the “@” sign before the person’s Twitter username (or click the arrow on the person’s tweet you wish to reply to).

Send and receive direct messages: Sending a direct message is easy, too. You can simply begin your tweet with the letter “d” followed by the username of the person you are messaging, or you can use the “Direct Message” feature on Twitter’s website or TweetDeck or Hootsuite. That person will receive an email notification regarding the receipt of a direct message (or DM), and the message will not be public.

DRILLING DOWN

Medium Is Large: Ev Williams has made an incredible impact on the world of digital publishing. He first created Blogger, one of the first and most popular blogging platforms, which he eventually sold to Google in 2003. Then he cofounded Twitter. And in 2013, he introduced a new platform called Medium, which is part blogging platform, part social network and part essay discovery community. The service hosts millions of monthly users and had 7.5 million articles published in 2016. It is intended for idea sharing instead of news and journalism, but it has definitely soaked up much of the activity that populated the blogosphere before its creation.

► Build your network

When you start on any social platform, you do not have a network or a community. But you can build one with a little time and effort.

The first step is to find people to follow. Use the search box on Twitter and search for terms you are interested in, such as “journalism” or “bitcoin” or whatever you happen to be interested in. You can sort by top

posts, people, images, video and more. You can also search for specific publications such as The New York Times or BuzzFeed. When you find a post that looks interesting, click on the profile of the person who posted it. If other posts from that person appear interesting, you should add him or her to your feed. Then click to see whom that person is following, and when you find someone whose interests seem aligned with yours and whose posts look interesting, follow that person, too.

Following just a few new people every day will quickly increase the depth and breadth of the posts flowing into your home page.

This also helps in the next step, which is to get people to follow you. On Twitter, each time you click the "Follow" button on someone's profile, that person receives a notification about your decision to follow his or her tweets. Usually, that person will then click the link to your profile, and if your tweets seem interesting enough, they will click the "Follow" button on your profile.

The best way to build a network is by posting good content and promoting those you follow. As Sarah Evans once noted on Mashable: "Twitter is all about karma. The more good you put out there, the more you receive."

Evans continued: "When you find others with great information, don't be shy in sharing with your community. It's a great feeling when you promote one of your followers (instead of yourself) and it results in dialogue among your community. It ultimately reflects support for you and credibility for your followers. Win-win!"

Also, it is a good idea to add your Twitter link to your email and other electronic signatures. Then, in addition to your email, website and blog, people you are communicating with will know you are on Twitter, too.

► Search on Twitter

At any given moment, you can see the most popular topics that are being discussed on Twitter. Normally, you will see a combination of hashtags and actual brands or people. This "Trending" section has become a bellwether for the internet's collective interest at any particular day and time.

If Apple has released a software update for the iPhone and you are a business reporter who wants to know whether people like it, you could

post an invitation to your blog and ask people to comment or email. But that is limited and slow compared with searching Twitter. Here you will find people who may never visit your blog, and you will find out very quickly whether the masses love or hate the upgrade. If you want to contact one of them, use @reply or send a direct message. You can also ask questions publicly by following whatever hashtag people are using (in this example, probably #iphone).

►► **Start following**

Social media is often compared to a cocktail party or professional networking event, and one of the first things you (should) do when arriving at a party is listen to the conversation that is already in progress. Apply that same line of thinking to Twitter and spend a little time “listening” by reading what people are writing, specifically those people who interest you.

“I have one simple rule—follow people back,” Linda Thomas wrote in the second edition of *Journalism Next*. “Imagine you’re at a party and for some reason you have captivated three people who are listening to you, when a fourth person walks up. It would be rude to turn your back and ignore him or her. But that’s what you do when you don’t follow people back on Twitter. That person might have had a great story to share, or a useful idea. You’ll never know.”

Refer to the suggestions covered in the earlier section on building a network and the methods listed below to find 20 people to follow each week. It takes only a few minutes to find and follow someone, so this assignment should not take more than half an hour per week. (It takes only a couple of minutes to follow three people a day.)

Here is how to find people to follow:

Use your followers: Scroll through the people your followers are following.

Use the followed: Scroll through the people you are following.

Follow the influentials: Services such as Friend or Follow rank people by their numbers of followers so you know which are the most popular. These people probably are not “in your network,” but it is fun to follow a few celebrities and the A-list people on Twitter. Following them might give you ideas about how to use the service most effectively.

► What to tweet?

People getting started with Twitter often worry they have nothing to say. Twitter's 280-character limit seems constricting at first, but it can be liberating because it lowers the bar on what is worth contributing.

Here is your tweeting assignment—five different types of tweets to post to your new Twitter account:

What are you reading? Use your RSS reader to find interesting links to post. This is the easiest way to add value and build followers.

What are you thinking? Start listening to the internal conversation you have going on in your head. At least once a day there has got to be something worth sharing.

What are you doing later? Not right now, since what you are probably doing right now is sitting in front of a computer trying to think of something to say on Twitter. But later on, are you attending an event or meeting that is interesting or hitting a deadline on a project that is worth noting?

What are you liking on Twitter? Find a message posted by someone you follow that is interesting or helpful and retweet it. This gives the original poster a public pat on the back and gives your followers access to something interesting they might otherwise have missed.

What can you ask or answer? Asking questions on Twitter is effective for many types of information. But you should also answer people's questions if you want them to answer yours.

►► Go mobile

Download the Twitter app on your iPhone or Android phone and use Twitter to post and read updates from anywhere. You can also go to the Twitter home page with your phone's Web browser, but downloading and using the native app will get you a better mobile Twitter experience.



The Twitter homepage for The Washington Post

Reporters are using mobile phones to post Twitter updates from breaking news events, press conferences, high school sports events and more. The 280-character limit makes it an especially comfortable medium, and it also offers an easy and effective way to capture and share photographs from the scene (see Chapter 5 for more on photography).

The interconnections of information—be it news, marketing or conversation—are critical to journalism in the digital age. Understanding microblogging with Twitter and tapping into the power of community are the best—and easiest—ways to get going.



Courtesy of David Cohn

DAVID COHN

► **SENIOR DIRECTOR OF
ALPHA GROUP** | Advance
Local (@Digidave)

When I first started blogging it was as much a way to meet and network with other journalists as it was a way to “blog” or collect one’s thoughts online. You have to imagine a time before Twitter, reddit, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and more. Owning a URL and blog back then was equivalent to having your own nightclub. You were the DJ, bouncer, bartender and more. You created the vibe through which your entire social internet experience rested upon.

In fact, I would argue blogging was the foundational stone upon which much of the pyramid of Web 2.0 was built.

Back then an RSS feed was equivalent to today’s FB feed, it was your front page to know what other people were thinking and doing. Click in and you’d be able to read and comment. More importantly you could read other comments and look for “trackbacks,” which were links to other bloggers. It was the very start of the social Web, and it’s how I “met” many people. Because not everyone was doing it, it felt like an insider space or special crowd of early adopters. Things didn’t go “viral” but it was a marketplace of ideas where everyone could chime in, and they did. Highly focused groups of bloggers formed. You could find a cluster around any topic from knitting to marketing to yes, journalism.

A true spark for my entire career came when I found journalist bloggers like Dan Gillmor, Jay Rosen and others. They weren't doing "reporting" through their blogs (although there was a class of bloggers who really did muckrake) but instead they were thinking, out loud, about the profession I was going into and its fate in a changing world.

Dan Gillmor's post "My readers know more than I do" is still at the heart of the people powered journalism movement today. Whether or not you know it, elements of how we practice journalism today were morphed, debated and formed by early conversations and debates that happened in the early days of blogging. It truly did feel like a moment in history worth witnessing and I was lucky/honored to be there.

Blogging in those days was also a place to make true friendships. In 2010, I moved to Missouri for a fellowship at the University of Missouri's Reynolds Journalism Institute. One of the other fellows was Will Sullivan, who I really only knew as the guy behind the blog JourNerdism. By then blogging was already past its prime, but because of our interactions online, which started via comments, we both felt comfortable enough to become roommates for our year in Missouri. We remain friends to this day and it wouldn't have been possible without WordPress.

I miss blogging. It was raw, but somehow less pungent than today's social media. Blogs could have a razor sharp focus or be a collection of meandering musings. I used to joke that there were two types of bloggers: linkers and thinkers. I think we could benefit from the medium today. There was more space to breathe, think and . . . write.

Source: Written by David Cohn at the request of the author.

★ PASSION AND PURPOSE

Most journalists got into the field because they liked it and then found they had a talent for it. The same is true no matter what platform you publish on. You need to be passionate about your craft or your beat. If you are not, you will be wasting your time.

"Gain as much experience as you can before your livelihood depends on it," recommends Sando, the NFL columnist at ESPN.com.

"Become an expert in something. Once you start working, it could be smart to prioritize doing the type of work you are interested in doing above working for a bigger-name company, on the theory that the latter will more readily take care of itself over time."

If you can find the fire to blog and participate in the world of Twitter with authority on a topic that truly interests you, you will reap the rewards.

"I think one of the most essential, revolutionary ideas that blogging taught us will hold true for the foreseeable future: the stream is ultimately more important than the story," says Matt Thompson. "Whether you're blogging in the classical fashion, tweeting, tumblr-ing, or pinning, you build the most significant value not with a single post, but with a stream of material that turns passersby into followers, hooking them back again and again. The growing crowd you convene around the work you do is your journalism's most powerful asset. Master the art of cultivating such a stream, and you assure yourself enduring relevance, as many of blogging's pioneers still claim today."

Box 2.2

BLOGS ON BLOGGING

Some of the tips in this chapter are courtesy of a blog on blogging called Copyblogger. It is among a handful of online resources that can provide a constant stream of suggestions and inspiration as you continue blogging. Problogger and BloggingTips.com are two other sources worth checking out.

Blogging

- ☐ **Evaluate other blogs:** Find three blogs that cover topics you find interesting and determine the following:
 - ☐ Each blog's biggest strength (immediacy, analysis, depth, style?)
 - ☐ How each blog plays to that strength
 - ☐ How each blog builds community through interaction with readers and links to other blogs or sources
- ☐ **Complete the quick plan:** Think about what your blog will cover:
 - ☐ What will you name your blog? (1–3 words)
 - ☐ What is a good, short description of or catchphrase for your blog?
 - ☐ What will you write about in your blog? What is your blog's mission? (2–3 sentences)
- ☐ **Create a blog:** Set up your blog on WordPress.com. Do not use the default theme; find one you like.
- ☐ **Post to your blog:** Start with some basic posts, on topics such as which RSS reader you are using and which feeds you have subscribed to. Make a post with an image; do not steal one, though.
- ☐ **Join a community:** Make three comments on any of the blogs that you are now following.

Microblogging on Twitter

- ☐ If you do not have a Twitter account already, or want a new one for your professional interests, create one.
- ☐ Use the search functions on the service to find new sources of information.
- ☐ Follow the steps listed in this chapter to start following others and then start tweeting to build your Twitter network.

NOTES

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4. Paul Bradshaw, "10 Things You Can Tweet About on Twitter," *Online Journalism Blog*, February 16, 2009. <http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2009/02/16/10-things-you-can-tweet-about-on-twitter>.
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8. *The New York Times*, "Innovation," March 2014. www.scribd.com/doc/224608514/The-Full-New-York-Times-Innovation-Report#scribd.