



Back

Forward

Stop

Refresh

Home

AutoFill

Print

Mail

Address: http://www.blogger.com/about



Favorites

History

Search

Scrapbook

Page Holder



Blogging Takes Off



ARI KAPLAN is an attorney with McDermott, Will & Emery and a freelance writer based in New York City. He teaches the Legal Issues course in the E-business Certificate Program in the Division of Continuing and Professional Studies at Baruch College. He often writes about technology, and his work has appeared in Wired, Crain's New York Business, ComputerWorld, and other venues.

The other day, my 83-year-old grandmother asked me what a blog was. Six months ago she asked me how to use an iPod, and three years ago she asked me what my e-mail address was. She doesn't quite have her finger on the technological pulse, but Nana certainly likes to learn what's new—even if she's never planning to go near a computer.

What is a blog? A blog (short for "weblog") is generally a personal journal that is maintained online for anyone to read. Blogging used to be reserved for the elite technorati among us, but today it is becoming as common as having a Web site. There are millions of blogs on the Internet, covering issues ranging from presidential politics to plumbing.

How can you start a blog? Blogger.com is one of the most well-known hosting services in the blogosphere, and it's free. You can customize the basic design and incorporate it into an existing Web site in minutes. If you are concerned about losing your data or if you need more advanced capabilities, you might want to try Typepad.com, a fee-based service, or blogging software from Moveable Type.

What makes a blog successful? Regardless of the software or host used, successful blogs have a distinct purpose and message. In addition, they are frequently updated, written in an engaging tone, and offer readers links to other Web sites. Success is measured by how often posts on your blog are linked to by other blogs and Web sites, the number of comments your posts receive, and whether you receive useful feedback.

Why bother blogging? Fame and fortune. Well, maybe not, but a blog may give you some notoriety and drive traffic to your Web site. A blog may also just give you a forum in which to vent. A word of caution though: the irony of blogging is that the more successful your blog, the more time you have to spend contributing (and almost no one is paid for it—yet).

What are the rules? It is not regulated, though copyright restrictions apply. Linking and paraphrasing are the keys to staying out of trouble—copying full-length content to your blog could raise issues. Most bloggers write with emotion and, if possible, even passion, because people tend to respond more to a position on the fringes than in the center. Write often, and spell-check what you write. Visit other blogs—site owners check who reads their work and will, as a courtesy, visit your blog. If that does not work, encourage others to blog and, of course, to link back to you.

As new as it still is, blogging is not really the technology *du jour* anymore. It is, however, spawning a new generation of communication. "Podcasting," for example, is a means of sharing audio files, often like radio shows, to subscribing listeners who automatically download your program. It allows people with MP3 players to listen to content on free subscriptions updated regularly using the RSS (really simple syndication) XML format, which more easily allows you to link short pieces of content with links to the complete versions. The digital cognoscenti are now associating MP3 files with their blog posts for the benefit of former readers who prefer listening.

Nana does listen to the radio—maybe she will get into blogging after all. ■

Have any suggestions for tech-related topics? Your question may become the next topic Ari addresses. E-mail your questions or comments about this column to communications@baruch.cuny.edu.