

Blogger: A blogging option for novices and pros

In this article, Linda takes a new look at Google's Blogger as an option for eliminating self-hosting.

A New Look At Blogger

I wrote an [article](#) a few weeks ago about choices for blogs outside the self-hosting option. I completely ignored Google's [Blogger](#) until this past week, when a few authors mentioned how easy it was for them to set up a blog on Blogger. I assumed that Blogger was fairly amateur until I took a second look – the options for professional blogging are astounding.

If you are seeking an option for a blog outside self-hosting, you might consider Blogger – especially if you want to monetize your blog, use customization, utilize a custom domain and have the ability to “blog on the go.” In fact, Blogger may become your weapon of choice for blogging – if you understand all the pros and cons in using this tool.



The screenshot shows the Blogger homepage. At the top right, there is a language dropdown menu set to 'English'. The main header features the Blogger logo (an orange square with a white 'B') and the word 'Blogger' in white text. To the right of the logo is a sign-in form titled 'Sign in to use Blogger with your Google Account'. The form includes fields for 'Username (Email):' and 'Password: (?)', a 'SIGN IN' button, and a 'Remember me (?)' checkbox. Below the sign-in form is a large orange button that says 'CREATE A BLOG'. Underneath this button, it says 'It's easy, and only takes a minute.' To the left of the 'CREATE A BLOG' button is a section titled 'Create a blog. It's free.' This section contains three bullet points, each with an icon and a link: 1. 'Beautiful templates. Customize your layout, fonts, colors and more...' with an icon of three colored pencils and a link to 'Try the template designer'. 2. 'Your blog. Share your thoughts, photos, and more with your friends and the world.' with an icon of a smartphone and a link to 'Learn more:'. 3. 'Easy to use. It's easy to post text, photos, and videos from the web or your mobile phone.' with an icon of a hand cursor. The 'Learn more:' section lists three items: 'Take a quick tour', 'Watch a video tutorial', and 'Read Blogger Buzz'. Below this is a section titled 'Blogs of Note' with a link to 'Playing Games Older Than Me'. At the bottom of the page, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'Features', 'About', 'Buzz', 'Help', 'Discuss', 'Language', 'Developers', 'Gear', 'Terms of Service', 'Privacy', and 'Content Policy', followed by the copyright notice 'Copyright © 1999 - 2010 Google'.

Blogger for Beginners

One of the reason those authors liked Blogger was the fact that it was free to use. Additionally, Blogger's help files were handy and an [introductory video](#) was succinct and to-the-point. They also were pleased to find the [forums](#), which touched on just about every question they had about creating a blog at Blogger. The only problem they seemed to have in setting up Blogger was in understanding that they first needed to obtain a Google account.

Understand that many of these novice bloggers had no clue about how to open a new tab on their browser or how to open a Google account. Additionally, many of these new bloggers carried a reticence about creating a Google account in the first place – some of these individuals were frightened about privacy issues, and they may not have had false fears.

Google, like any other free account, often [pushes the boundaries](#) on issues such as copyright, privacy and censorship. But, like any other free account, users might balance what they consider “issues” and what they're willing to give up with the ability to use a free account. Some of this balance comes with what Blogger offers to their users. And, you might keep this in mind:

On December 2009, Google's CEO, [Eric Schmidt](#), declared after privacy concerns: “If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place. If you really need that kind of privacy, the reality is that search engines – including Google – do retain this information for some time and it's important, for example, that we are all subject in the United States to the Patriot Act and it is possible that all that information could be made available to the authorities.”

Finally, take a look at [Blogger's TOS](#) (Terms of Service) to make sure you can live with their policies. Also preview the [privacy policies](#) for Google accounts. If you're satisfied, then open a [Google account](#) (if you do not already have one) and give Blogger a whirl.

Blogger for Professionals

With all the above said and done, and you're willing to use Blogger for your publicity as an author, designer or developer, then take a look at what Google does offer to its Blogger users...

Transferring Existing Blogs

You can import posts and comments from a previously exported Blogger blog, export a Blogger blog, or permanently delete it. When you're in Blogger, go to “Settings>Basic” and you'll find links to Blog Tools at the top of the page. When you import a Blogger blog (posts and comments), imported posts will be merged with any current posts, sorted by date.



Blogger asks for an [xml file](#) for upload, so if your blog is available to download in that format, this is what you need to use.

To export your blog, you simply download that Blogger blog into what is called a “Blogger Atom export format.” You can do this to move your blog to another blogging service or simply to store your blog on your own hard drive. Your blog will remain on Blogger until you delete it.

Deleted blogs can be restored within 90 days before they are removed forever. You can create another blog at this address using the Google Account you're currently logged in with. Before you delete a blog,

check that the import worked successfully by looking at the blog, and also at the list of posts under Edit Posts: are the right number of posts there, do they have the right labels, etc.

For a more detailed account on how to import a blog to Blogger, visit [Blogger-Hits-and-Tips](#).

Customization

You might be surprised to learn that you can alter various components within Blogger. You can edit the HTML by going to "Design > Edit HTML." Don't get all excited, though, as this editing pertains only to the template. That said, you can do a lot in changing that template (whichever one you choose) to create a whole new look for your blog.



Backup / Restore Template

Before editing your template, you may want to save a copy of it. [Download Full Template](#)

Upload a template from a file on your hard drive:

Edit Template

Edit the contents of your template. [Learn more](#)

Expand Widget Templates

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" ?>
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN" "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1
/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html expr:dir='data:blog.languageDirection' xmlns='http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml'
xmlns:b='http://www.google.com/2005/gml/b' xmlns:data='http://www.google.com/2005/gml
/data' xmlns:expr='http://www.google.com/2005/gml/expr'>
  <head>
    <b:include data='blog' name='all-head-content' />
    <title><data:blog.pageTitle/></title>
    <b:skin><![CDATA[/ *
-----
Blogger Template Style
Name:      Minima
Date:      26 Feb 2004
Updated by: Blogger Team
----- */
/* Variable definitions
=====
<Variable name="bgcolor" description="Page Background Color"
type="color" default="#fff" value="#ffffff">
```

[Revert widget templates to default](#)

CLEAR EDITS

PREVIEW

SAVE TEMPLATE

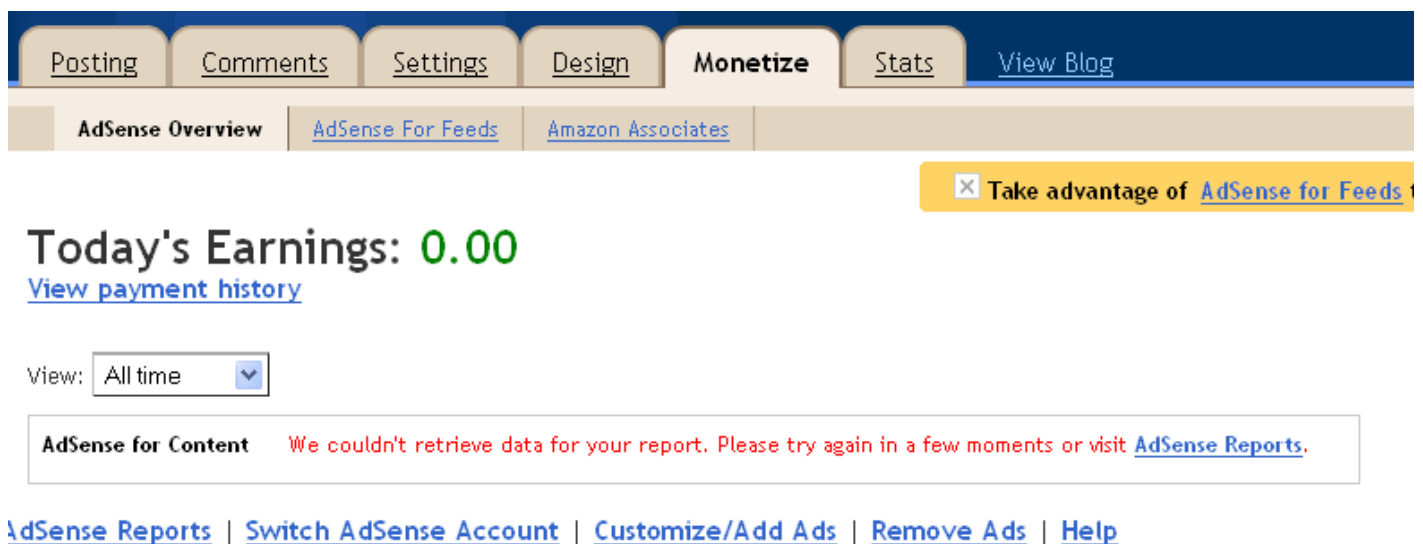
With experience, you know that you need to create your template in text or in a CSS editor and test it before you upload and change any template on Blogger. You always can revert to other Blogger templates if yours doesn't work out. Pay attention to custom tags specific to Blogger (it's not like you can use a [WordPress template](#), for example, and make that work automatically).

You'll also see an option to 'Expand Widget Templates.' By default, each page element is shown in the code as a one-line placeholder, and you can set options in the graphical interface on the Page Elements tab. Turning this option on will show the complete data and template for each element. The code is simpler the first way, but you have more control the second way, so use whichever option you prefer. Learn more by reading the article, [Widget Template Tags](#).

If you noticed the Template Designer (NEW!) in the illustration shown above, next to "Edit HTML," you'll learn that this link takes you to a page where you can view your blog and change the template design at the same time, using Blogger templates. This template designer also allows users to change layouts (depending upon the template chosen) and colours as well as text and backgrounds.

Monetization

Many bloggers like to use a little sidebar for AdSense or Amazon. Blogger allows both monetization elements without qualms.



The screenshot shows the Blogger 'Monetize' interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Posting, Comments, Settings, Design, Monetize (selected), and Stats. Below these are sub-tabs: AdSense Overview (selected), AdSense For Feeds, and Amazon Associates. A yellow banner on the right says 'Take advantage of AdSense for Feeds'. The main content area displays 'Today's Earnings: 0.00' in green, with a link to 'View payment history'. Below this is a 'View:' dropdown menu set to 'All time'. A red error message states: 'AdSense for Content We couldn't retrieve data for your report. Please try again in a few moments or visit AdSense Reports.' At the bottom, there are links for 'AdSense Reports', 'Switch AdSense Account', 'Customize/Add Ads', 'Remove Ads', and 'Help'.

Note in the image shown above that you have options for AdSense, AdSense for Feeds and for Amazon. They are fairly self-explanatory, and you can view your income in the drop-down menu below "View Payment History" by today, yesterday, last 7 days, this month, last month and all time. The various layout options – depending upon the template you choose – provide for side columns, banners and more for your monetization efforts. You must, however, have accounts at [AdSense](#) and at [Amazon Associates](#) to take advantage of these opportunities.

Google Affiliate Network and AdSense have integrated their payment systems to provide you with even more options to monetize your blog. To place Google Affiliate Network links on your blog, follow the instructions at [Google Affiliate Network](#) (you must already have an AdSense account).

Custom Domain

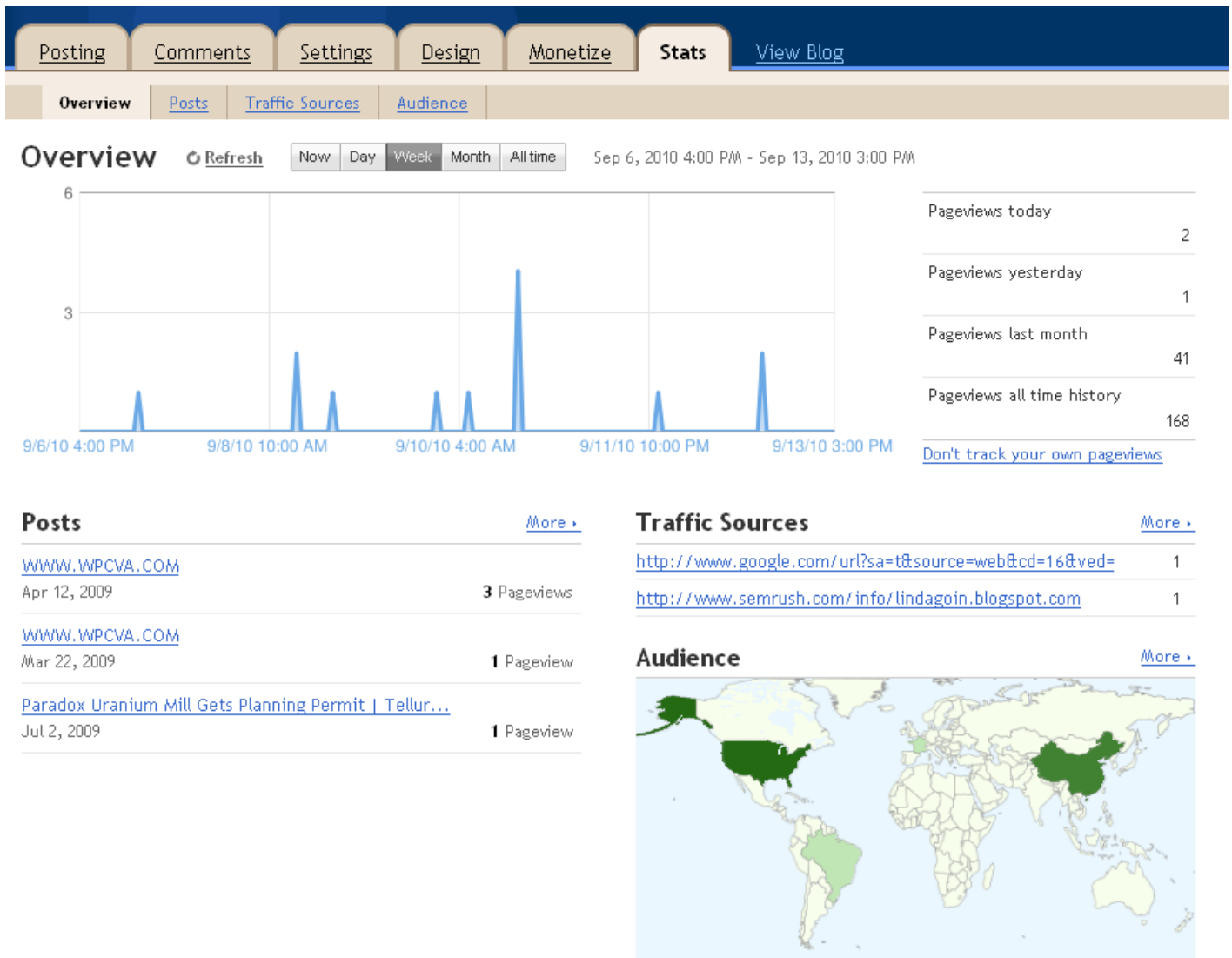
If you already have a domain name, you can use it with Blogger. If you don't have a domain name, you can apply for one through Blogger and they'll handle the DNS. If you're comfortable handling the DNS yourself, create a CNAME record for your blog's address.

To create a CNAME record for your domain with the DNS, associating your domain with: `ghs.google.com`. The exact procedure for doing this varies depending on your domain registrar, but you can find instructions for many common registrars [here](#). If your domain registrar is not listed, or if you run into other difficulties, you can contact your registrar directly and they may be able to help you out.

From this point, you can follow the [directions](#) at Blogger, where they show you how to alter four separate A records and make the necessary changes on your Blogger account.

Other Highlights

- **Video:** You can embed videos into Blogger from Google Video, LiveVideo or YouTube. The only issue is that the maximum width for Blogger is 320px, which means you need to change height along with width if you need to alter the width. You can use a variety of tools to calculate the image proportions.
- **Group Blogging:** As administrator for your blog, you can add team members for a [group blog](#). Those extra team members can be administrators or not. Administrators can edit all posts (not just their own), add and remove team members (and grant admin access), and modify the blog's settings and template. Non-admins can only create and edit their own posts.
- **FTP Support:** As of this year, there is no FTP support. If you want to learn more about this shut-down, visit the [Blogger FTP Info blog](#).
- **Blogging on the Go:** There are three ways to blog to your Blogger blog. 1) BlogThis! is a link you add to your browser's toolbar. If you use Windows and Internet Explorer, you can use BlogThis! from the SendTo feature of the [Google Toolbar](#). If you're on another browser, just drag [the link on this page](#) to your browser's Link bar; 2) To post to your blog via email, you need to configure your Mail-to-Blogger email address in "Settings > Email" as shown on [this page](#); Finally, you can blog by mobile device, and Blogger lists the countries and available listed carriers for each country on [this page](#). If you're unsure what alias your carrier uses, simply send a MMS to yourself at an email address and observe the FROM: field of the email.
- **Gadgets:** Think of "gadgets" as the same as "widgets," and you'll be set to go. At Google, gadgets are simple HTML and JavaScript applications that can be embedded in web pages and other apps, including Blogger. And, there's a bonus – every blog is an [OpenSocial](#) gadget container powered by [Friend Connect](#). That means as a gadget developer, you can leverage social APIs to build engaging tools for bloggers and their audiences. When you build a gadget for Blogger, it becomes available to millions of active bloggers. Just submit your gadget, and it will immediately surface in Blogger.com where users can easily browse, configure, and add your gadget to their blog's sidebar. Find out [how to build gadgets for Blogger](#).
- **Stats:** If you're familiar with [Google Analytics](#), then this portion of the Blogger dashboard may seem very familiar to you. You'll see from the image shown below that you can get an overview (including the option to opt out of counting your own visits), post overview, traffic source and audience breakdown all from the dashboard of your Blogger account. Pretty nifty and very convenient, as you don't need a widget, a plugin or a visit to another site to gain insight on your traffic.



Conclusion

As mentioned in the previous article that showcased various blogs on independent servers, you have limits to free use. But, it appears that Blogger overcomes many of those obstacles – especially the concern about monetization. If you browse through Blogger's help files, you can learn that Blogger has other features that may interest you.

For instance, if you're signed up through [Google Voice](#) (previously known as GrandStation), you can add a Google Voice button directly on your blog, if all rings true.

But, don't take my word for all this – give Blogger a whirl and learn that this Google option may be what you need. Take that word, Google, to heart – you may realize that anything “Google” could be anything “Blogger” as well – the changes may still keep coming...