

Start a blog in five minutes

happyearner.com/how-to-start-a-blog-in-five-minutes/

Posted by: By Tom Woods | October 14, 2016



It's technically possible to earn a living online without a website of your own. Or to have nothing but a series of landing pages. But I'd say this is the exception rather than the rule.

Here's our guide to starting that site even if, like us, you know nothing at all about programming or design.

First Question: Blog or Website?

There's no reason you have to choose, of course. You can have both, as I do. It depends on what you want to do.

If what you want is a presence online where people can find out about you, your background, your writing, your portfolio, or whatever, and you don't intend to add additional content on a regular basis that you'd want showcased in a prominent place, a simple website should do the trick.

On the other hand, if what you want is a place where you can add content on a regular basis, where that regular content will be immediately visible when a visitor arrives, and are satisfied with a simple page introducing yourself and providing some background, then a blog is for you.

Eventually you may want to combine the two: a site where you feature your work, or whatever it is you want to showcase, along with information about yourself, and so on, along with the capabilities of a blog, where you can post items regularly. But don't bite off more than you can chew. Maybe start with one and add the other.

Much of what follows below applies to people who want to start blogs in particular, but everyone needs a hosting company, the topic covered in the next section. Later I'll introduce additional resources that will help people who want full-fledged websites.

Where Do You Start?

The first thing you need is a name for your site – a domain name. Without a domain name, you'd have to tell people to visit you at something hideous like 123.456.789.123/happyeerner. A domain name, on the other hand, can be recalled easily.

This can be tricky, since most of the names you might want, at least with a .com suffix, are likely to be taken already. You can certainly go the .net route, or adopt still other, less common suffixes, but don't rule out .com too hastily. It's possible to be creative with your site name and come up with a .com domain that hasn't yet been taken.

In fact, a number of sites can help you brainstorm for an available .com domain that works for you. Free services like [BustAName.com](#), [LeanDomainSearch.com](#), and [NameBoy.com](#), to mention just a few, will take one or more keywords you'd like in your domain name and will give you a lengthy list of available domain names, which you would probably not have thought of on your own, that incorporate the keyword(s) you specified.

You can buy your domain name through a company like GoDaddy, and in many cases you can get a domain name as a bonus when you sign up with your hosting company (see below).

Your Next Step: Choosing a Hosting Company

Once you've decided on a domain name, you'll need a hosting company. We might compare your domain name to your physical address – it's where people can find you. And like your physical address in the real world, you can't just occupy a location without paying. Your Internet address needs to be leased.

Your website is composed of a number of files. They need to reside on a computer somewhere so that other people – your site visitors – can see them. These computers are known as *servers*, and your hosting company owns them.

If you're just getting started, you can get by just fine with companies like [Bluehost](#). They have an excellent reputation, and my followers have had very good experiences with them.

Eventually, as your traffic figures grow larger, you may want to switch to the company we at HappyEarner.com use, which is [WP Engine](#). They're pricier than these other companies, but you get what you pay for, and as your visitor numbers climb, you'll want the benefits of top-notch support, lightning-fast loading speeds – believe it or not, studies show that a difference of just seconds in loading time can mean huge visitor losses for you – and overall reliability. That's why we use it here.

Either way, drop us a line at bonuses@tomwoods.com after you sign up either through our Bluehost link or our WP Engine link and we'll send you 24 free video tutorials to get you from beginner to expert blogger!

From No Blog to Blog in Five Minutes

If I were to describe every little step involved in setting up your blog, I'd drive you crazy. It's like tying your shoes: if I just show you how to do it, it's much easier than if I try to describe it.

That's why I made a special, step-by-step video walking you through how to go from having no blog to having a blog. You can have your blog and be posting your first post within – no joke – five minutes!

You'll be using WordPress for your blog. It's easy to use. In the video above, I show you how to write a post and publish it on your blog using WordPress. If you're familiar with standard word processing software like Microsoft Word, you'll find WordPress a breeze.

Your Blog Is Up and Running! Here Are Your Next Steps

Now that you've watched that video and followed the directions, here are a few more tips for you, whether you wind up creating a full-feature website or stick with a simple blog.

(1) Let's start with the easiest first: prevent comment spam. If you skip this step, the comments on your blog posts will include obnoxious advertisements and other forms of spam. Fortunately, it's not difficult to deal with this problem: you activate Akismet, a plugin that is automatically included with WordPress. It's not difficult to activate, but if you need help, this video will walk you through the steps.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01tGKPx_URg

(2) Prepare your About page. This is very important. This page will get a lot of clicks. When people wind up on your site – because they've clicked through to one of your posts, say – they're going to be curious about who you are. What should you include? Think about what you would want to know about someone whose writing you are encountering for the first time, and you'll know what belongs on your About page.

Here's exactly how to create an About page:

(3) Create a sitemap. This makes it easier for the search engines to find the various pages on your blog. The easiest way to do this is with the Google XML Sitemap plugin. According to the description, this plugin “will generate a special XML sitemap which will help search engines like Google, Bing, Yahoo and Ask.com to better index your blog. With such a sitemap, it's much easier for the crawlers to see the complete structure of your site and retrieve it more efficiently.”

In case you're worried that this will be complicated, it isn't. First, download the plugin, by clicking on the download button at <http://wordpress.org/plugins/google-sitemap-generator/>. Then, on your WordPress dashboard (the page you see when you sign in as the administrator of your blog) click on Plugins and then Add New. Type Google XML Sitemap in the search box, then click to install now and then to “activate plugin.”

After activation, you'll be taken back to the plugins page on your dashboard. From there, find Google XML Sitemap and click Settings. You will be informed that your sitemap has not yet been generated. So click *build it*. And then you're done! Time for the next step.

(4) And that is: submit your site to Google and Bing. This is so these important search engines can find you, and your site can turn up in people's search results. Again, a video is far easier than a text-based explanation for a task like this, so [click here](#) for just such a video.

(5) Actually, there is one more thing. It's not strictly necessary, but I think it would be silly not to do it. Sign up for the Amazon affiliate program. Then, anytime you mention a book, or to any product available on Amazon, you can link to it with a special link that identifies your site as the source if anyone should click on it. And if someone does, then you get a commission from Amazon *on that person's entire order*, not just the item you linked to, and even if the person doesn't order the item you linked to. It costs nothing to join, so by all means [click here](#) and do it.

One More Thing – Why You Don't Want to Go the “Free” Route

Let me add that you could avoid paying the few dollars a month to a hosting company and pay absolutely nothing, by starting your blog through WordPress.com (which is not quite the same thing as the WordPress I mentioned above, which is WordPress.org), since it offers free hosting. But although that's tempting, here's why you don't want

to do it.

(1) You can't choose your own plugins. A "plugin" gives you a particular kind of functionality – like a shopping cart for sites with something to sell, or social media sharing capability, or helpful add-ons like [OptinMonster](#) that make signing up for your email list easy and attractive.

(2) No advertising is allowed. You could bring in a modest amount of money via advertising if WordPress.com didn't have this policy, but it does. You can join the WordPress.com advertising program – but only if your site traffic is high enough.

(3) WordPress.com controls your domain. If you are declared to be in violation of the WordPress.com Terms of Service – which, let's face it, nobody reads – you can be shut down permanently, with none of your content returned. You don't want that.

(4) You can build your brand far more credibly with your own domain name. You don't want [yourblog.wordpress.com](#) as the place you're sending people.

Spend a few bucks with [Bluehost](#) or any of the other hosting companies mentioned in this guide, and get your own site on your own terms.

Get Your Website Designed, But Don't Learn Design

I'm going to assume you don't want to learn how to program and design websites. If you do, there are plenty of resources both online and in print form that can teach you how to do it. But if you're like me, you don't want to, any more than you'd want to install your own roof or build your own microwave oven.

Use a Site Builder

If the idea of creating your own site from scratch doesn't appeal to you – and as I've said, it certainly doesn't appeal to me – but you don't want the expense of hiring a designer, you can use a number of services that offer a wide variety of templates you can use to create a website for yourself without having to know any coding. You can find a whole bunch of these, including [Wix](#), [SquareSpace](#), and [SiteBuilder](#).

Let me say a brief word about [Weebly](#), which *PC* magazine considers the best site of its kind. Although I've always used a designer to create my websites (see below), I've heard very positive things about Weebly, so I've been playing around with it myself. It's very easy to use. It's designed for people who don't specialize in this area. Its smartphone app allows you to edit your site on the go.

As of this printing, you can find well over 100 attractive templates at Weebly, and a variety of subscription plans. If you sign up for a free account, your domain name will look like [sitename.weebly.com](#). This is pretty unsightly and makes you look not particularly credible, so it's surely worth the four smackers per month for at least the Starter account.

In 2013, Weebly added ecommerce capability, meaning you can create an online store with Weebly now. Adding and editing products is easy and intuitive. For a store of modest size, Weebly's ecommerce functionality is more than adequate. For larger companies, [Shopify](#) – which specializes in ecommerce – is your best bet.

Here's a step-by-step video showing you exactly how to use Weebly. You may want to sign up for an account and then follow along with the video.

Or Hire a Designer

Most people can use a website builder like Weebly and get exactly the site they need at a reasonable price. They do not need to hire an expensive web designer. Most websites require essentially the same handful of basic features,

and these can be provided via the various templates available through a website builder.

On the other hand, if you need a lot of customization – that is, you need features on your site that are unconventional, and that you couldn't design on your own or with a website builder – then it's time to find a designer.

In my own case, I first became serious about my website back in 2009. I wanted something sleek, attractive, and effective. And boy, did I get it. I got a beautiful site that did everything I wanted, and I got it for a great price.

How did I do it? Through sheer luck. A friend happened to know a local college student who was outstanding at both design and programming – not an especially common combination. I was flabbergasted at how nice my site looked.

But here was the problem: he was a college student. If I needed something fixed or tweaked, I couldn't get a hold of him. (If only [Upwork](#), my favorite freelancer website, had been around in those days!) For years afterward, when later web consultants needed various credentials for my site or information about the domain name registration, it was a struggle to get them. If I had known more about websites in those days, I would have asked for all of this when the site was produced, but I didn't, and the result was a terrific inconvenience. The low price just wasn't worth the headaches.

As with anything else, so in web design: you get what you pay for. For this very site, we used a company called [Studio 1 Design](#). They are, in fact, quite reasonably priced. I also used them for my personal site. I needed a bunch of specific things: a shopping cart for my Books page; an attractive home page that conveyed all the things I do but without being cluttered; podcast pages with a podcast player, subscription buttons, a YouTube button, a transcript button, and other features; a contact page; and more.

Studio 1 Design did everything I asked for, never lost their patience with me, and produced a fantastic final product. Do you think your visitors would be impressed if you had a site that looked as good as this one? If you'd to give Studio 1 Design a try, they've agreed to give you good readers 10% off any design project if you use this special link: [Studio1Design.com/woods](#).

Good luck!

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