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Development was funded by the Department of Labor (DOL) Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant No. TC-22525-11-60-A-48; The National Information Security, Geospatial Technologies Consortium (NISGTC) is an entity of Collin College of Texas, Bellevue College of Washington, Bunker Hill Community College of Massachusetts, Del Mar College of Texas, Moraine Valley Community College of Illinois, Rio Salado College of Arizona, and Salt Lake Community College of Utah.

This workforce solution was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The solution was created by the grantee and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites, and including, but not limited to accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability or ownership.

Lesson 1: Introduction to WordPress

INTRODUCTION

This lesson provides an overview of blogs, blogging and WordPress.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define blogs and blogging.
- Define how blogs and blogging fit into social networking.
- Identify the uses of WordPress blogs.
- Define personal journalism.
- Define business blogging as a marketing tool.
- Identify common features of commercial websites.
- Discuss WordPress features specific to achieving desired outcomes.
- Compare content policies relating to specific web sites.
- Explain how a code of ethics influences the creation and maintenance of a blog or website.

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LEARNING SEQUENCE

Required Reading	Read the following: Lesson 1: Introduction to WordPress • WordPress • Content Management System • Social Networking • First Amendment to the United States Constitution • Wikipedia® Blogger Code of Conduct • Blogger® Content Policy • WordPress® Terms of Service • Association for Computing Machinery Code of Ethics • WordPress.com: The Features You'll Love • Citizen Journalism
Resources	Additional resources required: • Access to a computer, browser software, and internet service (required for this and all future lessons).
Assignments	Complete the following: • Assignment 1a: Content Policy Reports • Assignment 1b: Code of Ethics Report • Assignment 1c: WordPress features

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INSTRUCTION

Why WordPress?

If you ask ten web designers what is the best tool for you to use to create a web site you can easily get eleven different answers. Everyone has an opinion as to what is the best tool. This has to do with several factors:

The first can be what specific tools the designer is familiar with. Learning web design tools can be challenging and time consuming. And if you find something that works (at least well enough) it is tempting to stick with it.

The second reason can be a very good one – the designer has chosen a tool that has all of the features and power they need for the work they perform. But power often comes with the cost of a high learning curve. This proves daunting for the person who wants to build their first site.

The third reason, "If it is good enough for me it is good enough for you." This is not a very helpful reason.

The objective for this lesson is to begin the discussion of "Why **WordPress**?" This will involve some definitions, background, and a lot of research. But as you do your research you will find more and more people who design web sites are turning to **WordPress** as their go-to tool because of its initial simplicity and its ability to be customized.

What is a blog?

A blog is information (or you can think of them as resources) someone has stored on a computer on the internet (a "website") that they have made available for other people to see, such as:

- Words
- Pictures
- Sound
- Video

A blog is a where you can creatively express yourself though these words, pictures, sounds, or video that other people can learn, enjoy, or benefit from. They are like an old fashioned bulletin board where people would tack pictures, announcements, news articles, postcards, etc. To "tack" your information on to your blog is to "post" the information. Post is a word you want to remember.

Even NASA has a blog! And, the open.nasa.gov blog is built using WordPress.

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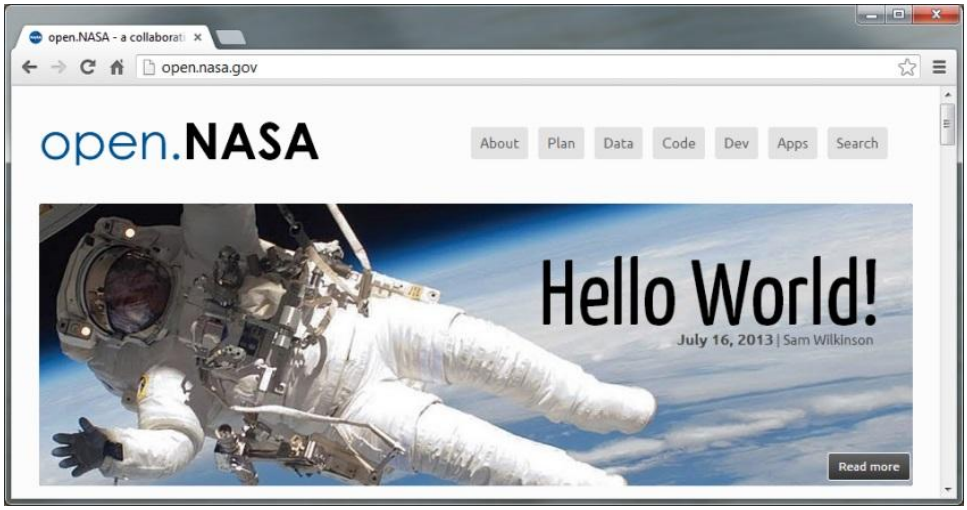

Figure 1 Screenshot of **NASA Blog Home Page**

What is blogging?

Blogging is the process of actively sharing ideas with others in a web-based forum. Usually this is an on-going process where you add new information (words, pictures, sound, and video) on some regular basis:

- daily
- a couple times each week
- every two weeks
- monthly

The idea can be personal, maybe you are a photographer who likes to share pictures you have taken for others to enjoy. Maybe you are an expert in some subject like gardening and would like to share helpful information on how to grow plants. Or you have a business you would like to market and need visibility on the internet.

So from a practical point of view blogging is the process of creating and updating content on a web page regardless of its subject matter or intended purpose. Take your gardening hobby as an example. Specifically you may be interested in growing sunflowers.

You have decided that you would like to share your love of sunflowers and your experiences growing them with others who share this same interest. And in some cases you might even like to have those people provide comments, feedback, suggestions.

So you create a blog where you can write your stories, post your pictures, give people the opportunity to write comments, and hopefully enjoy the experience and build a following of interested people.

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Figure 2 Sunflower Field in Yellow Springs, Ohio by Sue Reynolds CarmineMedia , CC-BY-SA 2.0

So far this is a hobby. You do it purely for the enjoyment you derive from sharing information and relating to a community of people who share your interests.

But what if you have a business for which you would like to create a presence on the internet? A blog can be the place where you tell potential customers about your products or services. It could simply be a picture that represents your business, contact information, and a description of what your business does.

You could expand this to include:

- product pictures
- descriptions
- prices
- customer testimonials
- support/frequently asked questions

You could further expand this to include a way for customers to order products or services on line. Sounds like a "website" doesn't it? WordPress allows us to blur the line between the two and easily move from just information to action.

What is a blogger?

Once you create your own blog and begin posting information on your blog, you are a blogger.

There is a real sense that to be a blogger, whether you are a hobbyist or a professional, you take the responsibility of the care and feeding of your blog content on some regular basis – a good rule of thumb being at least once a week.

Without regular updates you will lose your following as people grow disinterested and web search engines ignore you. And you will lose your own creative motivation.

What are the Tools?

You are accustomed to using a word processor to write letters, documents, flyers, newsletters, magazines, books, or whatever on your computer. There are many word processors available to you: Microsoft Word®, Corel WordPerfect®, Apple Pages®, LibreOffice Writer® are some of the most widely used.

To create and write a blog you need to have a tool. The long name for these tools is "Content Management System" or CMS. Please read: Content Management System.

For our purposes we will refer to a content management system simply as a "tool". Our focus is on the tool called **WordPress**. But WordPress is not the only tool available to you to create a blog. It is highly recommended that once you are comfortable with WordPress that you look into other blogging tools, you just might find one that is better for you. While many people absolutely love one word processor, others find that a different word processor meets their needs better.

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To give you a few examples, review three of the major blogging tools:

- Blogger®
- TypePad®
- WordPress®

How do blogs and blogging fit into social networking?

Social networking by definition means the use of resources (usually the internet) to share information with other people. Take a few moments and read the following: Social Networking.

So how do you connect with your family, friends, customers, community? For some, a resource like Facebook® is ideal – minimal effort; ability to seek out people; ability to be visible to the world in varying levels of exposure; ability to share quick messages, long documents, photographs, linking to other resources, etc. Twitter®, Pinterest®, Google+®, and LinkedIn® are other examples.

For others they have a different communication interest and would prefer a different "platform." Perhaps something more like a newsletter, a column in a newspaper, or a magazine but more dynamic than those mediums and perhaps even interactive with your community.

A blog provides you with an environment that is almost exclusively yours. Some blog tools (especially free tools) will have advertising. And you can choose whether to allow your community to post comments.

But wait! Read all about "Content Policy."

What can you put on your blog? You might be thinking of the *First Amendment:*

First Amendment to the United States Constitution

And that it *must be* an inalienable right to write or post whatever you want.

Before you begin it is very important that you do some research – just like you would study a map to drive someplace unknown to you or study the culture of another country you plan to visit.

With blogging, there truly is "*some assembly required*".

Common Features of Commercial Websites

What does a commercial website need in terms of features?

First, the website must have a good home page. The home page is the first page that a visitor sees when accessing a website. There is an old rule regarding resumes that says you have about 30 seconds to capture the attention of a potential employer, this same rule applies to the home page.

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The home page must be:

- Easy to read
- Make sense to both a first-time visitor and to a regular visitor
- Clearly communicate what the website is promoting
- Be easy to navigate for more information
- Have an appearance that is attractive and appropriate for the content.

Second, the CMS chosen should:

- Have the ability to provide a visitor with media options – text, graphics, audio, video, downloads
- Have the ability to provide database information for products and services that visitors can easily search
- Have the ability to provide a secure shopping cart if online sales are needed
- Have the ability to provide security features that help prevent unauthorized access or damage

Let's call the basic fundamental needs **E**ase of Use, **P**ower, **S**calability, **E**conomically Sustainable (**EPSE)**:

Ease of Use: it should not take a rocket scientist to build a good commercial website

Power: the website should provide all of the commonly needed resources

Scalability: as your needs grow your website should have the ability to grow with it

Economically Sustainable: as important as your website is to your business you need a website that is cost effective

If you have the budget and need to hire a team of web professionals to build and maintain a truly custom built-to-order website, great! But history in the information technology community has shown that this solution usually does not meet the EPSE test. WordPress is an outstanding EPSE choice.

Features of WordPress®

WordPress gives you incredible flexibility. In the information technology industry WordPress would be considered a "feature rich" tool.

Start by reading the following description of WordPress on Wikipedia: WordPress.

Here are a few things WordPress allows you to do:

- Build a blog
- Build a website
- Basic hosting services for a blog are free
- Basic software for building a website is free
- Themes (templates for how your blog looks) are available for free
- Custom themes can be purchased, usually for minimal cost
- Site statistics are available to help you understand the volume of your traffic

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- Manage comments from visitors
- Add tools (Widgets) to customize your blog
- Add tools (Plugins) to add functionality to your website

Take Some Time
Visit WordPress.com: The Features You'll Love to review some of the available "feature rich" tools.

Uses of WordPress Blogs

So who uses WordPress? Or, what is it used for? Here are a few categories that it might be easy for you to find examples:

- celebrities
- charitable causes
- churches
- clubs
- corporations
- entertainment
- fashion blogs
- food blogs
- hobbies
- how-to blogs
- not for profit organizations
- personal journals
- professional portfolios
- universities

Here are a few examples of blogs using WordPress:

Blog Title	Blog Type
Basset Hound Blog	A personal interest "we love our dogs and want the world to know" type of blog.
A Beach Cottage	An independent professional who uses design ideas to generate advertising revenue.
The Pioneer Woman	A personal blog that went viral.
Compassion International	A non-profit that fights child poverty.
Johnny Cupcakes	A young entrepreneur who uses a blog for his business.

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Open NASA	NASA – What else needs to be said?
Microsoft Office Blog	Microsoft – a blog featuring stories about their Microsoft Office products.

Just to give you an idea of where blogs can take you, it is estimated that The Pioneer Woman blog generates $1 million per year!

And interesting site to take a look at is called the Weblog Awards (Bloggies), an annual award for blogs. Please note that blogs are nominated and voted on for a variety of categories, and that there is no official source sponsoring the award, and that nominations and voting are at-large.

As you visit blogs remember that a major purpose of WordPress is to make it as simple as possible to create a blog while providing the ability to scale to a more full-featured website.

Two resources available to you to know more about WordPress are:

Visit WordCamp.org for conferences you can attend that are held worldwide.

Visit WordPress.tv for videos from presentations at WordCamp conferences.

What is Personal Journalism?

Think about journalism in general. You picture someone who works for a newspaper or related information source. A journalist may solely be a writer, someone who puts thoughts into words. Or they may be a "photo journalist", a writer who also is a photographer who puts thoughts into words and uses photographs to help tell the story. But typically these are professionals.

For years many people who have wanted to be a journalist have been unable to fulfill this interest. Their work had to be accepted by someone else (such as an editor) before it could be published and made available to the general public. An alternative was for them to self-publish, but this could be expensive and limit the scope of their potential influence (standing on street corners handing out pamphlets).

The computer age has provided a unique tool for allows individuals to be able to express themselves to a potentially wide distribution. Email provided the vehicle to begin this opportunity but was usually limited to a direct distribution list. Original recipients who thought content in an email was particularly valuable would often forward this to other people not on the original distribution list. But the originator had no control over their content once it was launched and had no ability to make it visible to others.

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Blogs provide a place to host information that is readily accessible to most people in the world, barring technical, political, or economic limitations. So now someone can take it upon themselves to write about local events in their community, share helpful information, make political commentary, or just tell their own life story. The age of personal journalism has arrived. Read the article Citizen Journalism.

Business Blogging as a Marketing Tool

If you had a small business, how would you market it? Direct mail? Television? Radio? An ad in the telephone directory?

For a neighborhood grocery store it might be enough to have a large sign out front, but it is likely they would send out advertising mailers to local homes. And the cost of mailers is not insignificant. What if you are in the same business, but your niche is a small specialty cheese store? It is likely you will follow some similar marketing for your store – a sign that hopefully gives you good visibility, but only from the road, a mailer campaign when you first open to let your neighbors know you are in business. And then you sit, and wait, and hope that customers find you.

You know that it is said that word-of-mouth is the best advertising, and the least expensive. What if you could help generate some of that conversation? Businesses can use blogging as a very effective tool to help market their products and services.

In the old days, if someone was interested in finding specialty cheeses they would use the telephone directory to identify stores who had advertised themselves this way and contact them. In the age of the internet people now open their favorite browser and use their favorite search engine to look. You are no longer limited to the extent of your advertising budget or who drives by your store.

Blogging allows you to reach customers beyond a couple-mile radius from your store and have access to your entire city and even across the country. You can go international, but you have to consider shipping costs, import/export restrictions, and perishability that may limit your international options.

Blogging is:

- An easy to use marketing tool
- Powerful beyond the effort put into creating the blog due to search engines
- Is scalable from a contact page to a newsletter to a full commercial website
- Is economically sustainable

PRACTICE

1. Explain the features of a blog.

2. Explain the activities of blogging.

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3. Explain the benefits of EPSE.

4. Use a browser to navigate to the blogs referenced in this Lesson.

5. Use a browser to navigate to any of the Wikipedia articles referenced in this Lesson.

SUMMARY

So what should you take away from this lesson?

- A blog is a place on the internet where you can share information for personal or professional purposes.
- Blogging is the process of sharing information on a blog.
- A blogger is what the person is called who maintains information on a blog.
- You need a tool such as WordPress to allow you to easily create and maintain a blog.
- WordPress provides ease of use, power, scalability, and economic sustainability.
- Content is vital to the message of your blog, but that you are under contractual, legal, and ethical limitations on what you can put on your blog.
- The creation and maintenance of a blog or website must be by a code of ethics
- Every blogging tool has features that make it useful and desirable, but they are not the same from tool to tool – which helps explain why someone would choose WordPress while someone else might choose Blogger.
- From a business point of view, blogs are a great resource for marketing.

ASSIGNMENTS

Note: Assignment details are located within the lesson.

1. Assignment 1a: Content Policy Reports

2. Assignment 1b: Code of Ethics Report

3. Assignment 1c: WordPress Features Reports

RESOURCES

Content in the "Use of WordPress Blogs" section includes adapted content from "Ree Drummond" by Wikipedia Community retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ree_Drummond and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/.

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