

63 Blogging Tools That Will Make You Insanely Productive

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Let me guess.

You read the headline on this post and thought, “Cool!” Then a little voice in your head whispered something like, “Why do I need another post on all the cool tools I don’t have time to use?”

That is the key, isn’t it? Time. Having the time to set up, play with and truly put to work all the amazing tools that will rocket your blog into the heavens.

And having time to write. And time to follow other bloggers. And time to network on social media.

After your blog is set up, after that technical part is over, every new blogger is fundamentally the same. You’re full of excitement and plans. You have a bright, shiny new blog, bursting with potential and ideas.

And zero readers.

Time then becomes the key factor that separates new bloggers into three dramatically different kinds of bloggers. That’s why all the standard advice about the tools you need is confusing. Tools don’t make the blogger. Time does.

Because it’s how much time you can spend studying the top bloggers in your niche, improving your writing and cultivating relationships with readers and influencers that determines how fast your blog will grow. And how fast your blog grows determines the tools you need.

Tools are essential, but time is the magic elixir.

Again, bloggers span a wide spectrum, but fall into three distinct groups. Read the following descriptions, and then jump to each group’s tool section to discover what you need.

The Minimalist Blogger

You have ideas you want to share but you may not be too sure about this blogging thing. You’re willing to dip your toe in the water, because it seems like it could work, but the tech part is still a challenge. You don’t need the fancy tools.

Most of all, you don’t want to spend a lot of time on it yet, or you don’t have a lot of extra time in your life right now. Maybe you just want to write and follow others in your niche. Whether your topic is a passion, a hobby or related to what you do for a living, a blog is a side project that you can give no more than 10 hours per week, if that.

The Serious and Committed Blogger

You’ve gotten your feet wet in blogging, and you’re committed to what you’re doing. You want to build a business from your blog, but your income and readership are not big enough for you to quit your job. You’re squeezing out as much time as you can, maybe 10 to 20 hours every week, and you need tools that won’t suck up much time but will deliver a big impact.



The Entrepreneur Blogger

You look at blogging differently than everyone else:

You're not running a blog; you're operating a business. Blogging is a promotion strategy, but it's not an end in itself.

Because you're doing this more or less full time, you have significantly more time to spend experimenting with tools that others can't.

Because this is your business, you're willing to invest money in it, so the higher price tags on the more sophisticated services don't put you off – IF they make sense for growing the business and saving you time and effort that can be used better elsewhere.

The Blogger's Tool List

We're listing all tools we're familiar with and use. Many of the links that follow are affiliate links, for which we'll earn a small commission if you choose to buy (at no additional cost to you.) Expect additions and changes as we find better tools. We'll also be adding sections on courses and books that will help you in your blogging business.

We've organized it into four sections to match where you're at as a blogger.

Setting Up Your Blog: This is the tech list. If you're thinking about starting a blog go here first to find out what you need.

The Minimalist Blogger: Tools to build a solid foundation but nothing fancy.

The Serious and Committed Blogger: Upgrades to many of the basic tools needed as you add products, build your subscriber base and earn money.

The Entrepreneur Blogger: Advanced tools for blogs earning from \$10 thousand to \$10 million.

Setting Up Your Blog

How to Buy a Domain Name

[NameCheap](#) is our favorite cheap domain registrar. There's no good reason to pay more. We recommend you don't purchase your domain name through your web hosting company either, because if you decide to switch web hosts later, which is likely, it can be more complicated.

How to Choose a Web Host

The standard advice to go with a large web hosting company for long-term stability is sound. Small web hosting companies still disappear without warning, a terrifying situation. You will also require different levels of bandwidth and service as your blog grows.

For minimalist to serious bloggers, we recommend [Namecheap](#), which offers several low-priced plans for new and small blogs. You can purchase shared hosting for as low as \$3.96 per month with a three-year contract, a 20% discount is almost always available and the support is excellent.

Why You Must Start with WordPress

We're adamant on this tool: only [WordPress](#). Forget Blogger, Weebly and all the other free amateur platforms if you want people to take your blog seriously. WordPress has become the industry standard.

Most large web hosts already have WordPress available for installation from within your hosting account. But you can do it yourself by downloading it from <http://wordpress.org/>. It's customizable to support a range of functions as your blog grows and you can set up a good-looking blog without knowing how to code.

How to Get a Great WordPress Design for Your Blog

WordPress provides the behind-the-scenes guts of your blog. A "theme" provides the template and design. You can pay a web designer or you can buy a customizable WordPress theme. A lot of graphic designers will get angry at us for saying this, but don't spend money for graphic design at this point. As you will see in a minute, premium WordPress themes can be very attractive by themselves and have robust code, making them more than enough for your beginning needs.

While you can get your blog started on the built-in WordPress theme, your blog will immediately look more professional with a premium theme. We don't recommend you use a free theme. The differences between free and premium themes are in the backend: While both may look good to visitors, free themes don't come with a technical support desk and are almost always ignored by their developers when they move onto other projects, leaving you with an outdated theme that will become more vulnerable to hackers and more prone to break over time.

Premium themes are updated regularly to keep pace with WordPress upgrades and new trends. Plus, they maintain support desks that will help you with setup, problems, customization, upgrades and maintenance.

We use themes from [ElegantThemes](#) for several sites. It doesn't take much effort to customize an Elegant theme. For \$39 a year you have access to all 86 themes plus customer support. Developer pricing and a lifetime one-time fee are available.

[StudioPress](#) is the leader in premium WordPress themes. Built on the Genesis WordPress platform, StudioPress is used by many top social media bloggers. Although pricier than Elegant Themes, you can buy Genesis plus an individual theme or the entire theme package.

A Basic Set of WordPress Plugins

With plugins, more is not always better and in fact more can slow your site down or cause code conflicts. You only need a few basic plugins to add enhanced functionality for social media sharing, email capture, analytics and site performance.

Social sharing: Dozens of social sharing plugins are available for WordPress. We like the free [Digg Digg](#) plugin because it floats on the side of the screen and follows the reader up or down the page as they read, so it's always visible.

Popups: We didn't like the aggressive way popup boxes take the reader's screen hostage, so we designed a better one – Unpop, a polite popup that slides up the screen, doesn't annoy the reader and goes away when your reader tells it to. You can use it to get email subscribers, likes for your Facebook page and register readers for a webinar. Try it for 30 days free at [GetUnpop](#).

Analytics: Be sure to get some form of tracking or analytics code on your blog from the start. [Google Analytics](#) is free and easy to install. Later as your traffic increases you may want to invest in a paid analytics program but for the short- and mid-term Google Analytics will provide enough data to make your head spin.

Site performance: We recommend installing [WPSuperCache](#) to maximize the speed at which your blog's pages load for a visitor. Consider it fine-tuning for your blog's engine; knowing the technical details at this point won't make you a better blogger but your blog won't annoy your visitors.

SEO: The degree of SEO (Search Engine Optimization) you need to implement generates intense debate among bloggers. For beginners, we say forget about it. Seriously. Other than creating the very basic metadata so your posts show up correctly in a Google search, your time is better spent writing great content and promoting it.

Many WordPress themes, like StudioPress, have SEO built in that makes the basic set up quick and painless. Don't overthink this part.

Where to Find Images and Photos

Everyone has their favorite stock photo site, and ours is [Bigstockphoto](#). The prices are inexpensive for small photos, which are the right size and resolution for blog post images. Searching for appropriate images to illustrate a blog post can become a huge time suck, so limit yourself to one or two stock sites.

How to Establish an Email List

Building your email list should be your primary focus as a blogger from the day you start. Relying on RSS or other email collection programs to maintain your list is foolish. You should aim to collect emails from Day One, or earlier.

We recommend you start with the free version of [MailChimp](#). It has a clean, easy-to-use dashboard and you can not only create multiple lists but also create segments of lists as well. One key thing you can't do with the free version is create a series of autoresponder emails that will be sent out automatically when a visitor signs up to your list.

You'll need to upgrade to either a paid MailChimp account or another paid email marketing provider when your blog reaches the point where you're offering a free email class that requires an autoresponder.

The Minimalist Blogger

Social Media Listening Tools

[Feedly](#) is a free replacement for Google Reader that you can use for tracking posts from the blogs you're following in your niche. Set it up with folders by topic or by size or by influence, whatever works best for you.

The free version of [Hootsuite](#) is more than enough at this stage to monitor different social media networks in one place as you follow the top bloggers and cool kids in your niche.

Add Custom Email Sign Up Boxes

The free version of [MailChimp](#) will still be adequate at this point. As you begin guest posting, you might consider a premium plugin like [Optin Skin](#) to add custom email sign up boxes for the readers who visit your site.

The Serious and Committed Blogger

Upgrade Your Email Provider to Create a Free Email Course

You are probably ready to develop a simple email autoresponder course on your topic. For that, you'll need to upgrade from the free MailChimp account to either a paid MailChimp account or one of those listed below. All of these email providers provide pretty much the same service and are competitively priced. Pick the one you like the best or find easiest to use during a free trial period.

- [MailChimp, paid version](#)
- [Aweber](#)
- [ConstantContact](#)
- [GetResponse](#)
- [MadMimi](#)

Develop an Audio Course as Your First Product

Now that you've whetted your subscribers' appetites with your free email course, offer an audio course for your first paid product. It's quick to produce, technically easier to manage and one of the best ways to gauge if you're hitting the target without a lot of time invested in production. [InstantTeleseminar](#) is the most reliable provider we've found. It records automatically and customers can join your teleconference calls via phone, Skype or the Internet.

Add a Shopping Cart

You're wise to keep it simple at this point, until you have multiple products or build an affiliate network. Your best choices are [PayPal](#), [eJunkie](#) and [Clickbank](#). Each provides a slightly different set of features, so compare them to find your best fit.

Add Landing Pages to Your Blog

Offering products or requiring registration for classes, teleconference calls or webinars requires separate landing pages to make the experience seamless for your customers. We recommend [OptimizePress](#) for building simple landing pages.

Schedule Social Media Sharing

You should know by now where your peeps hang out on social media, so use a free [Buffer](#) account to schedule links to useful and relevant content from other bloggers, quotes, tips and links to your guest posts and blog posts.

Tweak Your WordPress Theme

As you build a reader and subscriber base and tweak your blog angle, you may find your theme doesn't have the look or features you need. Rather than paying big bucks to have someone design a brand new theme, which can create unwanted technical problems while you're beginning to make money, search out freelance web designers on [Odesk](#) or [99Designs](#) for customizing your current theme.

You can find a lot of talent on Odesk if you take the time to search carefully, using the competency scores and feedback from previous clients as gauges. 99Designs uses a contest model rather than a fee per hour model. You determine what you're willing to pay and the design requirements. Designers who are interested respond with samples for you to choose from and you choose the winner.

Optimize Your Blog for SEO

You should have gained enough traffic, page views and links for Google to notice your blog consistently by now. We recommend the [Yoast SEO](#) plugin to optimize the content on your site.

Back Up Your Site

Don't tempt fate. Install a backup plugin. We use [BackWPup](#) and back up to our server, but you can back up to a [DropBox](#) or [Amazon S3](#) account automatically.

The Entrepreneur Blogger

Upgrade Your Webhosting

As your traffic grows you'll want to upgrade your plan and may consider moving to your own server, which you can do with or web hosts dedicated to blogging and WordPress, such as [WPEngine](#) and [Synthesis](#) at Copyblogger Media. Both are expensive, but the peace of mind and higher-level customer support for a large site that hosts your business, community and products are worth it.

Upgrade Your Site Protection

As your blog gains traffic and becomes known, expect the hack attacks. It's not pretty and can destroy overnight the goodwill you earned with your readers and subscribers. [Sucuri](#) cleaned up the nasties when BBT was hacked last year, and continues to keep them at bay. It's expensive, but not as expensive as losing hundreds of subscribers it took months to win over.

Choose Email Marketing and Shopping Carts Based on Sales

Your growing traffic, subscriber and customer base demand closer attention and more integration. You have several choices.

Under \$10,000 in sales

Expect to outgrow PayPal, eJunkie or Clickbank soon and begin researching other options.

Up to \$30,000 in sales

Open a business bank account if you haven't already. Most accountants and bookkeepers would probably advise you to do it earlier.

Over \$30,000 in sales

Open a merchant account either through [PowerPay](#) or get a [Stripe](#) account, an alternative to a merchant account. You will need either one to have a credit card processor.

Up to \$100,000 in sales

Keep your paid email marketing provider and add a shopping cart: We recommend [UltraCart](#). It offers the complete range of shopping cart services, such as order pages and affiliate management, and integrates with all the leading email providers.

Over \$100,000 in sales

Upgrade to an integrated email, shopping cart and customer relationship management (CRM) system such as [Ontraport](#) (formerly OAP). The difference with an integrated provider is automation – many of the email, list segmentation and billing functions can be automated and integrated with the contact profile. You can also track and group clients and contacts in different ways.

Landing Pages

[LeadPages](#) offers dozens of slick page designs for sales, event registration and other types of landing pages plus easy split testing. It's easy to set up and customize.

Tweak Your Web and Graphic Design

Your blog-based business has finally reached a point where it could benefit from a custom design. Use [Dribbble](#) and [Behance](#) to find a really good designer.

Expand into Video and Audio Tools

We continually get questions about how Jon creates his videos. The short answer – he's a geek. The longer answer includes [PowerPoint](#). Seriously. Jon uses advanced PowerPoint animation techniques you can learn from [Slideology](#). He does a screen recording of the presentation in PowerPoint, then imports it into [Camtasia](#), where he records the slideshow with audio, and then renders it as an MP4. On a Mac, you can use the same animation with [Keynote](#) and [ScreenFlow](#).

If you like the slides in our webinars, we get the templates from [Graphic River](#).

If you don't have that much geekiness, you can find a video producer on [ODesk](#) or [Eance](#) that knows advanced presentation techniques.

Consider Adding a Membership Site

After you've grown a substantial list, it may be time to open the doors to a private membership site to offer exclusive products and information. You need several elements to create that private community.

[Wishlist Member](#) is our choice for managing your membership. It integrates seamlessly with WordPress and the expanding list of plugins allow you to customize your members' experience. It's a bit more expensive than other options, but versatile.

Most membership sites offer a forum for members to interact. We use [Simple:Press](#) in the [Guest Blogging Apprenticeship Program](#), which is a large and active forum. The plugin is still free but the excellent customer support is now fee-based.

Consider Offering Webinars

Up to \$100,000 in sales

If you're hosting small or infrequent webinars, try [Meeting Burner](#) or [Any Meeting](#).

Over \$100,000 in sales

Consider a subscription to [GoToWebinar](#). The most expensive option, it's the most reliable despite its occasional glitches.

Take a Look at In-depth Analytics

Up to \$100,000 in sales

Tools like [CrazyEgg](#) or [VisualWebsiteOptimizer](#) make sense for tracking visitor behavior on your landing pages (but not your entire blog). [Moz](#) or [Raven Tools](#) are also helpful for tracking your traffic from search engines and social media.

Over \$100,000 in sales

You have several ultra-sophisticated, pricey options for data-tracking and analysis: Look at [Kissmetrics](#), [MixPanel](#). You'll probably need a developer to set up these tools and handle campaigns. At this stage, small tweaks in conversion can equal significant gains, so don't get lost in analysis paralysis.

Advanced Social Media Tactics

Because your social media following has likely reached a critical mass that now grows organically, reaching out to individual influencers in your niche is a more profitable use of your time. A tool like [BuzzStream](#) efficiently helps you search and track your interactions with bloggers, journalists and other people you want to keep your eye on.

Advanced Email Marketing Tactics

[Customer IO](#), which sends emails triggered by user behavior, can help you refine your customer marketing and engagement and increase conversions.

Scalable Affiliate Software

Depending on your particular product mix, you may need to compare affiliate services. [IDevAffiliate](#) is popular and robust affiliate tracking software that will scale as you grow.

We're not finished yet...

This resource guide will evolve, as our business grows, as we require different tools and as new tools are introduced. We'll add a tab at the top of the blog so you can find this guide easily when you come back, and we will keep you posted on the changes.

...and neither are you!

Wherever you're at with your blog, you now have the all tools you need to take it to the next level. We've done the research and explored all the dead ends – so you don't have to. Whether you have 10 hours, 20 hours, or 60+ hours a week to work on your blog, using the right tools will help you fully exploit the time you have.

So let's "tool up" and get your blog ready for prime time.

If you have a question regarding a particular tool, post it in the comments below. We'll do our best to help you.

About the Author: In addition to helping oversee BBT, Marsha Stopa is an Assistant Instructor at [Guestblogging.com](#), where she has helped literally thousands of students with their blogs. If you'd like her to help you with yours, [click here to visit her consulting page](#).