



Building a  
**WORDPRESS**  
**BLOG**

People Want to Read

Second Edition



SCOTT McNULTY

## Building a WordPress Blog People Want to Read, Second Edition

Scott McNulty

Peachpit Press  
1249 Eighth Street  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
510/524-2178  
510/524-2221 (fax)

Find us on the Web at: [www.peachpit.com](http://www.peachpit.com)  
To report errors, please send a note to [errata@peachpit.com](mailto:errata@peachpit.com).

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Editor: Kathy Simpson  
Production editor: Danielle Foster  
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Indexer: Ann Rogers  
Cover design: Charlene Charles-Will  
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ISBN-13: 978-0-321-74957-4  
ISBN-10: 0-321-74957-X

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in the United States of America



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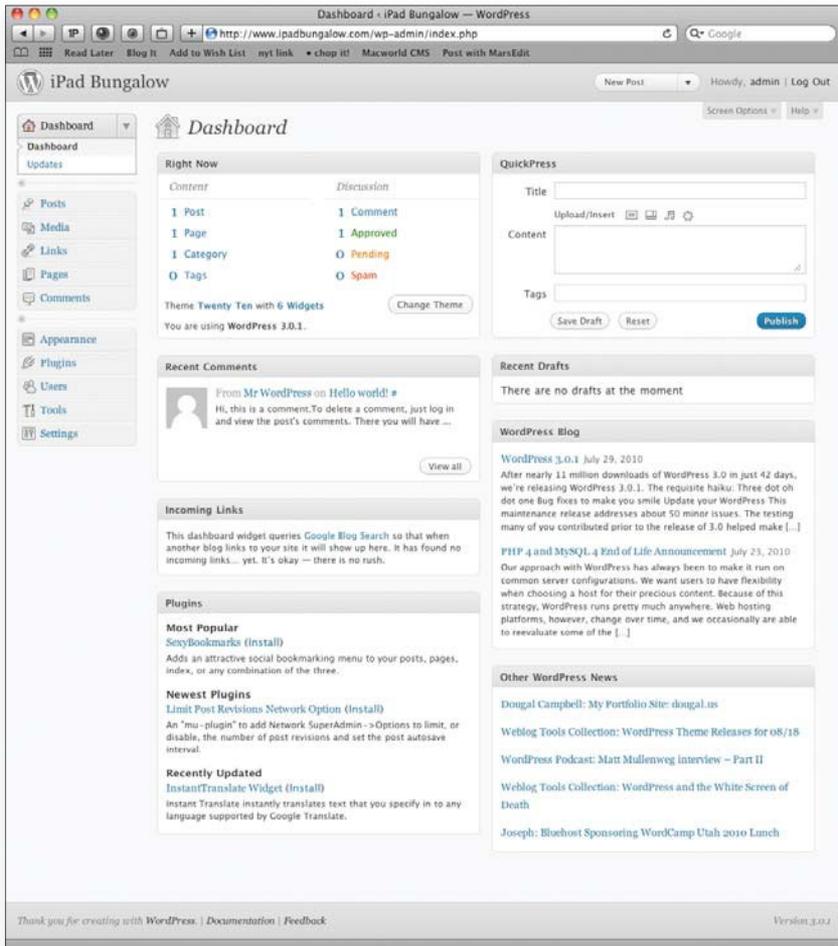
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# The Dashboard

The Dashboard (**Figure 4.1** on the next page) is the first thing you see when you log in to any installation of WordPress. It's your captain's chair, the tower from which you overlook the grandeur of your digital kingdom, the window into your blog, and a dozen more clichés.

The Dashboard provides information at a glance about a variety of WordPress-related items through eight modules:

- Right Now
- Recent Comments
- Incoming Links
- Plugins
- QuickPress
- Recent Drafts
- WordPress Blog
- Other WordPress News



**Figure 4.1** The WordPress Dashboard, in all its glory.

Out of the box, the Dashboard's customization options are limited, but they can be expanded with—you guessed it—plug-ins. This isn't to say that you don't have any options out of the gate, though. As long as you're logged in as a user in the Administrator role, you can change a few things.

In this chapter, I take a look at the anatomy of the Dashboard. Along the way, I point out what you can change.

## Right Here: Right Now

At the top of the Dashboard, you see the Right Now module (**Figure 4.2**).

Content	Discussion
<a href="#">1 Post</a>	<a href="#">1 Comment</a>
<a href="#">1 Page</a>	<a href="#">1 Approved</a>
<a href="#">1 Category</a>	<a href="#">0 Pending</a>
<a href="#">0 Tags</a>	<a href="#">0 Spam</a>

Theme **Twenty Ten** with **6 Widgets** [Change Theme](#)

You are using **WordPress 3.0.1**.

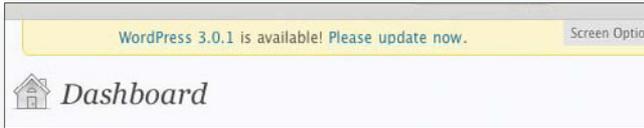
**Figure 4.2** Right Now displays an easy-to-read overview of your blog's content and gives you a quick way to change your blog's theme.

As you can see, the Right Now module displays some statistics about your blog in two columns: Content and Discussion. Each entry, no matter which column it appears in, is a hyperlink. A fresh installation of WordPress comes with one post and a comment to give you a good starting place. Clicking one of the statistics links takes you to the related section of WordPress, as follows:

- The Posts link takes you to the Posts module, where you can edit or create posts (depending on your role).
- The Pages link takes you to the Pages module.
- The Categories link shows you how many categories you currently have in your blog. Click this link to add, edit, or delete categories.
- The Tags link shows you how many tags you currently have in your blog. Click this link to add, edit, or delete tags.
- The Discussion column has four categories: Comments (total comments), Approved (number of approved comments), Pending (number of pending comments), and Spam (number of spam comments). When the number in any of those categories is greater than zero, you can click the link to perform comment-specific actions.

Below all that information about the content of your blog, you get some info about the blog itself: the current theme, which determines what your blog looks like, and the number of widgets the theme is using. (See Chapter 12 for details on themes and widgets.) Clicking the Widgets link takes you to the Widgets module, which allows you to add or remove widgets. You can change your current theme by clicking the Change Theme button.

Finally, the Right Now module displays the version of WordPress you're running. If a new version is available, two things happen: A note alerts you to update your software (**Figure 4.3**), and a new button appears in the Right Now module, labeled *Update to 3.0.1* (or whatever the current version is).



**Figure 4.3** When a WordPress update is available, an alert pops up on the Dashboard.

## Meeting the Public: Comments and Links

The two modules right below Right Now concern the lifeblood of any blog: comments and external links. You'll never forget the first time someone comments on one of your blog posts, and you'll be thrilled when you find the first Web site *not* run by you that's linking to your blog.

### Recent Comments module

As you might expect, the Recent Comments module (**Figure 4.4**) displays recent comments that folks have left on your blog. It also alerts you to any comments that are awaiting moderation. A pending comment is highlighted in yellow, and the pound sign (#) is a link directly to that comment. You can also click the View All button in the bottom-right corner to manage all the comments on your blog.



**Figure 4.4** Recent Comments are displayed in this module.

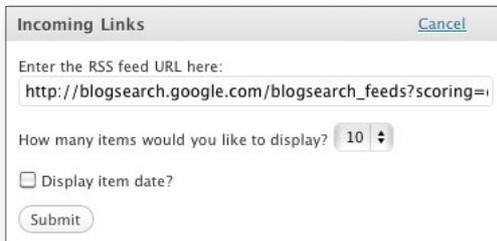
## Incoming Links module

The Incoming Links module (**Figure 4.5**) is a great way to see what other people are saying about your blog on their blogs. This feature uses Google Blog Search to see what blogs are linking to yours and reports back to you. When you first install WordPress, there won't be any links to your blog, so your module will look like **Figure 4.5**. As you start to blog, though, you'll start to build your audience, and people will start linking to you. It won't happen overnight, but with some work, it'll happen sooner than you think.



**Figure 4.5** Incoming Links tells you how many people are (or aren't) linking to your blog.

You can customize this module to a degree by hovering over the module's title, which causes a Configure link to appear in the right end of the header. Clicking the Configure link expands the module, as you see in **Figure 4.6**.



**Figure 4.6** You can plug in the RSS feed of your favorite blog search engine here and make the Incoming Links module display what you want to see.

You can set the following options in the expanded Incoming Links module:

- **RSS feed.** By default, this module uses Google Blog Search, but if you prefer to use another search engine that provides an RSS feed of results, you can enter the URL of its RSS feed here. (I discuss RSS feeds in more detail in Chapter 5.)
- **Number of items to display.** Choose the number you want from the drop-down menu. You can display 1 to 20 items.
- **Display date.** If you check this box, the date of the link appears alongside the link itself.

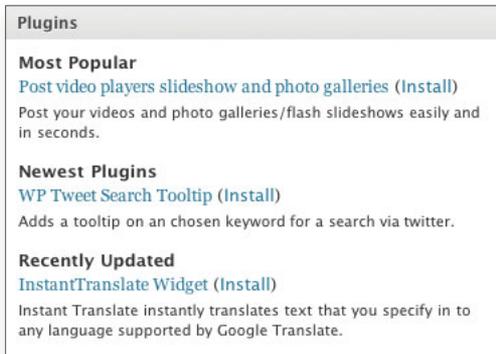
Whatever you do in this expanded module, click Submit when you're done to tell WordPress to accept your changes.

**note**

You can't customize this module too much, and the same goes for the rest of the modules featured in this chapter.

## Plugins

The next module in the Dashboard is Plugins, which displays plug-ins in three categories: Most Popular, Newest Plugins, and Recently Updated (**Figure 4.7**). Clicking a plug-in's name takes you to its page in the WordPress Plugins directory. You can also install one of the listed plug-ins just by clicking the Install link next to it. I explore plug-ins in depth in Chapter 14.



**Figure 4.7** This module highlights plug-ins that may be of interest to you.

## QuickPress

QuickPress is a great way to get an idea from your mind onto your blog in no time flat (**Figure 4.8**). As the name implies, this module is all about making it very easy to post to your blog. I cover posting from top to bottom in Chapter 6, but now I'll talk about the trade-offs you make for the speed of QuickPress.

The QuickPress module allows you to write blog posts that include text, video, audio, and images, but you have to use HTML to format the post.

Furthermore, you can't assign categories (though you can enter tags), and the myriad formatting options available in the far more robust Add New Post section just plain aren't available.

**Figure 4.8** QuickPress offers a fast way to write a blog post, with some limitations.

Why would you ever use QuickPress, given these limitations? Well, notice that Save Draft button at the bottom of the module? I don't know about you, but I often have a brilliant idea for a post, and if I wait too long to write it down, the idea just vanishes. QuickPress is a great way to jot down blog-post ideas and save them as drafts.

I cover the differences between a draft and a post in Chapter 6 and provide more details on drafts in the next section of this chapter.

## Recent Drafts

A *draft* is a blog post, or page, that isn't ready for public consumption. Think of a draft as being a work in progress. Visitors to your blog don't see drafts; only people who are logged in to your blog's Dashboard can see your drafts, and only if they have the proper permissions.

The Dashboard's Recent Drafts module (**Figure 4.9**) displays any drafts that you've saved. Each draft shows up as a link, and when you click that link, you go directly to the edit screen for that draft. Clicking the View All button lists all the drafts that you currently have saved.

**Figure 4.9** Recent Drafts lists all the drafts you can see on your blog.

## WordPress Blog

The WordPress Blog module displays, by default, the two most recent entries from the official WordPress blog. You can see the entry's title, a brief excerpt, and the date on which it was published. Clicking the title of the post takes you to that post's page on the WordPress blog.

Hovering over the title of the module reveals a Configure link. When you click that link, you see all the options for the module (**Figure 4.10**).

The image shows a configuration dialog box titled "WordPress Blog" with a "Cancel" link in the top right corner. The dialog contains several input fields and checkboxes. The first field is labeled "Enter the RSS feed URL here:" and contains the text "http://wordpress.org/news/feed/". The second field is labeled "Give the feed a title (optional):" and contains the text "WordPress Blog". Below these fields is a control for "How many items would you like to display?" with a dropdown menu showing the number "2". There are three checkboxes: "Display item content?" (checked), "Display item author if available?" (unchecked), and "Display item date?" (checked). At the bottom of the dialog is a "Submit" button.

**Figure 4.10** The WordPress Blog module, expanded.

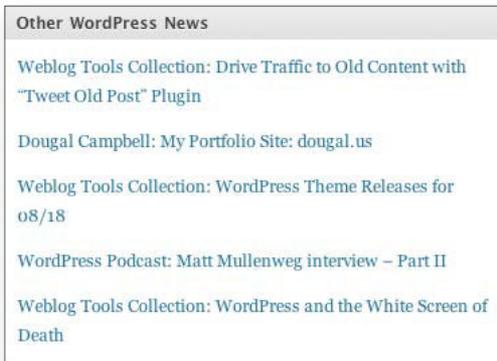
Here's what the options mean:

- **RSS-feed URL.** Enter the URL of the feed you want this module to display. As you can see in Figure 4.10, the WordPress news blog is the default, but you can enter any valid RSS URL. An RSS URL, for those who are unfamiliar with the concept, is also called a blog's *feed*. It's a file that lists all the recent updates on your blog, and allows people to subscribe to your blog and read your updates in an application called a *news reader*. (Google Reader and NetNewsWire are two examples of such applications.)
- **Feed title.** The default is WordPress Blog, but you can change the title to anything you want; then the module's name changes in the interface. You could use this setting in combination with the RSS-feed setting to display a different blog's content in this module and have it labeled as such. Neato.

- **Display of item content.** Because this module is a mini-RSS reader, it only makes sense that you can display the content of entries. Only excerpts are shown in this module's limited space; disable this option if you want to see just titles.
- **Display of item author.** In keeping with the mini-RSS reader idea, you can also display the author of the entry if it's available in the feed.
- **Display of item date.** This option displays the date when an item from this RSS feed was posted.

## Keeping Current: Other WordPress News

The final module of the Dashboard, Other WordPress News (**Figure 4.11**), showcases blogs that are either written by WordPress developers or devoted to WordPress.



**Figure 4.11** The Other WordPress News module.

**note**

This module is also known as the Secondary Feed module.

When you mouse over the module and click the Configure link that appears, you see the same options that are available in the WordPress Blog module, and they all function the same way (**Figure 4.12**).

**Figure 4.12** The Other WordPress News module allows you to display any RSS feed you want.

## Customizing the Dashboard

You're an individual (and so am I; we have so much in common!), and I'm sure that you'd like to make the Dashboard all yours. WordPress gives you the option to customize the appearance of your Dashboard. In the top-right corner, you see a gray rectangle labeled Screen Options (refer to Figure 4.1 earlier in this chapter). When you click it, a menu of display options for your Dashboard appears (**Figure 4.13**).

**Figure 4.13** The Dashboard screen options. Anything with a check is displayed; unchecked items are not.

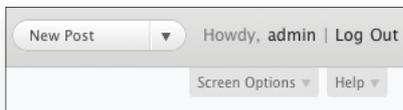
All the modules available for your Dashboard are listed here. By default, they're all checked, which means that they appear in your Dashboard. If you clear a module's check box, that module is removed from your Dashboard. (To bring it back, just check its box again at any time.)

The Screen Options menu also lets you customize the number of columns in your Dashboard, from one to four.

In addition, you can rearrange the modules in your Dashboard by dragging and dropping them. When you hover over the header of a module, the cursor turns into a cross; click and hold the mouse button to move the module around on the page. When you release the mouse button, the module snaps into place.

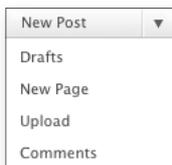
## Beyond the Dashboard

The top of the Dashboard—and every WordPress administrative page, for that matter—features the controls shown in **Figure 4.14**.



**Figure 4.14** The New Post button sits at the top of every page in the WordPress admin interface.

The New Post button takes you to the Posts page. If you click the arrow next to it, a menu drops down, listing shortcuts to other sections of the WordPress admin interface (**Figure 4.15**). You can jump directly to Drafts, New Page, Upload, and Comments, each of which I cover in full in later chapters.



**Figure 4.15** These shortcuts are listed when you click the triangle next to the New Post link at the top of a WordPress page.

The controls at the far right end (refer to Figure 4.14) contains a mix of links to internal and external resources:

- **User name.** The first link is your user name, which takes you to your profile page (see Chapter 3).
- **Log Out.** The Log Out link logs you out of the WordPress administrative interface.
- **Help.** Clicking this link reveals a help page for the Dashboard. This link is contextual, so when you go to different pages in the WordPress admin interface, the Help link relates to the page that you're viewing.

**tip**

The Dashboard also includes a link to the **WordPress Forums page** (<http://wordpress.org/support>), which provides lots of support information.

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