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Getting a blogging platform

All three of the options listed below are free. The first two options are the easiest but are also limited on features. If you are just trying to make an extra few hundred dollars from your blog, these options could work. But if you're really serious about trying to make good money from your blog, try self-hosting your blog (which we talk about in the next section).

Blogger.com – Blogger is very good and easy to set up, and Google owns it. You can customize the theme, and the domain name includes “.blogspot.com.” (In some people's opinion this is a little less professional.) Blogger continues to become more customizable and currently has a lot more options than it did a few years ago.

WordPress.com – These sites are completely free and easy to set up, and you can customize the theme, but other customizations are limited, domain name includes “.wordpress.com.” The big downside with these sites is that they don't allow you to place ads on your blog.

WordPress.org – Wait, what's the difference between wordpress.com and wordpress.org? To put it simply, WordPress.com is where you go to set up a basic, easy blog with limited features. WordPress.org is where you go to get a self-hosted

4. How to set up a self-hosted blog

If you plan to use one of the first two free options from the previous section, you can skip this section.

If you're serious about blogging and looking for the best way to customize your blog's look and other features, then getting a self-hosted blog from WordPress.org is the best way to go. It's far and away the top choice for most bloggers. It does require a little more work up front and does have small costs associated with it: buying a domain name (about \$10/year) and hosting your blog (< \$10/month).

One of the big advantages is that you can use your own domain name (i.e., yourblog.com). While this might not seem like a big deal, it's a lot easier for people to remember yourblog.com rather than yourblog.blogspot.com, which is what you get if you use Blogger.

While it's a little more work on the front end, I'm really glad I got good advice and did this at the beginning, rather than doing it a year or two down the road.

site speed and minimize downtime. Also, all of the support staff is very well trained in WordPress, which is rarely the case at other hosts.

Summing it all up

HostGator is an excellent choice for new bloggers because there's dependable support and it's cost-effective. And for bloggers who want a rock-solid hosting company and can afford a little more, try WP Engine.

5. Get a customizable theme

After I took the step to self-host my blog, the next step that greatly helped me increase earnings was to choose a highly customizable theme. This costs anywhere from \$50-\$100 so you may not want to do it at the beginning, but once you're committed to blogging and want to invest a few bucks, putting that money toward a premium theme is a good investment.

For all my blogs I use either the Thesis theme or the Genesis theme. Without getting into all the details, if you asked me right now what the best WordPress theme was, I'd say the Genesis theme. Thesis is really good, but it has gotten more and more complex in recent months, so I normally just recommend the Genesis theme for most bloggers.

Right out of the box, it provides you with a very pretty site that's very easy to customize. It is SEO optimized very well, has a lot of bells and whistles and a ton of support. The kicker is that you can buy it and get lifetime updates for \$59.

If you're a programmer, you really don't need to buy a theme because you can make all the customizations yourself to any basic theme. Since starting to blog a couple of years ago, I have

Guest posting

I think this is one of the best ways to start getting some traffic and building an audience. Guest posting provides a great opportunity for a newbie to write an article that 20,000 readers can see. I don't know of any other method that could bring traffic as quickly.

The key is to write a great article – don't hold back your best stuff. I've seen people grow their blogs very quickly by posting some of their best articles on other sites. Also, only submit unpublished content as a guest post. If it's already published, then the blog that's allowing you to guest post won't get any search engine traffic for that article. There are, though, places to republish your articles. We'll get to that in a minute.

First, do a lot of commenting on some small to medium-sized blogs in your niche. Get to know the bloggers, connect with them via email or other social media, and get to know them. THEN, offer to write them a guest post.

Join directories

If I were starting a blog today, one of the first things I would do is Google “whatever topic I want

6. Write articles people are searching for

This might seem unrelated, but it's very important. If you're like most bloggers, you have a regular readership and you have readers from the search engines. For some reason a lot of bloggers just don't give much respect to search engine readers and don't really try to reach out to them other than trying to "convert" them to a regular reader.

I approach things a little bit differently. Rather than getting frustrated that so many search engine visitors don't come back, I started to embrace it. I realized that my main goal was to help people, so why should I care if they visit only once or on a daily basis as long as they're getting helped?

So while I very much appreciate and value my regular readers, I also understand that I can help those who find the site via a search engine. I started doing keyword research to see what people were looking for in the search engines. If there are people searching to find out how to start a budget, I want to help them find out!

What happened for me as I started to become more conscious of what people were searching for was that I started getting more search engine traffic – which, of course, leads to higher earnings from AdSense.

this to get a ballpark estimate of how many people are searching for particular keyword phrases.

5. **Hittail.com** – This one provides ideas for articles based on what you previously wrote about and could probably rank for. If you have a blog that's established, it might be worth paying \$10 a month for it. Try using the free trial and see how much it helps you.
6. **Stock.xchng** – The best free stock photography site I have found.
7. **BigStock.com** – The best cheap stock photography site I have found. They have lots of images you can get for just about a buck.

A few more resources

- **My online blogging courses** – to dive deeper on this whole blogging thing, feel free to stop by EfficientBlogging.com to check out some of my blogging courses to help you start rocking it with your blog!
- **Scribe SEO tool for WordPress** – I tried it out and decided not to continue to use it because I thought it was priced a little too high for what I got from it. It can make the SEO process a bit easier, but I just wasn't sure about spending \$27 on it. If the price comes down, I might recommend it a bit more.

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