

## A Folk Musicians Guide to Web Publishing

When I was a kid it seemed like everybody was putting together mimeographed songbooks to hand out at jams. As the years went by technology changed and people started using photocopiers to duplicate chord sheets and even stapled together their own songbooks to pass out at jam sessions.

That was nothing new. Folk musicians have a history of coming up with creative ways to use available technology to reach the people.

Even during the American Revolution, songwriters used the printing press to distribute song lyrics in magazines and broadsides. My favorite example of this appeared in the May 1775 issue of *Pennsylvania Magazine*:

### **The Irishman's Epistle to the Officers and Troops at Boston**

*Sung to the tune of The Irish Washerwoman*

*How brave you went out with muskets all bright,  
and thought to befrighten the folks with the sight;  
But when you got there how they powder'd your pums,  
And all the way home how they pepper'd your bums,*

Chorus:

*And is it not, honies, a comical farce,  
To be proud in the face, and be shot in the arse?*

To me, it only makes sense to carry this tradition of creativity to the World Wide Web. To use these new tools at our disposal in ways that allow us to express ourselves, share the techniques of our craft with the next generation of musicians and generally cause a ruckus.

In this workshop we are going to take a look at some free tools and services you can use to set up your first homestead on the Internet. From setting up a Gmail account to launching your own blog to creating and uploading your own multimedia files.

This will be by no means a comprehensive guide. For sanity's sake I am limiting the materials presented to tools I am currently using to run Tangier Sound (<http://tangiersound.wordpress.com>). Once you understand the tools presented here you should have no trouble finding and using other resources available on the Internet.

## Step One: Get Gmail

Gmail is the greatest thing since frozen orange juice. Yes, it is just an email account - but the storage and search features are a lifesaver when you have large files going in and out of your inbox and thousands of fellow artists to keep track of.

### To get a Gmail account:

- Go to <http://www.gmail.com>
- Click on the link that reads, “Sign up for Gmail”
- Fill out the form

Choose carefully before you pick a Gmail login name. It will end up becoming part of your email address. For example, my Gmail login is *ask.patrick*, so my Gmail address is [ask.patrick@gmail.com](mailto:ask.patrick@gmail.com).

Once you have set up your account you can arrange to have all of your other email accounts deliver to your Gmail address. This has a couple of advantages.

- Gmail stores all of your mail in a searchable database.
- The large storage space of your account allows you to receive honking huge video or audio attachments.
- You can check all of your mail accounts while you are on the road.

It is easy to set up your Gmail account to access your other mail accounts.

To use your Gmail account to receive all of your email:

- On your main Gmail page (where you check your mail) click on the link that reads “Settings” in the top right corner.
- Click on “Accounts”
- Click on “Get mail from other accounts”
- Click on “Learn More” for more detailed instructions.

Once you are finished, repeat the process using the “Send mail as” menu option so you can send mail through Gmail.

It takes a little bit of work to set up your Gmail account, but as you start interacting with other artists on the Internet you will find the storage and search features of Gmail to be a real life saver.

Be sure to explore all of the features of your Google account. Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) and Google Calendar (<http://www.google.com/calendar>) are great tools that can be especially useful when you are setting up a jam session, workshop or festival.

## Step Two: Building Your Homestead

Now that we have Gmail set up, let's stake out a little claim on the Internet for you to build your homestead.

I *love* Wordpress.com. I have been using the service to host Tangier Sound for more than a year now.

To start a Wordpress.com blog:

- Go to <http://wordpress.com>
- Click on the button that reads "*Sign Up Now!*"
- Fill out the form - being careful to choose a good username.
- Make sure the "*Legal flotsam*" and "*Gimmie a blog*" options are checked

As with Gmail, your Wordpress username will end up being part of your address. My Wordpress username is *tangiersound*, so my Wordpress.com address is <http://tangiersound.wordpress.com>.

Once you log in to your Wordpress account head over to the dashboard to start setting up your blog.

The dashboard main menu offers a list of options to choose from:

- **Write**  
Write a post to your blog.
- **Manage**  
Manage posts, pages, files and other features.
- **Design**  
Change the look of your blog with various templates and add features with widgets.
- **Comments**  
Moderate comments posted to your blog.
- **Upgrades**  
Extra features you can add to your blog for a small fee.

The submenu options include:

- **Dashboard**  
Links back to the main dashboard page.
- **Blog Stats**  
Tells you who is visiting and linking to your blog.
- **Blog Surfer**  
Check up on your friends web sites.
- **My Comments**  
Comments you have posted on other blogs.
- **Tag Surfer**  
Search for tagged keywords.

If it seems confusing you can visit the help page on Wordpress.com. <http://faq.wordpress.com/>

Wordpress also has a helpful and active user forum at <http://en.forums.wordpress.com>. This is a great resource for asking questions and meeting other bloggers.

Just having a Wordpress blog is not enough. You have to start writing posts for people to read.

To write a post on your Wordpress blog:

- Log into your account
- After you log in, a menu should appear across the top of your screen with the options: “My Account”, “My Dashboard” and “New Post”. Click on “New Post”.
- You should now be on a page with several form fields.
  - “Title” is where you enter the title of your post.
  - “Post” is where you enter the text of your post.
  - “Publish Status” allows you to decide if the post is going to be published or private – it also allows you to save your post for later editing before publishing.
  - “Tags” and “Categories” are words that will help people find your post.

The “Post” form field can be used to into formats. Visual works much like a word processor and HTML allows you to play around with the raw HTML of the post.

Playing around in HTML mode is a great way to start learning how web pages work.

HTML is what we use to format text on a web page. Commands like “strong” (for bold text) and “em” (short for emphasis – which puts text in italics) are inserted before and after a word or phrase: <command>word</command>.

For example, this bit of text:

**Strong** makes text stand out and *emphasis* adds drama.

Would use these HTML codes:

<strong>Strong</strong> makes text stand out and <em>emphasis</em> adds drama.

We link to files or other web pages with this bit of code: <a href="link goes here">text</a>

We insert images with this code: 

Play around with your Wordpress account to learn more about HTML.

### **Windows Live Writer**

The Wordpress dashboard is a great tool, but Windows users may find it easier to use a free program called Windows Live Writer for blog posting.

Windows Live Writer works almost like a word processor for your blog. It connects directly to your Wordpress account and simplifies just about every step of writing a post, adding multimedia files and uploading your content.

<http://get.live.com/writer/overview>

### Part Three: File Storage

Now that you have a blog you need someplace to store your multimedia files. Your Wordpress blog already has a lot of free storage. Wordpress.com offers 3 gigabytes (wow!) of free storage for images (jpg, jpeg, png, gif), documents (pdf, doc, odt) and presentations (ppt).

Music (mp3, m4a, ogg, wav) and video (avi, mp4, mpg, mov, wmv) files can only be uploaded to your Wordpress blog after purchasing a space upgrade. As of this writing, a 5 gigabyte upgrade to your Wordpress.com account costs \$20.00 a year.

Uploading files to your Wordpress blog is simple. Simply click on the appropriate option in the add media list on top of the editor.

I also use The Internet Archive to store and share a lot of files. Any media file (text, audio or video) that you own the rights to can be uploaded to archive.org for folks to access and use under a Creative Commons license.

To join the Internet Archive :

- Go to <http://www.archive.org/>
- In the upper right hand corner you will find the following: “**Anonymous User (login or join us)**”. Click on “*join us*”.
- Fill out the form. Click “*Get library Card*” when finished.

Files stored on the Internet Archive are publicly available under a Creative Commons license. You can read about how Creative Commons works by visiting <http://creativecommons.org>.

Once you have read up on Creative Commons we can upload our first file to the archive.

To upload a file to the Internet Archive:

- Log in to your account.
- In the menu across the top of your browser click on “*contributions*”.
- Click on “Create and upload a new movie, audio recording, live concert recording, or book”.
- Enter a title for your upload and click on the button marked, “*Next*”.
- On the next page, fill in the form and click on the button marked, “*Upload Files*”.

After uploading, archive.org will automatically generate a page where people can download and view your file. For some audio and video formats The INternet Archive will automatically produce alternative fomats called *derivatives*. Make note of the proper links - in the proper format - to your file so that you can paste them into your Wordpress blog.

CcPublisher is an interesting alternative to the upload process. The program basically does everything for you.

<http://wiki.creativecommons.org/CcPublisher>

## Part Four: Know Your Multimedia

### Text

We may live in a digital age, the written word is still one of the most effective and powerful tools for reaching people. You will most likely need some way to prepare documents that people can view - and possibly edit - on their own computers, or at least print out to share with friends out in the real world.

The two most common offline file formats are plain text (.txt) and PDF (.pdf). Using either of these formats ensures that the bulk of your audience will be able to access your files with a minimal amount of fuss and bother.

PDF stands for portable document format. Files distributed in .pdf format can be opened in virtually any web browser with the appropriate plugins.

Plain text is just what the name implies; a raw text document with no formatting. Text files can be viewed in any web browser and edited with programs as basic and ubiquitous as Windows Notepad.

Generating plain text is pretty simple. Just use the text editor of your choice and save the file with a “.txt” extension.

To generate PDF files I usually use Cute PDF, a free program that converts any text or image file into .pdf format.

- **Cute PDF:** <http://www.cutepdf.com>

I use Microsoft Word 2007 for nearly all of my word processing needs, but there are some great free alternatives out there.

Zoho Writer and Google Docs are free online word processors. In other words, it's like installing a copy of Microsoft Word in your web browser. The two programs are very similar. They both allow you to create files and edit them anywhere. Online word processors also have an advantage over desktop-based applications in that you can set things up so that other people can edit your files - creating some interesting collaborative possibilities.

You can also make selected files public or export your files to other formats like .pdf for uploading to your Wordpress or Internet Archive accounts.

- **Zoho Writer:** <http://writer.zoho.com>
- **Google Docs:** <http://docs.google.com>

AbiWord is a word processor and Open Office is a full office suite. Both are free, open-source and work excellently.

- **AbiWord:** <http://www.abisource.com>
- **Open Office:** <http://www.openoffice.org>

## Pictures

Picasa is a free program for downloading images from your digital camera to your computer. Picasa features excellent image editing tools and comes with a pretty nifty free online storage service for your pictures.

- **Picasa:** <http://picasa.google.com/>

Flickr is an excellent place to store your pictures. The free service works fine, but you can expand your account to make use of all the services Flickr offers for \$2.00 a month.

- **Flickr:** <http://www.flickr.com>

Adobe Photoshop Express is free service for storing, editing and sharing image files. I love using Flickr and Picasa, but the editing tools in Photoshop Express are so outlandishly powerful and easy to use that I am starting to think seriously about making this my photo application of choice.

- **Adobe Photoshop Express:** <https://www.photoshop.com/express>

## Video

For video hosting the most popular choice right now is YouTube (<http://youtube.com>), but I also like to mirror my video files on The Internet Archive. You see, The Internet Archive makes it easy to download the files. Streaming video is great stuff with broadband Internet, but sheer misery over a dial up connection.

Sign up for YouTube:

- Go to <http://youtube.com>
- Click on the link in the top right hand corner that reads “Sign Up”.
- Fill out the form.

Upload A Video To YouTube:

1. Click on the button that reads, “Upload”
2. Fill out the form
3. The next step gives you two options. You can either upload a video file from your hard drive, or capture the video directly from your camera - sort of a live TV kind of a deal. Experiment a bit and see what works best for you and your hardware.

You can embed a YouTube video into a post on your Wordpress blog in one of two ways:

1. Click on the appropriate option in the add media list on top of the editor.
2. Use this snippet of code: [youtube=”video URL goes here”]

The video URL for any YouTube clip can be found by clicking, “more info” in the description block.

At this moment there is no way to embed video files from The Internet Archive into your Wordpress blog.

You can find plenty of information on uploading video on the YouTube web site.

## Editing Video

To produce video files I usually use Windows Movie Maker. The program is easy to use and produces surprisingly good results for a program that comes free with most PC's.

## Audio

For audio work, Audacity is my program of choice. Be sure to install the LAME MP3 encoder so that you can generate .mp3 files.

- **Audacity:** <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>
- **Learn about LAME:** <http://lame.sourceforge.net/index.php>

I almost always upload my audio as Ogg Vorbis files to The Internet Archive. The Archive will automatically generate a MP3 file - and that gives your audiences the luxury of choice while I get to work with my favorite audio format. Everybody is happy.

- **Learn about Ogg Vorbis:** <http://www.vorbis.com>

To post an audio file on your Wordpress blog use this snippet of code: [audio="MP3 URL goes here"]

## Tabulature

For writing out tab and chord charts I use MusEdit. The program is not exactly cheap, but I haven't found anything that works equally well generating tab for the web or the printed page.

- **MusEdit:** <http://www.musedit.com>

For distributing tabulature, I either save the entire files in PDF format (thanks to Cute PDF) or use the export feature in MusEdit to save the selected measures as a image file.

## Part Five: How Not To Be Seen

Once you have a web site up and running you will probably find yourself wondering how to generate traffic for your web site. Web promotion is a tricky subject nowadays. There are millions of people generating content and everybody is screaming for attention.

I believe that the best promotional tactic for your web site is to simply devote yourself to your craft. I think the secret to the success of Tangier Sound is the fact that I would be working just as hard if the site was only reaching ten people every day. I *love* what I do.

You don't find an audience. The audience finds you.

## Get Lost

Here I say, "Go and work on that, and don't come back until you can do like I showed you."

I know that there is an overwhelming amount of information here, but if you take your time and experiment a bit you will find that there is nothing all that complicated about getting information up on the Internet. Play around with the tools provided and let your imagination run wild.

My friend Wolfgang (<http://www.banjo-kiel.blogspot.com>) started up a transcontinental jam session on his site. I teach music at Tangier Sound. My friend Fernando (<http://jazztaliada.wordpress.com>) plays old jazz and blues records.

Bring back the idea of broadside songs about topical events. Teach something. Share your artwork. Sell guitars and banjos. Do something crazy and wonderful that can brighten things up for people around the world.

And never step in anything soft.

Best wishes,

Patrick Costello

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