

# Chapter 1

## This Is Your Brain on Vlogs

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Discovering videoblogging
  - ▶ Uncovering the reasons to vlog
  - ▶ Stocking the vlogger's toolbox
  - ▶ Planning a vlog
  - ▶ Creating a vlog
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**V**ideo seems like the hottest new thing in the online world. It seems like everyone's posting links to videos from YouTube, or adding little clips of themselves to their MySpace accounts. You can even download full TV shows to your video iPod to watch them any time you like.

Videoblogs are one great way to share videos with friends, family, and complete strangers on the Internet. As you start videoblogging, kick back with a cold beverage and enjoy yourself.

### *Checking Out the Vlogging World*

You may or may not be aware of it, but there's a revolution going on right now, and it involves your television. And your computer, for that matter! Videoblogging is changing the way people think about visual media, how they interact with it, and what they choose to say with it.

### *What a videoblog is*

A *videoblog* is a collection of video files posted to the Internet using a method that makes it easy to update content quickly — combining the usability of a

blog with video files. There are many different definitions of videoblogs, and fussing over the distinction between a videoblog and just video on the Internet, but here are the core qualities that most videoblogs *should* have:

✔ **Video that can be downloaded and played outside of your Web browser.**

This means the video is a downloadable file, instead of a streamed video or an embedded-only format. A lot of Flash-based Web sites, which may have cool interactive animation, aren't really videoblogs because you can't download the animation and play it without being connected to the Internet, although Flash videos, which are different from Flash interactive animations, usually can be saved and played. Similarly, streaming video, although useful for longer videos, doesn't really fit into the concept behind videoblogging, because it downloads while you watch it. If your video can't be saved to someone's hard drive, then your viewers can't put it onto an iPod or download it overnight while they're asleep.

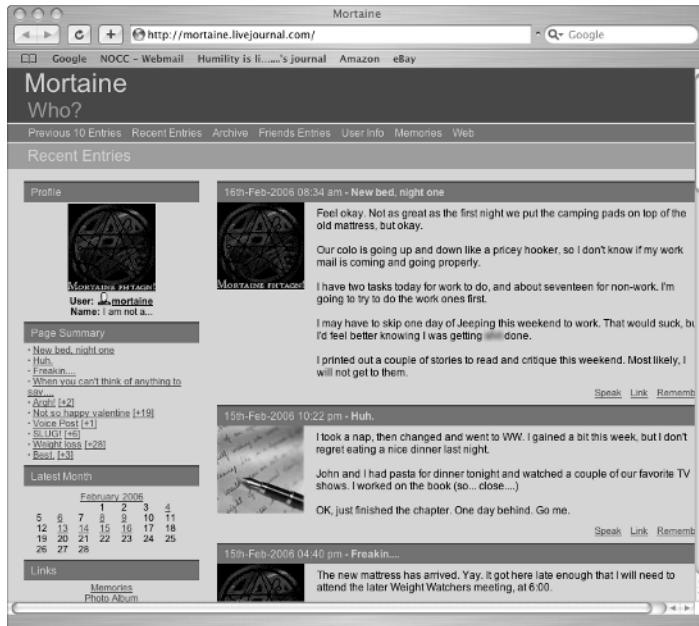
✔ **A regularly updated blog format.** Most videoblogs use a standard blog format, such as the one shown in Figure 1-1. It's not strictly necessary to have a videoblog format — certainly, you can update a Web page and your RSS feed file manually every time you want to post a vlog entry — but that's time-consuming. If you really dislike the blog layout and appearance, you can customize it, if you know some HTML and have a good eye for design. But if you offer the third quality, an RSS feed, chances are many of your viewers won't see your beautiful design anyway.

✔ **An RSS feed with enclosures.** With an RSS-enabled videoblog, people can subscribe to your feed and download your videos whenever it's convenient for them. Figure 1-2 shows how the RSS feed looks for the same blog posts shown in Figure 1-1. RSS readers will often check feeds on an automatic schedule, so when you post new entries, you can be confident that your subscribers will receive them. An RSS feed is what makes videoblogs work for most people, and what makes videoblogs work in iTunes.

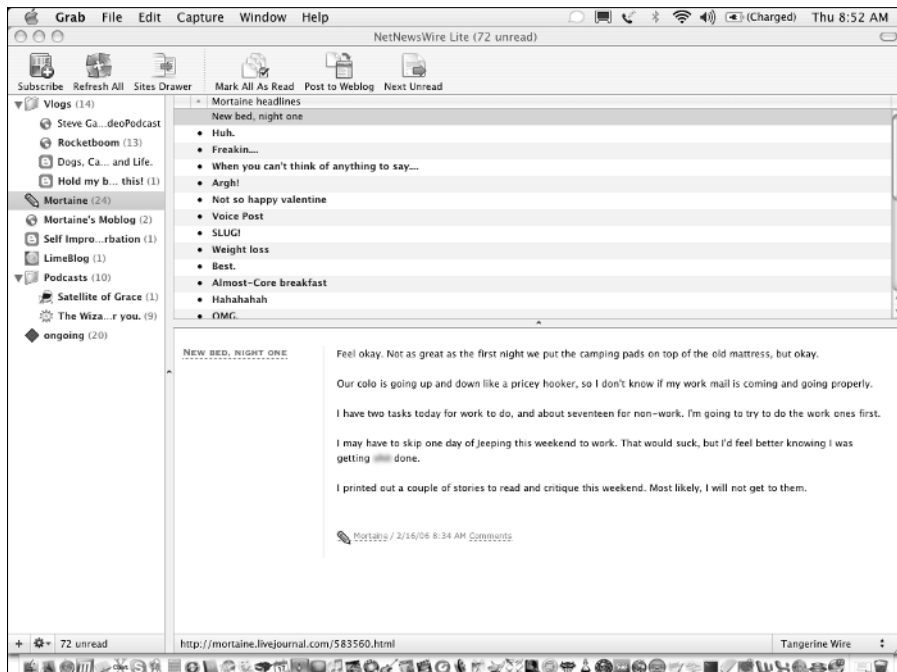
RSS, Atom, and Media RSS are all similar (and, thankfully, compatible) XML-based technologies that allow users to subscribe to your videoblog feed. When you include *enclosures* in the feed, you send along a file, like an image, audio, video file, along with the blog's text. The subscriber can then view the blog entry in a separate reader.

Now, I won't say that every videoblog has all of these qualities, nor will I suggest that every videoblog *must* have them. But most videoblogs do, and new videoblogs can meet a lot of resistance if they don't have them.

The reason behind having these qualities is simple: Videoblog watchers want to download the video without having to sit and wait. They want to watch it at their leisure. With the new generation of mobile video-viewing devices, many vlog-watchers want to download videoblogs onto iPods and PlayStation Portables and watch them when they're away from the computer.



**Figure 1-1:** Videoblogs often use a standard blog format.



**Figure 1-2:** A blog post in an RSS reader.

## Who makes videoblogs

Videobloggers are a mixed group — and there are thousands of them, with more starting up every day. Most early-adopter videobloggers are enthusiastic, but not necessarily driven by a business model for creating content. Videobloggers are artists, filmmakers, technology geeks, and citizen journalists who go out and report news that major news networks may have overlooked or underreported (say, technology trade shows or unusual political activism). But many videobloggers are ordinary people who would normally share their family videos by mailing out a VHS tape every six months, but who now have this amazing format they can use to send video to family members who don't live nearby. The reasons vary — as does content.

In addition to the personal, non-commercial, and journalist videobloggers, more commercial entities are getting into videoblogging. Videoblogs now run ads for BMW cars and for beer, from lawyers providing educational outreach for potential clients, and also pure entertainment shows. Major studios are even getting into the action, with vlogs like the *Superman Returns* videoblog ([www2.warnerbros.com/supermanreturns/videoblog](http://www2.warnerbros.com/supermanreturns/videoblog)).



*No one regulates the content* in videoblogs except the videobloggers themselves. Videoblogs aren't given a rating like TV shows and movies, and quite a few videoblogs contain explicit language and content. Some vlogs are even used as teasers and ads for adult Web sites that require a paid subscription. If you're searching for videoblogs to watch, be aware that not everyone's vlog is rated G (or even R), and make sure the content is appropriate for the people you watch the vlog with.

## Why watch videoblogs

I asked a bunch of vloggers why they watch videoblogs, or why they think other people do. Now, granted, these are people who actively produce videoblogs, so they have a vested interest — but they are also the largest group of watchers out there right now. The reasons they stated ranged quite a bit, but here are a few:

- ✓ I have a personal connection with the videoblogger.
- ✓ I can watch videoblogs whenever and wherever I want, and I have control over what I see.
- ✓ Videoblogs are short enough to keep my attention.
- ✓ I don't have to watch what the TV networks think I should like and there are no ads.

- ✔ It's social — I host vlog-watching parties every week.
- ✔ I enjoy the diversity of people and environments represented in vlogs.
- ✔ I like watching creative people doing things.

Of these, the two most prevalent reasons to watch videoblogs were social networking and getting away from the network television model. When a vlogger shows you his or her personal space, home, family, and life, you get to know him or her in a way that's unusual in Internet culture. Sure, there's still the possibility that the whole thing is made up, that the vlogger is acting or not being entirely truthful in his or her videos. But you can't watch a vlogger weeping over her crashed hard drive and not connect with her in a very human way. When you as a viewer comment on someone's videoblog entry, you bring that social network into a two-way communication, and form a closer connection to the videoblogger. And when you watch videoblogs, you get away from the network television model because *you* get to specify the lineup of video content that you enjoy watching through your RSS subscriptions. If you don't like a show, you just drop the subscription.

## *Where to find out more about videoblogs*

After you finish reading this book, you'll be well on your way to becoming a great videoblogger. But there are tons of resources on the Internet that you can tap into to discover more about videoblogging — whether you're looking for how to subscribe to and watch other people's videoblogs, or how to make your own videoblogs.

### *Finding videoblogs to watch*

You can find videoblogs by searching in the common videoblog directories, by talking to other videobloggers, and by looking for uncommon ways to describe videoblogs.

The popular videoblog directories are

- ✔ **Vlogdir** ([www.vlogdir.com](http://www.vlogdir.com)): The first vlog directory search engine.
- ✔ **Mefedia** ([www.mefedia.com](http://www.mefedia.com)): A videoblog directory and RSS aggregator; you can subscribe to and watch your favorite vlogs inside the Web site.
- ✔ **Vlogmap** ([www.vlogmap.org](http://www.vlogmap.org)): A geographically based directory.
- ✔ **FireANT** ([www.fireant.tv](http://www.fireant.tv)): This directory plugs into the popular videoblog RSS viewer.

- ✔ **iTunes Music Store:** Here you can search in Podcasts for Video Podcasts, and subscribe to the ones marked Free. It's only accessible through the iTunes interface.
- ✔ **Yahoo! Video (<http://video.search.yahoo.com>):** You can search Yahoo! for videoblogs and their feeds to your My Yahoo! Web site.
- ✔ **Google Video (<http://video.google.com>):** Google's entry into the world of video directories is disappointing and doesn't offer real videoblogging options, but you can still find some interesting video-on-Internet through them.
- ✔ **Internet TV networks:** Veoh.com, Current.tv, and DTV (<http://participatoryculture.org>) are all Internet television models, some of which use videoblogs for content. Each one has its own search engine of channels, and many have separate downloadable programs you need in order to watch their video content.

You can also find vlogs through good old word of mouth. Videobloggers are highly self-referential, so they talk about other peoples' videoblogs in their own vlogs, and cross-link to them often. The more you vlog, the more other vloggers will notice you and your videoblogs. They'll come by, leave comments, and then you can go check out their vlogs and find interesting stuff to watch that way, too.

### *Finding more information about videoblogging*

You've already taken the first step in learning how to videoblog by reading this book. The following list provides some additional, online resources for videoblogging:

- ✔ **Videoblogging.info ([www.videoblogging.info](http://www.videoblogging.info)):** A catch-all videoblogging information site.
- ✔ **Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videoblogging>):** The Wikipedia entry for videoblogging is sometimes severely slanted by people with a financial agenda, but is mostly good information.
- ✔ **FreeVlog ([www.freevlog.org/tutorial](http://www.freevlog.org/tutorial)):** A tutorial on creating a videoblog for free (camera not included).
- ✔ **FeeVlog ([www.feevlog.com](http://www.feevlog.com)):** A tutorial on creating a videoblog using for-pay services.
- ✔ **Node 101 ([www.node101.org](http://www.node101.org)):** Node 101 videoblog learning centers are opening in many metropolitan areas to help teach people in a classroom how to vlog.

## Videoblogging terminology

Videoblogging is a new technological phenomenon, so it doesn't have its own terminology firmly established yet. *Videoblogs*, *vlogs*, *vblogs*, *vodcasts*, and *video podcasting* are all terms that describe the same thing: video, delivered over the Internet, in some automated fashion. Usually those methods use an RSS feed to deliver their content.

Because the public imagination ties podcasting so intimately to Apple's iPod (even though, as *Podcasting For Dummies* by Tee Morris and Evo Terra points out, you don't need an iPod to do it), Apple coined the term *Video Podcasting* for when a podcast uses video instead of audio. However, the word "podcast" is somewhat brand-centric, in that it refers to the iPod in its name. Many videobloggers, aware of the importance of vocabulary on mindshare, choose instead to use the more generic term *videoblogging*. Similarly, the generic term for a podcast is *audioblog*. Long before iTunes offered video playback, videoblogging was available and growing strong. When Apple announced the addition of videoblogs subscriptions in iTunes, there were already over a thousand videobloggers, making movies and publishing them to their blogs.

Another potentially confusing term is for *mobile blogging* or *moblogging*. Traditionally, moblogging has referred to posting blog entries via a cell phone, often including photographs in the moblog post. To distinguish between a moblog that's limited to text and pictures and one that includes video, some people now say *mobivlogging*. I've also seen *movlogging*, but I think few people can actually say that out loud without stumbling. Personally, I think that's getting into too fine a level of detail, so I just call all of it *moblogging*.

The word *vlog* is a more colloquial way of saying *videoblog*, but it can also refer to an individual post in a videoblog. Although a few people pronounce it "vee-log," more people say "vlog," with the "vl" sounding a lot like the vl in Vladimir or Vlad the Impaler. It's uncommon (though not unheard of) for someone to say "vee-blog," and spell it "vblog." In this book, I use *videoblog* to refer to the blog space, *vlog* for the posts and movies, and *videobloggers* or *vloggers* for the people making the movies. If you feel more comfortable thinking of them as video podcasts, you're certainly welcome to do so. Just be aware that, if you search on the Internet for *video podcast*, you get only half the story.

### *Joining the videoblogging community*

Another resource that is essential to the serious videoblogger is the Videoblogging group on Yahoo! Groups. With over 2000 subscribers, the e-mail and Web-based group has a lot of traffic and discussion of all topics related to videoblogging. This is where you make the personal connections that so many find worthwhile about videoblogging.

Unlike many other technology-oriented e-mail groups, you won't usually anger anyone by asking newbie questions. (Though if you don't bother to read the resources you're directed to, or follow the advice given, the participants will express some frustration.) Discussion ranges from technical issues to hosting

sites to media trends, and the group currently gets over 2000 messages a month. Despite the high volume of posts, off-topic chatter is pretty low, though the videobloggers do consider a lot of topics to be “on topic” for videoblogging.

You subscribe to the group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/videoblogging>. There’s a link in the upper right-hand corner of the page that says [Join This Group!](#) If you don’t have a Yahoo! account, you will need to create one to join the group, and you can set your e-mail preferences to receive each message posted to the group’s forum in your e-mail inbox, get a daily digest, or only read the group on the Web site.

## *Finding Reasons to Vlog*

There are many reasons to make and post a videoblog, from purely personal to highly-charged political reasons. There are as many reasons to videoblog as there are videobloggers — perhaps more.

### *Personal reasons to vlog*

On the personal end, videobloggers create and post vlogs because on one level or another, they enjoy it. Here are just a few of the personal reasons why videobloggers do what they do:

- ✓ Keeping in touch with distant friends and relatives
- ✓ Ego-stroking (Some people just really like to see themselves on screen!)
- ✓ Archiving family history and interviews
- ✓ Ranting about issues in their lives
- ✓ Learning more about digital video technology
- ✓ Increasing the online presence of a minority group
- ✓ Making people laugh (for comedy vloggers)
- ✓ Making new friends online



Whatever your reasons for videoblogging, make sure you get some personal enjoyment out of doing it. There’s no point in taking up a time-consuming hobby if you don’t really love doing it.

## *Professional reasons to vlog*

People create professional videoblogs for the two main reasons:

- ✔ **To make money:** There are, in fact, professional videobloggers, people for whom videoblogging is their primary means of employment.
- ✔ **To promote their businesses:** In some cases, professional videobloggers use videoblogs to promote themselves, their products, or their services. In other cases, they're using videoblogs as a means of delivering their products. Or they may use videoblogs to provide an educational background for their potential clients.

Some videobloggers turn pro by offering services to other videobloggers, like video editing or production, Web hosting, or blog online services. Others may earn their keep by teaching people to videoblog.

If you want to put together a videoblog that ties into your professional life in some way, go ahead. There aren't nearly enough of them out there, and as long as you're up-front and honest about your financial and professional interests, you'll find your audience in time. However, if your vlog is just a bunch of ads that provide no value to your viewers, you'll never get off the ground. If your vlog gives some kind of value, be it important information or some humor, then you'll quickly get subscribers coming to watch your videos.

Even an ad-only vlog can offer value to the viewer. Exciting and gorgeous visuals ("eye candy") or cleverly-written ads can draw people back to your vlog even when it's just advertisements. Think about all the ads in the Super Bowl — lots of eye candy and witty writing. Some people watch the Super Bowl just for the advertisements because the ads are so expensive and so competitive, they tend to be the cream of the crop. Viewers see the ads as being valuable in and of themselves.



If you decide to go pro with a professional or commercial videoblog, you'll also have to be more careful about how you use other peoples' works in your videoblog. In this book, I talk about re-using video and music from other vloggers who have offered their work with a Creative Commons license, but you need to understand that the biggest group of Creative Commons-licensed material is available only for non-commercial purposes. If you want to use it commercially, you'll have to contact the creator and negotiate terms for its use.

## *Citizen journalism and political reasons to vlog*

Journalism, political activism, politics, and videoblogs all go hand in hand. Just as bloggers have become a major media force in researching, reporting, and exposing political events and scandals, so too are videoblogs poised to report the news that major news outlets have ignored.

*Citizen journalism* refers to a movement of independent — usually individual — news reporters delivering their reports to the Internet. It also refers to the many people who, in the midst of a disaster or tragedy, think to capture the moment in photographs, video, and film. The citizen journalists present during the 2004 tsunami made history when they posted video clips to the Internet for the world to see what damage a tsunami could inflict. Similarly, photos from rescuers in areas afflicted by Hurricane Katrina helped shape public awareness of the real situation in New Orleans and the Gulf area.

As you might have guessed, citizen journalists are often also political activists in one way or another, and covering activist events and viewpoints is frequently the purpose of a citizen journalist's videoblog. The fine line between activism and journalism blurs here, but videobloggers blur the line between objectivity and personal opinions with ease. The really hard-core vloggers may come off a bit like the extreme talk-radio hosts, but because you can get body-language cues when watching someone on video, there's a greater sense of the personal in a vlog.

Politicians have jumped on the videoblogging bandwagon, realizing how powerful a medium video is, and how much more powerful their messages are when broadcast over the Internet.

## *Art as the reason to vlog*

Of the videoblogs out there, I would classify at least half as being purely artistic in nature. Personal, diary-like vlogs, while expressive, are not necessarily artistic — they don't always aim for and achieve an artistic statement beyond a video of someone talking about their feelings and vulnerabilities. That's not to say that such videos don't have artistic value, but rather that their value is different from what many folks consider aesthetic.

Perhaps the biggest difference between an art vlog and other vlogs is that most videoblogs have at their core some kind of story to tell, a narrative that's being expressed, and the narration takes precedent over most other parts of the videoblog's composition. In an art vlog, there is a single idea or emotion being expressed, and that takes precedence over the narration or storytelling in the vlog.

If you want to create an artistic videoblog, chances are you don't need me to tell you how to do the artistic part. Artists know best how to express themselves and their art. Artists also know that the best way to learn a new tool is to use it until it becomes comfortable, whether that tool is a pencil or a video camera. But I can give you a few handy pointers on trying out the tools, and how to deliver your artwork to the worldwide Internet audience.

As you watch any artistic videoblogs, pay special attention to how the vloggers use light, sound, screen effects like the focus, and color in their vlogs to emphasize particular elements. Most artistic vloggers have a specific idea they want to express; look for it. In addition, because videoblogs connect the creator with his or her audience, go to the vlogger's blog and comment on any posts that you found really interesting or compelling, or which you really feel you understood.

When you begin videoblogging, consider a single artistic idea you want to express. Perhaps it's an emotion evoked by something visual in your life, or a particular color or shape that you'd like to explore. Go out with your camcorder and explore it as fully as you can, edit it, and perhaps set it to music. When you look at the results, look at it with your artist's eye, not your videographer's eye, and not your storyteller's eye.

## *Knowing What You Need: The Basic Tools and Budget*

A common question about videoblogging is “but don't I have to buy a bunch of camera equipment?” While it's true that you will need a toolbox of equipment to videoblog, many vloggers do fine with a smaller set of tools than most people would expect. Additionally, vloggers are a resourceful bunch — if they can't use a video camera, they'll use a still camera. If they don't have one of those, a screencast might be the way to go. Or they'll remix videos from other sources into new vlogs to post.

### *Gathering your tools*

Chapter 3 goes into depth about the equipment you need to create a videoblog. Here I give you the basic list of things you'll need, sooner or later, to get going as a vlogger:

- ✔ **A fairly recent computer.** A PC that can run Windows XP or a Macintosh that can run Mac OS X is just about the *minimum* you'll want for videoblogging. You can make do with something less, but it'll be a struggle.

- ✔ **An Internet connection.** Your Internet connection should be some kind of high-speed connection, be it broadband, cable Internet, satellite, or DSL. You must have an Internet connection, and if you want to watch videoblogs and upload your posts quickly, it should be fast.
- ✔ **A camera.** It can be a webcam, digital camera (with or without a video option), digital camcorder, or even analog camcorder with a FireWire cable. The best option is a digital camcorder, but all you really need is some way to get a video or image into your computer.
- ✔ **Video-viewing software.** This one is easy — the major video viewers, QuickTime and Windows Media Player, are both available as free downloads.
- ✔ **Video-editing software.** Windows XP comes with Windows Movie Maker, and iMovie comes pre-installed with new Apple computers, or can be purchased as part of iLife. You can also buy more advanced video-editing software, such as Adobe Premier or Final Cut Pro.

## *Budgeting your vlog money*

If you have absolutely nothing to start out with, you can expect your foray into videoblogging to cost about \$3000, including the cost of a new computer and a simple MiniDV digital camcorder, plus an ongoing expense of about \$50 per month for a broadband Internet connection. If you have a fairly recent computer and a camcorder that has a FireWire cable, you can get started right away for nothing but the cost of your Internet connection.

The following items are necessary for videoblogging, so you'll absolutely have to buy these (or have purchased them in the past):

- ✔ **The camera.** Your best option for videoblogging is a MiniDV camcorder with a FireWire cable, because you'll have the easiest time getting the video off of it and onto your computer. Camcorders that use FireWire have been made since around the year 2000, so your camcorder doesn't need to be brand new to work. If your video camera is analog, you'll need an external converter that converts analog data into digital and then feeds it into your computer; such converters cost \$150 to \$200 and up. With some MiniDV camcorders selling for under \$300, you may find it more cost-effective to upgrade than to struggle with the converter. Some cameras record directly to a file — whether on DVD or media card — without requiring FireWire; many are equipped with USB.

USB camcorders will not capture to iMovie on the Mac.

- ✔ **The Internet connection.** Dial-up isn't a great choice for videobloggers. It's not impossible to videoblog with a dial-up connection, but it's hard. If your only option is dial-up at home, look for other places you can post



from, such as cafés and libraries. *Ask first* to make sure they don't mind you using their faster connection for videoblogging.

- ✓ **The computer.** If your computer is more than about five years old, it's going to frustrate your vlogging efforts. You'll need a lot of hard drive space while you edit — at least 10GB free when you want to work on a video. Also, make sure your computer has a FireWire port. FireWire and USB have similar-looking plugs, but they are not the same.
- ✓ **Tripods, camera cases, extra batteries.** You can get a short, inexpensive tripod for less than \$5, and they're invaluable for setting up a still shot and for getting a good angle on the camera while you're in the frame.



If your equipment is a few years old but the camera does have FireWire, and you're planning an upgrade path, consider upgrading to a larger hard drive first, then a better computer, then a better camera — and then work on the optional items. The hard drive will become crucial once you have more than a few videoblog entries saved — and the computer speed will make a huge difference in how frustrated you get while editing video and posting files. A better camera has a huge effect on your video, and you might think that's the most important place to start. It's not. Especially when you're starting, your enjoyment of the experience is far more important than how well your camera handles lighting problems.

Here's some optional equipment to consider on your upgrade path:

- ✓ **Improved editing software.** High-end programs include Final Cut Pro, Adobe Premiere, and QuickTime Pro. QuickTime Pro is actually a good upgrade to buy early — since you can use it to export to more video file formats — and it's inexpensive. Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere are good options when you want special effects in your video.
- ✓ **Sound hardware.** Microphones, booms, windsocks — these are all optional accessories for your videoblog. If you end up filming in noisy situations, you will want an external mic sooner rather than later, but be wary — microphones can be very inexpensive, but can quickly add up when you go for quality.
- ✓ **Audio software.** Music and video go together so well, you might want some audio editing software to go along with your video editors. GarageBand is Apple's music editing program, and it comes with iLife (which also includes iMovie, if you don't already have it).
- ✓ **Second camera.** A second camcorder, a webcam, or a digital camera that shoots video as well as stills can be a very handy addition to your vlogging toolbox, but it's entirely optional. For myself, I have a webcam, a digital camera with video, the camcorder, and a cell phone with video camera built in. I use the cell phone for tiny moblog posts, the webcam for videoconferences, and the digital camera when I'm going hiking and want to take video of the trip — it's lighter than the camcorder, and I probably would have brought it with me anyway, to take pictures.



Whatever you decide to do with your videoblog, there will be some expenses you can't quite get away from. Vlogging is a terrific hobby, but many vloggers are also turning it into a more professional arena. If you're interested in a career as a videoblogger or doing any kind of digital video work for pay, your vlogging toolbox is an investment, not just an expense.

## *Budgeting your time*

Videoblogging eats time. Between planning your next vlog, filming it, attending events, downloading the video from your camera to your computer, editing the video, posting it, and then communicating with other videobloggers and watching their videos . . . well, it can quickly turn into a full-time job!

Budget the amount of time you spend on this newfound passion. If you find yourself attending events and only taking a small amount of video, reconsider the event coverage vlog as an option for you. Set a timer to check how long it takes you to import a video and edit it to your own satisfaction.

If you're having trouble keeping control over your time, consider these time-saving ideas:



✔ **Don't use music.** Searching for music that won't land you in legal hot water is time-consuming. Unless you already listen to music podcasts that feature royalty-free or Creative Commons music — and are already familiar with songs and bands you'd like to use — don't add musical soundtracks to your videoblogs. Just be yourself.

Of course, if you compose your own music, there's nothing to keep you from using it in your vlog. Some singer-songwriters already create videoblog entries that feature and promote their music.

✔ **Avoid fancy titles and transitions.** In your first videoblogs, experiment with titles and transitions to find ones that you like, but once you're comfortable with them, use them consistently. The most common transitions I use are cross-fades and fade-outs, because they're seamless. People are used to these scene transitions, so they hardly notice them.

✔ **Consider buying a faster computer or upgrading to a faster Internet connection.** A slow computer means slower video editing; likewise, a slow Internet connection means long waits when you upload your videos and download other videoblogs.

✔ **Use an RSS aggregator.** Watch videoblogs in an RSS aggregator program (discussed in Chapter 2), so the video files download while you're away from your computer.

- ✔ **Change your format.** If it takes you forever to make a vlog entry on your preferred topic, change the topic or format to something less formal, more fun for you.
- ✔ **Plan your vlog entry in advance.** If you already know you want certain clips to appear in a specific sequence, you can just grab the clips, put them together, put any transitions you like, and you're done.

Sometimes managing time for videoblogging is more a problem with managing time in general. If you're the kind of person who never has time for anything, you might just need to sit back and take stock of what's really important to you. If you're videoblogging because you want to capture and share your kids' lives with their grandparents, consider posting your videos on a monthly basis, and set aside a block of time each month to work on it. If your kids are old enough, get them involved in vlogging by having them edit the videos themselves.

Taking on an assistant can help for other vlogs as well — if you're camera-shy, you can enlist someone to be the face of your vlog. If you're the kind of person who just loves to play with the technical side of things, you could get someone else to shoot the video for you. Motion pictures are always collaborative efforts — videoblogs can be, too. (Read more about working with other people in Chapters 7 and 15.)

## *Planning the Content for Your Videoblog*

A videoblog can be many things. It can be a personal diary, done in video. It can be news coverage, political commentary, or artistic expression. It can be a commercial promotional tool. When you create the blog that you're going to use for your videoblog, think about what your vlog will do or be. It's okay if you don't know — you can just think of it as a personal diary of someone learning about and starting a videoblog.

### *Planned vlogs and “reality vlogs”*

There are many ways to make videoblogs, but in the planning stage, you can either go with a planned videoblog, or an unplanned vlog. An unplanned vlog is like a reality TV show — you set up the camera, put the personalities in front of the lens, and shoot video until you run out of tape, time, or patience. Then you go to the video editing stage where you look through all the video you shot and piece it together to tell the story you want to tell. You might have planned the story in advance, or you might decide on a storyline to fit the footage you have available.

### *Reality vlogs*

If you make a reality vlog, you don't have to put as much planning into your vlog before you shoot, but you will need to be more organized and thoughtful about what goes into the video after you're done. Every second that doesn't move the storyline forward will end up on the cutting-room floor, so be prepared to edit heavily.

When you create a reality vlog, you should keep an eye out for one thing: scenes and clips that are meaningful. What's meaningful? Well, if you shoot a day's worth of video and want to post a vlog called "My Day," then the five hours you spent vegging out in front of the TV can be distilled into about six seconds of glassy-eyed staring. That filler time doesn't have much meaning unless you want to post a vlog called "how I watch TV." However, if your day included a trip to the grocery store, a walk in the park, and climbing on the roof of your house to clean out the gutters, then you have three distinct scenes that you can include in the vlog post. They establish the milestones of your day, and change the setting and action enough that your viewers won't get too bored.

In addition, your reality vlog might have a plotline. The most common story to tell in a vlog is "this is how I spent my time," but yours could be something different, more complicated, or more emotionally dramatic. Ryanne Hodson (<http://ryanedit.blogspot.com>) has a video of herself weeping over a hard-drive crash and subsequent loss of all her digital video. Her partner Jay, knowing she wouldn't want to lose that emotional honesty, captured her distress on film and Ryanne later posted it to her videoblog. The story is simple, but the anguish and drama is very effective.

Moments of extreme emotions make good storylines, as long as you stay sensitive to the people involved. You can also evoke positive emotions, by filming the funny moments in your day and posting them, or by touching on your audience's sensitive side. Even though he didn't post it as a videoblog, Mike Potter, winner of the 2006 CellFlix competition ([www.cellflixfestival.org](http://www.cellflixfestival.org)), did that with his video "Cheat," in which an elderly subject talks about how he "cheats" at a game with his wife, so he can get a few extra kisses. The short film, shot entirely with a cell phone, is quick, effective, and absolutely charming.

### *Pre-planned vlogs*

A videoblog that has a purpose and a plan takes some time and forethought, but usually results in a more polished, targeted vlog. If you want your videoblog to attract a specific audience, you will need to make and post videos that interest the people you have in mind.

Some examples of videoblogs with a purpose are

✔ **Rocketboom:** A daily news show with a humorous slant. ([www.rocketboom.com](http://www.rocketboom.com))

- ✔ **IceNRye's Geocaching Videoblog:** A long-format videoblog (40-minute episodes) about geocaching and dog training in Canada. (<http://icenrye.blogspot.com>)
- ✔ **Cherub:** A parody of a popular vampire TV series, and one of the few all-fiction vlogs ([www.cautionzero.net/cherub](http://www.cautionzero.net/cherub))
- ✔ **Crash Test Kitchen:** A cooking show ([www.crashtestkitchen.com](http://www.crashtestkitchen.com))
- ✔ **Net Video:** A vlog from Net Video, a technology TV show from Australia ([www.netvideo.com.au](http://www.netvideo.com.au))

Even though most of the videoblogs I watch are off-the-cuff reality vlogs, I really appreciate the extra effort that goes into a planned videoblog. I think as videoblogging matures, there will be more of these targeted vlogs available, which will certainly make vlogging an even more viable delivery medium for anyone's message.

## *Low-tech tools for good videoblogs*

The following three tools are just a few ways you can make better videoblogs without investing in more hardware and software. All three are ways to use the most important tool in your videoblog — your mind. How you organize information in your videoblog will determine how good it is to your viewers. If your vlog is very chaotic, with little bits and topics being mentioned that don't have much connection to the rest of the vlog, you'll have a hard time keeping anyone's attention unless the vlog adds value in some other way, by being funny or sexy.

### *A video journal*

Yes, your videoblog is your journal, in a sense. But you can also keep a record of your videography so you'll know what worked and what didn't. When you shoot a video, write down some details about the shot within a few hours, so you'll have the information during editing, and when you review your clips later. You can keep a small spiral-bound notebook in your camera bag for this, or use any recording device you like.

Include the following in your notes:

- ✔ Where and when the video was taken. Include time of day.
- ✔ Who is in the video. You'll need this for the credits. Include musicians playing in the background. Pay special attention to who has given permission to be filmed — and who hasn't — for your edit.
- ✔ Assistants helping you with the shot.
- ✔ If the shot was taken outdoors, describe what the weather was like. For example, include how much cloud cover there was.

- ✓ If the shot was taken indoors, describe what kind of lighting was available (fluorescent, incandescent, sunlight, low-light).
- ✓ Ambient noise, such as people talking in a bar or restaurant.
- ✓ What equipment you used — your standard camcorder, or a different camera? Also note any sound equipment, such as if you used a microphone.
- ✓ Any camera special effects you used. Some cameras have built-in special effects, such as widescreen or night vision.
- ✓ Details that struck you as interesting while you shot the video, such as a memorable quote or a shot angle you really liked.

When you post your videoblog entry, you can choose to add the video notes to your blog post, or just keep them private in a notebook or in a text file on your hard drive.



You'll need notes when you edit and post your videoblog, so you can give credit where it's due. Notes also help you remember (and zero in on) clips you thought were particularly good or interesting.

In addition, you should go back and review your past videoblogs every couple of months to see what you did then that you've since changed, or if there's a particular effect you got without even realizing it and want to re-capture now. Your notes help make your vlogging more deliberate.

### ***Outlining***

If you have an idea for your videoblog's content, write it down. Having a plan or statement of your vlog's purpose will help you keep it focused and interesting to its target audience. Then, as you plan your first videoblog entry, think about what you want to say in it. What's the story you have to tell here? If you can, write an outline for the vlog post.

Here's an example outline for a videoblog post I made called "Hiking and Camping with Johnnyb":

Intro: ID with fade-in

Clip1: "We're going hiking" from cell phone, use picture-in-picture over a shot — still or video — of the trees

Clip2: Slideshow of photos from the trip

    Add voiceover describing what happened

Clip3: Salamander footage, talk about encountering wildlife

Clip4: Footage of the lesson of the hike

Outro: Music credit

The videoblog in question is tightly formatted — each clip has footage and photos from a hike of some kind, with a miniature lesson or hiking and camping tip from Johnnyb, the host of the show. With only four clips of video plus a slideshow, this is a short vlog post.

In this particular case, I wrote the outline after I shot the video, so I could include all the footage I had. If you outline a videoblog post in advance, you may need to edit your outline later if you caught a really great moment or scene out of the blue. For instance, in this vlog post, I couldn't have anticipated finding a salamander and getting it on film.

### *Storyboarding*

The outline is a general, scene-by-scene listing of what content will go into the videoblog. A *storyboard* is a way to plan out a vlog. In it, you will actually draw pictures to plan the shots you want to capture. A storyboard resembles a comic strip — it has several pictures lined up to tell the story. For more about creating and using storyboards, as well as an example of a storyboard, check out Chapter 8 — and the tear-out Cheat Sheet, which provides a mini-storyboard for you to carry in your notebook or camera bag.

Storyboarding is useful when you want to compose your shots carefully to get a particular effect and to use the language of film to express more than the flat storyline. Note, however, that it can take time to develop this technique, and it's even less forgiving than outlines for capturing impromptu moments.

## *Preparing and Presenting a Vlog*

This chapter talks a lot about why people make videoblogs, and how to plan a vlog, but at this point you might be thinking, “Great, but how do I *do* it? How do I make a videoblog?” That question is answered in greater detail in the rest of this book (particularly Chapter 4, which takes you through the steps to create and post your first videoblog entry), but here is an overview of the process of creating a vlog entry and posting it:

- 1. Download the raw video from your camera or source to your computer.**
- 2. Edit the video clips in a video-editing program and convert the edited video to a Web-ready file format.**
- 3. Post the video to an RSS-enabled blog on the Internet.**

## *Videoblog creation and editing*

First, you shoot your video. You can do this with any camera, as long as you can somehow get the video from the camera onto your computer's hard drive. Shoot any subject you like — as long as it's legal — and *get permission* if you're going to interview someone and then post it to the Internet.

When you edit the video, you use video-editing software to take the footage from your camera and to cut the video scenes until each segment (called a *clip*) is short enough to tell the story without dragging too much. You put these clips in order with your video-editing software, usually by using some kind of timeline view. You can also add still photographs at this point. You might add titles and transitions between clips to make them flow more smoothly, or you could leave the video in more of a raw state.

Chapter 10 has more information on editing your video.

## *Videoblog files and compatibility*

When you have finished creating your vlog entry, editing it, and adding the transitions and music, the next step is to compress the file into a format for the Internet. If you're using a Windows machine, you'll most likely publish a Windows Media file. If you're on a Mac, it'll be some type of QuickTime or MPEG-4 file.

Although Windows Media Player was available for the Mac until 2006, Microsoft recently discontinued support for it on the Mac. QuickTime is still available for both Windows and Mac, as are Flash and Real Media. When new features become available in your preferred file format, get a friend to test them out using another platform (Windows if you're on a Mac, or vice versa).

The common file formats that are viewable on Mac, Windows, *and* Linux are MPEG-4 and AVI — which isn't recommended for videoblogs because it's usually an uncompressed video format.

In Chapter 12, you get a closer look at file types and compression.