Chapter 9

Making Your Blog Mobile-Friendly

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- Learning to prioritize what to feature
- Installing the dotMobi plug-in to your WordPress blog
- Configuring the WordPress Mobile Pack
- Avoiding “train wrecks” with the mobile switcher
- Customizing your mobile theme
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- Configuring your WordPress blog to accept e-mail posts
- Adding multimedia to your mobile blog
- Interview with legendary blogger Doc Searls, author of “The Cluetrain Manifesto”

Before we get to the technical details, it’s necessary to take a minute and think conceptually about the why before we get all tangled up in the how. Specifically . . .

✓ Why would someone want to read your blog on their mobile device, and under what circumstances?
✓ Why would you want to update your blog using the rudimentary (by comparison) keyboard, camera, screen, and data connection of a mobile device?

The answer to both questions is the same: because you can do it away from the home, office, or home office.

Of course, the next consideration becomes the circumstances that compel that kind of interaction versus the more established means of accessing the Web. If people are looking at your blog on their phone, fancy design flourishes are obviously not what they’re after. Therefore, the simple plug-ins we demonstrate in this chapter will allow you to serve up a stripped-down version of your blog specifically for mobile.
Streamlining the blog-reading experience to adapt to the mobile platform is balanced by immediacy, which is what mobile contributes to blog creation. Writing from anywhere, at any time — even live-streaming audio and video on some of the new services — means you can share your experiences with a global audience in real time. It’s comparable to being the star of your very own *Truman Show*.

We begin this chapter by explaining how to install the dotMobi WordPress plug-in. Certainly many other options are available, each specific to the particular blogging software you use, but because WordPress is the preeminent blogging platform, we feature it here.

Additionally, this chapter shows off some of the exciting new tools that allow bloggers to break out of the “blogging in your pajamas” stereotype and take creating blog posts away from the desktop and into the world. If you like, though, you can still wear your pajamas.

**Prioritizing Your Blog Features**

A hard and fast design rule is “All emphasis is no emphasis.” If you have a page full of huge bold type and exclamation points, and everything is flashing and jumping around, what are you really telling your readers? Not much, actually, because most sane humans will quickly click away from that kind of monstrosity.

When it comes to re-conceptualizing what your blog should look like on the mobile platform, you have to apply the rules of mobile Web design with ruthless efficiency. Most bloggers, as they grow comfortable with their blogs, start collecting widgets, plug-ins, and features that they like.

Bloggers are, by their very nature, like technology magpies. We see some new, shiny thing and want to drag it into the nest and play with it for a while. Before you know it, the blog’s sidebars are overflowing with code snippets that show off the top books you’ve read lately, the countries your blog visitors are from, the tune you’re listening to, and the number of cows you milked in the Facebook game Farmville.

On a desktop, this means your readers have to scroll down a bit more to find your older posts, or they have a momentary giggle while contemplating the dancing bears next to the podcast player.

But on the mobile platform, those sidebar widgets slow down page loads, create conflicts with operating systems or handset capabilities, and generally just gum up the works.
Similarly, the complex multi-box layouts of some of the more sophisticated blogs — the ones that make a blog front page look like the front page of *The New York Times* or ESPN — just don’t translate well to a 2-inch, 128-pixel-wide screen — or even to a 4-inch, 320-pixel-wide screen.

We recommend that you take a few minutes to think strategically about your blog and what you really want people to see when they access it from a mobile device. Table 9-1 offers suggestions, based on some of the most common blog subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9-1</th>
<th>Migrating Blog Features to a Mobile Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog Feature</strong></td>
<td><strong>Can You Migrate This to the Mobile Web?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide shows and other image-intensive content</td>
<td>Yes; but Flash-based galleries or slide shows (that are common on photo sites) won’t work on most mobile devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Yes, but it’s very tricky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long posts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists people may need to search while on the go (Many organizations, such as Little League, churches, and nonprofits, have schedules of events, contact information, and maps that fit this category.)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 9-1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog Feature</th>
<th>Can You Migrate This to the Mobile Web?</th>
<th>Then You Should</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact information</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Create a “Text” widget containing this information, and use the theme to make sure it appears on the home page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large images</td>
<td>Possible, but not advisable.</td>
<td>Make sure the Shrink Large Images option is chosen. See Chapter 8 for an image-resizing tutorial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash-based layout or banners</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Convert to JavaScript or Ajax</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding the dotMobi Plug-in to Your WordPress Blog

Obviously, designing a plug-in that functions with every blog’s style and configuration is impossible. There are just too many variations on the basic themes of WordPress for any one-size solution to fit all.

However, the dotMobi plug-in transforms most standard blogs in the following ways:

- **Simplifies the banner and color scheme.** Large images or rich media content in banners slows down page loading.

- **Stacks headlines in a long row.** Mobile users like to zip up and down through easy-to-grasp headlines, rather than the traditional blog format, where posts can make pages scroll through six or seven screen-lengths.

- **Moves sidebars to the bottom of the page.** Because most mobile screens are still narrow, having content appear on the sides means either things get squeezed and unreadable, or the users have to scroll side-to-side as well.

After you install the dotMobi plug-in, you can adjust several settings so that your blog and its contents display as logically and attractively as possible.
Although we cannot anticipate every situation or need, the following sections should get you started on “mobilizing” your blog so that you can test and refine the settings on your own.

In Figure 9-1 you see how the dotMobi plug-in alters the appearance of the Slightly Used Cats blog across a collection of different mobile devices. Figure 9-1 shows how the blog displays in Firefox on a desktop computer. It also shows the blog on a Droid phone, a BlackBerry, and a Motorola RAZR.

Figure 9-1: The dotMobi plug-in transforms a WordPress blog into mobile-friendly versions that display well on a variety of mobile devices.
Part III: Multimedia, Marketing, and E-Commerce

Installing the dotMobi plug-in

The steps in this section walk you through the process of installing the dotMobi plug-in on your WordPress blog.

One risk of installing complex plug-ins, including the dotMobi pack, is that when WordPress periodically updates its software, the update sometimes conflicts with your plug-ins. If this happens, you may have to deactivate or uninstall the plug-in until it is updated as well.

Now that you know what the gotchas are, you’re prepared to look out for them and are ready to install the plug-in as follows:


The WordPress Mobile Pack page appears, as shown in Figure 9-2.
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2. Click the Download button on the right of the WordPress Mobile Pack page (not the Download button in the WordPress.org header at the very top right).

3. In the window that appears, choose where you want to save the Zip file containing the WordPress Mobile Pack plug-in. Click Save to download the file.

4. Log in to your WordPress blog, and click Plugins on the sidebar on the left of the page.

5. On the drop-down menu that appears, choose Add New.

   The Install Plugins page appears, as shown in Figure 9-3. This page is very useful for WordPress bloggers; you can use it to browse all kinds of plug-ins. The tag cloud in the center of the page gives you a snapshot of the most popular plug-ins that bloggers are searching for and using. This page is also where you upload plug-ins you want to add to your blog.

   ![Figure 9-3: The Install Plugins page allows you to upload the plug-in you just downloaded and find others that might lead you in entirely new directions with your blog.](image)

6. Click the Upload link near the top of the page.

   The Upload page opens and allows you to easily upload the Zip file containing your plug-in to your blog database without having to use an FTP program.

   The Featured, Popular, Newest, and Recently Updated links can keep you up to date on the latest plug-ins bloggers are using.

7. Click the Browse button.

   A window opens and lists your default directory.
8. Navigate to where you just saved the WordPress Mobile Pack Zip file. Select it and then click the Open button.

9. Click the Install Now button.
   Your computer automatically uploads the plug-in to the proper directory in your WordPress blog and unzips the contents of the file.

10. Click the Return to Plugins Page link.
    The Manage Plugins page opens.

11. Click the Activate link under WordPress Mobile Pack.
    Your blog activates the plug-in and Plugin Activated appears at the top of the page. If there is a conflict between this plug-in and one of your other plug-ins, or with your blog’s theme, you receive an error message. If this happens, you have to troubleshoot by systematically deactivating and reactivating the conflicting plug-ins or features of your blog.

You can shortcut this process by navigating to the plug-in directory of WordPress and searching for the Mobile Pack plug-in there. Unfortunately, whenever a plug-in gets popular, there are always spammers and scammers who try to piggyback on the plug-in’s success by putting out copycat versions that can damage your blog — or worse. These copycat versions are often variations on the spelling or word order of the original plug-in, and they can be hard to spot. If you do choose to install the Mobile Pack using the one-click method, be sure that you have researched this thoroughly, and that you’re getting what you expect.

At this point, you can sit back and let the automatically selected settings take over and determine how your blog will look on mobile devices, or you can dig a little deeper into the various settings to try to customize the look. We lead you through some of the options in the upcoming sections. You don’t have to know any real computer programming to adjust these options, although you have to invest some time and effort in testing the various settings.

If you have some PHP and CSS skills, you can really take matters into your own hands and edit the various files to totally customize how this plug-in makes your blog look.

**Tweaking the mobile switcher**

With the dotMobi plug-in installed, the first thing that a mobile browser encounters when it tries to access your blog is the mobile switcher. Before we get into customizing how this nifty bit of code works, here’s a brief explanation: The mobile switching agent tells the mobile browser to ignore all the files on how to format the blog’s content for the desktop environment and to use the coding in the WordPress Mobile Plugin pack to filter the content. For more on mobile switches, see Chapter 2. Here’s how to adjust the settings:
1. Open a browser and navigate to your WordPress blog’s Dashboard.
2. Click Plugins on the left sidebar.
   The Manage Plugins page appears.
3. Scroll to the WordPress Mobile Pack plugin and click the Switcher link.
   Alternatively, you can access the Mobile Switcher by selecting it from the Appearance tab, as shown in Figure 9-4.
   The Mobile Switcher page opens, as shown in Figure 9-4. This page contains various drop-down menus you can use to adjust the settings.

4. On the Switcher Mode drop-down menu, choose from the following options:
   - **Disabled**: Choose this when you want there to be no switching, perhaps because you have a site that is designed to be seen only on mobile devices.
   - **Browser Detection**: When users access your blog, their browser sends a little information to your server, telling it what kind of browser and operating system is making the request. Think of it like a polite guest knocking on your door and announcing who they are. This mode is pretty effective, although very new or non-standard browsers may not be recognized; therefore, the users would be sent to your desktop site. (To guard against that kind of error, see Step 9).
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- **Domain Mapping**: This identifies whether the visitor to your blog is trying to access a mobile domain (say m.slightlyusedcats.com, slightlyusedcats.com/m/, or slightlyusedcats.mobi) or just the regular desktop site. This is quite effective if your users are typing in the complete address. However, it requires that you create a completely separate mobile site at that address.

- **Both Browser Detection and Domain Mapping**: The advantage of using this setting is that it covers almost all possible mobile user access scenarios and flashes a warning message when your user tries to access the mobile site through a desktop browser or vice-versa.

5. **On the Mobile Theme drop-down, choose which theme you want your mobile users to see.**

   The defaults are limited to the base color scheme, as well as blue, green, or red. If you customize and save a mobile theme of your own, it appears here, too.

6. **On the Browser Detection drop-down menu, choose User-Agent Prefixes if you like.**

   This drop-down menu is available only when you choose Browser Detection or Both Browser Detection and Domain Mapping in Step 4, because if you’re not using Browser Detection, the choices here will not be available.

   As we write this book, the only option here is User-Agent Prefixes. However, updates to this mobile pack may provide more options.

7. **In the Desktop Domains box, change the text only if you have a complicated or custom-built site.**

   The default is your primary Web address where users hitting your site from traditional desktop or laptop computers are sent. If you don’t know what you’re doing here, leave it alone.

8. **In the Mobile Domains box, enter the names of any custom mobile domains you’ve created.**

   As we mention in Step 4, you can create a completely different site at an m.whatever.com or whatever.mobi domain. However, just filling in a variation of your existing domain address does not magically create this site. Creating subdomains like these requires a fair amount of specialized knowledge and access to server-level functions that not all Web hosts offer.

9. **(Optional) Select the Footer Links check box to allow your users to override the mobile switcher.**

   This places a link on the bottom of the page that allows users to defeat the switcher in case it sends a desktop user to a mobile page, or vice-versa. If you’re confident in the switcher and want to save space on your page, don’t include the link, but most people choose to just in case.
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Allow your users to choose which version of your blog they want to see; maybe a desktop user is on a particularly slow connection and just wants to access the simplest version of your site.

10. Click the Save Changes button when you are done.

Customizing your mobile theme

Although you can choose the basic color scheme of the existing mobile themes when you configure the mobile switcher (see the preceding section), the Mobile Theme page allows you to further customize what your mobile users see when they access your blog.

1. Open a browser and navigate to your WordPress blog’s Dashboard.

2. Click Plugins on the left sidebar.

The Manage Plugins page appears.

3. Scroll to the WordPress Mobile Pack plug-in and click the Themes link.

Alternatively, you can click on the Mobile Theme link under the Appearance tab, as shown in Figure 9-5.

The Mobile Theme page opens, as shown in Figure 9-5. This page contains various drop-down menus you can use to adjust the settings.
4. **Ensure the Enable Nokia Templates option is selected (checked).**

Despite all the hype about smartphones, such as the iPhone or Droid, Nokia handsets are still the most popular in the world, especially in developing nations.

5. **If you have a dedicated page, deselect the Show Home Link in Menu check box.**

If you have a dedicated home page for your blog (such as a big picture, a video, or an animation), you want to deselect this check box. Otherwise the plug-in places two Home links on your mobile page. If you do not have a dedicated home page, leave this check box selected.

6. **Choose the number of posts to display on your home page or archive page.**

The default is five. If you want your blog to load quicker, type a smaller number. If you want your readers to see more items and aren’t worried about load times (or believe that your readers mostly have fast phones or a lot of patience), then increase the number. Experiment with this setting until you are happy with how your blog downloads and displays in a browser.

7. **On the Lists of Posts Show drop-down menu, choose one of the following options:**
   
   a. *Title Only* causes the mobile version of your blog to display only the title of your blog posts. Again, this is a tradeoff between detail and loading speed.
   
   b. *Title and Teaser for the First Post, Title for the Rest* is a good compromise setting. Your readers see the title of your most recent post and the first few words of the post; after that, readers just see the headlines.
   
   c. *Title and Teaser for All Posts* displays as much information as possible to get your readers to click through to the full posts. Of course, having this setting selected means that the pages load slower. Your readers may get frustrated and abandon your blog.

8. **Select the Display Metadata for Posts option if you want to display additional information about your posts.**

   If you choose this, each post also shows the name of the author and any tags you’ve chosen.

9. **Choose the teaser length (if any).**

   The default is 50 characters. If you want a longer teaser, type a larger number. Again, this is something you should experiment with.

10. **Type the number of widget items you want to display.**

    The default is five. Your widgets will not display in a sidebar on your mobile blog; instead, they appear in a bar at the bottom of the page. If
your widget has a lot of information in it, only a short teaser and a link to the full list will appear.

11. **Select the Remove Media option if you want remove all rich media content from on your blog.**

   Depending on what you blog about, this can be one of the most crucial decisions you make. If you use a lot of multimedia in your blog posts, then removing all your audio, video, or Flash files may leave you with little content to offer mobile visitors. However, if you mostly post text and photos on your site and occasionally have audio, video, or Flash, removing these elements may be in your best interest. Rich media elements are usually large in size; users may not want to wait around—or burn up their limited data plans—waiting for your home page to download. When you choose to remove media, the plug-in removes the object, embed, marquee, script, frame, and iframe HTML tags and their content.

12. **Select the Partition Large Pages option to break up your content into bite-size pieces.**

   If you tend to write long posts (if your post requires the user to scroll through more than four screens of content, it’s long), you might want to give your audience a break with this option. If, however, you want people to load only one page at a time and avoid clicking repeatedly to load page after page, then leave this check box deselected.

13. **Select the Shrink Images option to resize your pictures to fit on mobile screens.**

   Shrinking images might not be a good idea in some circumstances. If you are a photographer and are afraid that the resizing engine in this plug-in might add noise or distortion to your photos, or you prefer to handle the resizing yourself, leave Shrink Images unchecked. Otherwise, it doesn’t make much sense to have a poster-resolution image on a post-age-stamp-size screen.

14. **Select the Clear Cache Now option if you want to ensure that the resized images are the ones that appear for mobile users.**

   Sometimes, WordPress caches images locally so that it doesn’t have to keep going into the database to retrieve them. If you chose to resize images, but haven’t cleared the cache, your blog could continue to deliver the large image files.

15. **Select the Simplify Styling option.**

   This removes any little flourishes that have crept into your posts and pages, such as having ornate initial capital letters or having unique styles as frames around pictures. On the mobile Web, these kinds of elements are referred to as “drag,” as in “All the fancy typography and design on that blog are dragging it down like an anchor thrown into bottomless quicksand.”
16. **Click Save Changes when you are done customizing your settings.**

Call up your blog on your mobile device to see what your changes have done to your blog’s appearance.

**Choosing which widgets to display**

If you’re a blogger, you’ve probably added a widget or two (or ten). When you set up your WordPress blog for the mobile Web using the dotMobi plug-in, here’s how to display widgets for your readers:

1. Open a browser and navigate to your WordPress blog’s Dashboard.
2. Click Plugins on the left sidebar.

The Manage Plugins page appears.


The Mobile Widgets page appears, as shown in Figure 9-6. This page contains various check boxes that allow you to winnow your widgets to just the ones that are absolutely essential to your blog. You can enable your widgets on the regular Widgets page, where you can drag and drop the elements to add, subtract, or re-order the content.

![Figure 9-6: The Mobile Widgets page.](image-url)
4. Select which widgets you want to appear on the mobile version of your blog.

Accepted wisdom is that no more than three widgets should load when you hit a mobile page. (Purists say anything more than three is pushing it.) Consider carefully what information absolutely, positively has to be on your mobile blog. Widgets for stock tickers, Twitter feeds, Flickr slide shows, or MP3 players can severely clog page load times. Keep widgets to things like your About page or Recent Posts.

5. Click the Save Changes button.

**Blogging from a Mobile Device**

As mobile devices increasingly include full alphanumeric (“QWERTY,” for the letters on the top row) keypads, users are taking advantage. Before, typing a post with a telephone keypad, where you had to push the 9 key four times to enter a Z, was something only die-hard bloggers with fast and muscular thumbs dared to try.

You have dozens of ways to post to your blog from mobile devices; the various App Stores are overflowing with custom-built tools to empower bloggers to capture every waking second of their lives in words, pictures, and video. We encourage you to check these apps out (if your mobile device supports downloaded apps) and see whether any of them suit your needs.

However, if you don’t want to tie your blogging future to the whims of an App developer, some free and easy tools enable you to add and update posts using the most basic skills and setup — namely mobile blogging via e-mail.

In only 20 years, e-mail has become so ubiquitous; it seems that every life form on the evolutionary scale higher than an amoeba has a Gmail account. One of the strengths of blogging is that refreshing a Web page is (almost) as easy as typing an e-mail message and attaching a file. Well, that last step has been bridged by updates to blogging software that allow blogs to take incoming e-mails and turn them into blog posts. Admittedly, sending an e-mail does not allow you to format the post with precision or to preview it to see how it looks — but it gets the content into your blog immediately from any device that is capable of sending an e-mail.

In the sections that follow, we explain how you set up a WordPress blog to accept blog posts via e-mail. If you use a blogging platform other than WordPress (such as Blogger or TypePad), the specific steps you follow will vary but the basic idea is the same.
With the addition of audio recording, cameras that take up to 8 megapixel images, and even video recording, bloggers now have a cornucopia of tools at their disposal. If you want to use photo-sharing services, such as Picasa, to construct geotagged maps showing the exact locations of the pictures you take, or use live streaming sites, such as Ustream or Kyte, to be your own broadcast network, flip to Chapter 8. This section focuses only on text posts.

**Creating a secret e-mail address**

Before you start blogging via e-mail, you have to create a unique e-mail address to send your blog posts to. The creation process will vary depending on the way your Web hosting service or e-mail is set up. Essentially, you can use any e-mail address, but there are significant risks to doing this with a Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo! account because so many spammers and noxious advertisers randomly blanket every possible address with messages that would then wind up as content on your blog.

Don’t use your regular e-mail address. All the e-mail you get in your Inbox daily (including secret love notes or chain letters from your crazy uncle) posts automatically and immediately to your blog. WordPress recommends you create a really obscure e-mail address (see the examples below) and keep this e-mail address as secret as possible. If it gets out in the open, spammers can then hijack your blog by sending whatever noxious material they want to that Inbox, and your blog will automatically post it.

So before you start down this path, make sure that you have a safe and secure e-mail address that is dedicated only to receiving e-mails that will then be converted into blog posts. You can share this e-mail address with (very) trusted friends, say a group on a vacation or at a big concert, so they can post their impressions to your blog as quickly and easily as possible.

To make your special blogging e-mail address safe and secure, WordPress prompts you to use semi-random strings of letters and numbers, such as 4lrp59qs@yourmail.com. Since nobody sane has a name like 4lrp59qs, the automated programs that spammers use to guess common names won’t hit upon this combination for their unwanted messages.

**Converting e-mails into WordPress posts**

Here’s how to set up your WordPress blog to accept your e-mails and turn them into content:

1. Open a browser and navigate to your WordPress blog’s Dashboard.
2. Click Settings on the left sidebar.
Depending on how you have set up your own blog, your Settings tab may be in a different location, such as at the bottom of the sidebar.

3. **Click the Writing link.**

The Writing Settings page opens, as shown in Figure 9-7. This page enables you to adjust many of the settings for creating new posts. Skip the first two sections because they have nothing to do with creating posts via e-mail; make changes to them only if you know what you are doing.

Under the Post via E-Mail heading is a paragraph containing three suggested “random strings,” which look like this: 23anir8r2c. These are for you to use as usernames to send your blog posts to. That is, you send your e-mails to 23anir8r2c@yourdomain.com and they automatically publish.

4. **Enter the mail server for your e-mail account.**

If you have your own self-hosted WordPress blog, the mail server will probably look similar to mail.yourblogname.com.

5. **Enter the secret e-mail address in the Login Name box.**

6. **Enter the password you established for this e-mail account.**

7. **Choose a category from the Default Mail Category drop-down menu.**

If you want the posts from your mobile device to go into a special category (such as Out and About), you would choose that here.

8. **Click Save Changes.**
Blogging on the mobile Web: An interview with Doc Searls

Doc Searls — alpha blogger and co-author of “The Cluetrain Manifesto” — is one of the guys who was around when the Internet was created, and who had a real hand in shaping and giving voice to its emerging culture. He is a firm believer in the righteousness of open-source technology, the wisdom of the crowd, the promise of many-to-many communication, and taking pictures out of airplane windows.

Searls has made it his life’s work to study the implications of the many-to-many information flow that blogging makes possible (see his blog shown in the figure). His long-term insights on where blogging is headed, now that it can be created and consumed anywhere, are essential to any blogger hoping to make the transition to the mobile platform.

Q: Migrating blogs to function on the mobile platform seems to run headlong into a whole bunch of conflicting considerations; are any of the following guidelines (culled from “expert” advice) accurate, and if so, to what extent?

Before we go there, it’s important to note that WordPress, Drupal, and other popular authoring systems are not yet optimized for mobile. [Ed. Note: Besides the plug-in demonstrated in this chapter, which helps optimize the theme for a blog]. This is bound to change, but soon isn’t fast enough. I think the presence of the iPad in the world will help. Authors will soon be writing, consciously, for three sizes of screens: desktop/laptop, tablet, and smartphone.

Meanwhile, the best format for mobile is plain HTML. This is what Dave Winer does with his news rivers. I keep a bookmark for http://nytimesriver.com in my iPhone browser because it loads instantly, and looks great — if what you’re trying to do is actually read.
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Sometimes simpler is better. This is especially the case when space and processing power are limited, as they are with mobile devices. The same goes for streaming. The streaming equivalent of a 50,000-watt radio station is a 24 Kbps stream: the lowest useful bit rate. That’s because you can receive it with GPRS (Edge) and not just 3G and Wi-Fi.

The problem at the moment is that designers want to fancy things up, which is only natural. They want pretty Web sites, sparkling audio, and high-resolution video because those things flatter their work and align with their ideals. But, in the real world, those ideals are often at odds with actual use. In the long run, this conflict sorts out because we get both the pretty and the practical. But, right now, we’re in a tug between them, and the designers are winning.

Perspective: It’s only 15 years since the first popular graphical browser came along, and the commercial Web (Amazon, eBay, and so on) followed. The ‘Net is still young. It’s a sophomore in high school, not even old enough to get its driving permit. So, some patience is required, along with as much innovation as we can stand.

**Bloggers have to write even shorter, pithier pieces because the readers are on the move.**

I don’t agree. Years ago people said blogging should be short-form, yet long-form blogs often did better than the short kind. The trick is to make them easy to read. People tweet and re-tweet most of my blog posts, and nearly all those posts are hundreds or even thousands of words long.

**Bloggers need to make sure they have longer content available, because readers are sometimes killing time and are willing to drill down deep.**

That’s true. I sometimes go to a long blog post before I get on the train and then read it underground, on my iPhone.

**It’s essential to have good-looking multimedia content to take advantage of the new smartphones that play video so well.**

No. You need interesting material. Good beats fancy every time. This is not to say that multimedia is bad, just that it won’t be the only thing. TV didn’t obsolete text. Nor will smartphones.

**Multimedia content has to be stripped out because of the still-shaky data connections and the whole Flash controversy.**

Well, it needs to be optional — gracefully added and subtracted as bandwidth requires.

**People are searching for immediate, useful information on their mobiles.**

Of course. In fact, in the long run people will be publishing their own demand selectively to markets on the fly — “I need a stroller for twins in White Plains in the next two hours. Who’s coming through?” — without having to do that within the silos of eBay, Amazon, or Craigslist. (And this isn’t a knock on those. Just an observation that we need an open marketplace as well as these closed ones.)

Q: Facebook’s growth on mobile has been absolutely shocking — 600 percent last year.

Thank a killer — and very simple — Facebook iPhone app.

Q: Does this qualify as blogging?

No. Facebook is still a closed and private silo — or a giant walled garden. In this respect, it is still AOL 2.0.

Q: Is this kind of growth going to continue? Or are we going to get sick and tired of playing in Zuckerberg’s garden and head off to more bespoke social communities?

We’ll always head back in an open direction, away from beautiful but limited closed spaces.

(continued)
There is a market ecosystem at work here. We have the Facebooks and Apples creating vertical apps and devices that create new categories (or vastly improve old ones) and show much of what can be done there. Then we have the Googles and open-source communities working horizontally, doing openly what closed systems prevent.

Q: You once described being an “alpha blogger” as being akin to being an “alpha paramecium.” Does that make an alpha mobile blogger an alpha virus? Or a paramecium with legs?

The latter, I suppose.

What I meant there was that blogging is essentially a personal act: a one-man or one-woman show. It is social in the way all of us are social — humans are social animals — but it is not a collective activity.

Humans are also mobile animals, and phones are far more popular than computers for a good reason: They’re more personal, more conversational, and you can carry them in your pocket.

The problem with blogging is that it is essentially a text activity. Given the difficulty of writing while walking or driving, blogging is likely to remain mostly a sitting-still activity as well. But there are endless possibilities here: speech-to-text, audio and video postings, mashing up work by other people…

Q: Is being able to file live reports from out in the field such a big deal? Outside of a few high-profile successes, is this really that big of a selling point for a blogger?

The appeal of photography and video is that there’s no limit to what you can do with them. Few of us imagine we’ll be filing live reports, but knowing we can is not a trivial consideration. Most of us don’t expect to be dialing 911 either, but knowing we can is a good thing.

Q: How often do you read blogs on your mobile?

Every day, usually several times a day.

Q: Under what circumstances and what are you looking for?

Usually, I’m following links in tweets, simply because they’re interesting to me.

Q: What do you think is going to be a big growth area in mobile blogging over the next couple of years? What’s going to take off that’s just started getting traction?

The biggest thing will be video. The ability of anybody to upload, mash up, and edit video is going to put a big stress on existing systems, which are built with a bias for bandwidth in the downstream direction. This stress can break in one or both of two ways. One is resistance from the carriers, which would rather persist in their few-to-many entertainment industry dreams (TV moving to the ‘Net, and available only to subscribers). The other is carriers (and other parties, such as municipal fiber systems) embracing users as producers and a wide-open marketplace where everybody can supply ideas and content to everybody else. There is far more economic vitality in the latter than the former.

Q: What is on your wish list? Is it an actual established business model for content creators?

That’s one of them. See EmanciPay at http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/projectvrm/EmanciPay.

Also,

✓ Grass-roots growth of municipal and regional broadband utilities — rising tides that lift all boats.

✓ Preservation of the ‘Net as an open, simple, end-to-end style system that’s NEA: Nobody owns it, Everybody can use it, and Anybody can improve it.

✓ Success of open mobile devices running on Android, Symbian, and other operating systems that no one company controls.
✓ Evolution of journalism from the exclusive province of the few into the standard practice of the many — with a sense or moral purpose and balance and purpose in the course of it. For a little on that, see my post at http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/doc/2010/04/21/write-and-wrong.

I could go on, but that’s probably more than enough.

Q: Or is it the continuing creative chaos, where it’s possible for people with a compelling message to make up a revenue stream on the fly?

Well, it’s that too.