

Blogging and beyond

The Wonders of WordPress 1

Several staff members recently attended an event called "**WordCamp Albuquerque**", a weekend seminar about WordPress which Southwest Cyberport helped sponsor. It's the first time such an event has been held here, and it was a great success. We returned with a deeper understanding and an even greater appreciation of this remarkable tool.

Over the next several issues, we'll publish a series of articles telling how you can get the most out of it.

Evolution of the blog

Blogging is now old hat on the Internet, but blogs are still incredibly popular. According to the Nielson Company, there are currently an estimated *156 million* of them. Beginning in the late 90s as "**web logs**", interactive guest books which turned into online diaries, it was the ability of visitors to directly talk back to the authors that led to blogging's great explosion over the last decade.

Now blogs deliver everything from personal philosophy to hard news to merchandise for sale. According to Technorati in 2008, 65% were made by hobbyists, the remainder for commercial purposes. But with increasing numbers of professional journalists and other experts taking to them, blogs may be on the verge of replacing paper newspapers and magazines. Some bloggers have been able to leverage their passion into a full-time career, and countless others creatively use their blogs to successfully promote their writing, teaching, consulting and other services, art, even real estate.

Since its first version in 2003, **WordPress** (wordpress.org) quickly became the single most widely used self-hosted blogging platform around, now with *25 million users*. WordPress is open-source and highly adaptable, and there's a huge and enthusiastic community of users and developers constantly improving it.

Free and open

WordPress is based on "**themes**". These are more than just "skins" which control the look of the blog, they contain **templates** which govern the structure and behavior of all the pages. You can buy premium themes, but the basic program and enhancements are all *free*. And there are thousands of free themes available, too. If you wanted, your WordPress blog could have a new design every single day, and you'd never have to repeat. Though many themes come with striking front page graphics included, a good number are designed to be easily customizable for your own choices of color, layout, and images.

WordPress is easy to install and simple to upgrade, designed for people who have no interest or ability to program, but highly tweakable by those who do. One of the beauties of WordPress is that the platform is very flexible and customizable by the user right out of the box. WordPress blogs are clean and clear-cut, straightforward to use for content creators as well as casual browsers. Since it's all up in the cloud, a web browser is all you need to work it.

Blogging with WordPress is probably the easiest way to establish and maintain a large and lasting presence online entirely on your own terms. It's only *\$15/month* plus a **Domain Registration**, which start at *\$20/year*. Blogs are a great way to share your ideas and creativity, meet like-minded people, and maybe even make money online. Call our Help Desk today, and start posting tomorrow!



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Online "Sextortionist" Sentenced

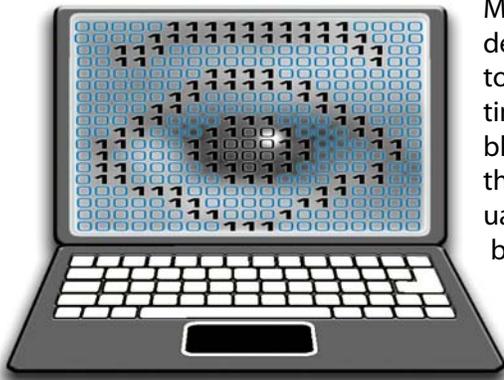
In a bizarre case seemingly taken from a TV cop show that will likely inspire one soon, several teenage girls in Glendale, California were stalked online in 2009 by a person that seemingly knew everything about them. The young women were contacted online by a person, in one instance using a screen name nearly identical to her boyfriend, who had nude photos of them and demanded "Web sex" in exchange for not posting them online.

The stalker knew what the girls' bedrooms looked like and tracked their activities online, threatening them if they went to the police. The few times that anyone told, the stalker acted on his threats, once even posting a nude picture of one girl to the MySpace account of her confidant.

The cases grew ever stranger and more disturbing. Girls would get instant messages supposedly from siblings who were in the next room and offline. Webcam lights would turn on seemingly by themselves – one woman even covered hers with a sticker because it was so unnerving. Several of the women and even the men involved were traumatized, and at least one relationship broke up as a result.

The FBI investigated for six months before arresting the hacker, who turned out to be a 32-year old, wheelchair-bound, illegal immigrant named **Luis Mijangos**. Despite his paralyzed condition, the result of a drive-by shooting in Mexico when he was 17, Mijangos not only snuck into the country, but took computer classes at community college in California and became proficient enough in computer skills that he was legitimately clearing \$1,000 a week.

But Mijangos admitted he was up to a lot more, making three times that amount each day working with hackers to transfer money and use stolen credit card numbers. He also confessed to occasionally hacking other people's computers. His favorite trick to gain access was to seed file sharing networks with popular song titles that concealed malware.



Mijangos denied "sex-torting" victims – that is, blackmailing them for sexual favors – but claimed he was hacking into their

accounts at the request of the women's boyfriends or husbands. The FBI soon ripped those claims to shreds when scans of Mijango's laptops, phone, and flash drives revealed he had actually gone after 129 computers and a total of 230 victims, 44 of whom were underage. He even kept screenshots from some hacked machines showing their owners' banking and financial information.

However, it was his obsessive behavior that was most disturbing. Mijangos devoted considerable time and effort toying with victims. If he couldn't find incriminating photos or videos on women's computers, he would attempt to make some himself with their own webcams. If he got access to a male's laptop, he would impersonate the man to ask the girlfriend for pictures, and some would oblige. He would monitor instant messaging, email, even use the microphone on their laptops to listen to phone conversations. This naturally terrified his victims into compliance.

Mijangos reached a plea bargain and was recently handed 72 months in prison. However, his is not the only online sextortion case to surface. One high school boy in Milwaukee, for instance, conned a number of his male classmates into sending him nude pictures, after which he demanded sex. In fact, the FBI reports such a rising number of cases that the term "**sextortion**" is now used in criminal filings.

Without the existence of unsecured intimate and embarrassing images, such criminals would have no chance. But all those in these cases already had such material lying around unprotected. With creation and distribution of images so easy with modern technology, sextortion will likely only continue to grow.



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Facebook Caught Again

The social media giant has goofed again, found to be tracking members around the web even after they've logged out. And once again, they have apologized for the "mistake" saying it happened accidentally. However, the data gathered just happens to be worth millions of dollars to advertisers. Earlier this year, Facebook was caught gathering browser data from people who've never even visited the site.