

# citizen media

AN INTRODUCTION



Cambodian blogger Sopheap Chak uses her weblog to share information about human rights in Cambodia. <http://sopheapfocus.blogspot.com/>

## Introduction to Citizen Media

### A change is taking place in how we communicate.

Just ten years ago we all learned about the world around us from newspapers, the television, and radio. Professional journalists would go to faraway places and bring back stories, photographs and videos of the situations they witnessed and the people they met.

Sometimes at dinner we talk about these stories with our friends and family. But ten years ago we rarely, if ever, communicated directly with the journalists themselves. Leading members of society wrote editorials expressing their opinions about various issues, but the rest of us could only share our

opinions and thoughts with a small group of friends.

Over the last few years everything has changed. Thanks to new tools like weblogs, it is now possible to easily publish to the Internet. From Turkey to Kenya to Bolivia, everyday people like you and me are starting to share their stories and opinions with the rest of the world.

While this new form of communication is now freely available to anyone, most of the people participating still live in the wealthy neighborhoods of urban cities.

The purpose of this guide is to show that anyone with an internet connection can participate in the emerging global conversation. Our understanding of the

world is now shaped not just by the newspapers and television, but also by each other.

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Rising Voices is a citizen media outreach initiative of Global Voices [[www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)]. By connecting passionate bloggers, podcasters, and video-makers from around the world, we hope that every neighbor from every neighborhood is able to participate in the online conversation that is spreading across the globe. This guide - Introduction to Citizen Media - is the first in a series of publications meant to make the world of participatory media easier to understand and take part in.



Even though Venezuela is a deeply divided country, bloggers in the capital city, Caracas, share their thoughts about the changes taking place around them. <http://www.to2blogs.com/>

## As Easy as Email

The word "blog" is short for weblog and refers to a type of website that is updated chronologically. You can think of a blog just like email. Except, instead of sending an email to just one person, you are publishing the note on a website where it can be seen by anyone in the world with an internet connection.

Most blogs allow for comments, which means that other people are allowed to leave a public comment on every note that you publish. If, for example, you write that Michael Jackson was the greatest singer that ever lived, I could leave a comment disagreeing with you. This is how a conversation begins - one person writes his or her opinion and then others either agree or disagree. Some of the most popular weblogs frequently receive over 100 comments every time something is published.

The first blogs started to appear in the mid-1990's, but blogging didn't really get popular until around 2003. These days the websites of many newspapers, celebrities, and even presidents also contain weblogs where new information is posted on a daily or weekly basis.

## Start in Just Five Minutes

Starting a blog is just as fast and easy as starting an email account. In

fact, you'll notice several similarities between writing an email message and writing a post on a blog. The two accompanying tutorials to this guide will show you how to start and maintain a blog using two of the most popular free services, WordPress.com and Blogger.com.

It doesn't really matter which service you choose - both are free and available in many languages. And, if you change your mind, you can usually import your blog from one type of service to another.

If you are eager to begin, you can skip the rest of this introduction for now and head straight to one of the tutorials on how to set up a blog with either Wordpress.com or Blogger.com. However, there are a few things you might want to consider before you start.

## Why blog?

Tens of millions of people all over the world now have weblogs. There are blogs in over 100 different languages and covering more topics than you could possibly imagine. However, the great majority of blogs are written from North America, East Asia, and Western Europe. Even though internet access has spread across much of the globe, participation in this new, exciting, online conversation has mostly been

## Four Steps to Blogging

Every blogger needs just four things to get started



### 1. A Computer

You will need a computer, but it doesn't have to be your own. Because blogging software is all on the internet, you can write, publish, and archive all of your content online and access it from any computer at any cyber-cafe.

### 2. An Internet Connection

Having a fast internet connection does help if you are interested in working with audio and video, but even extremely slow connections are OK for text blogging.

### 3. Blogging Software

One of the first choices you must make is what kind of software you want to use to make your weblog. Rising Voices offers guides on two of the most popular services: <http://blogger.com> and <http://wordpress.com>.

### 4. Opinions and Stories

Finally you will need something to write about. Some people treat their blogs like public journals - a way to record the experiences of their lives. Others like to discuss politics or share their opinions about the state of the world. What you choose to write about is up to you, but we offer a few suggestions on the next page.

“Everyone will be famous to 15 people.” - David Weinberger

constrained to just the Northern Hemisphere. These guides hope to inspire more creative participation from individuals in the so-called developing world.

Different people keep blogs for different reasons. Some people want to record their lives for their children and grand-children and great-great-grand children. Even though we will never meet our great-great-grand grandchildren, they will be able to experience our lives just as we do thanks to what we leave behind on the Internet. Unlike photographs and paper journals which fade and decay after time, what is published to the internet can survive forever.

Others keep blogs because they are passionate about a certain topic, issue, or hobby. Many blogs focus on technology and politics while others focus on literature, art, and photography. Still other niche blogs explain how to start a business, how to invest money, or how to work more productively. Fictional blogs are also becoming increasingly popular as both established and aspiring writers are now publishing their short stories to the internet.

There are blogs about how to be a better farmer, how to be a better parent, and how to be a better guitar player. In fact, if you are interested in anything at all, there is most likely a blog about it. (On the next page we'll look at ways to discover blogs that match your interests.)

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## Blogging won't make you famous or rich

Some people start to blog because they want to be famous. While there are a handful of blogs that are read by tens of thousands of people every day, most blogs only have 10 - 20 dedicated readers. In the days of just a few television and radio stations, everyone was searching for his or her 15 minutes of fame. In the Internet era, everyone is 'famous' to just about 15 people. But the support, encouragement, and advice that comes from those 15 individuals is much more valuable and longer-lasting than

## Case Studies:

### Hernán Casciari



This Argentinian might be considered the first blog novelist. Two of his blogs "More respect, I am your mother" and "Orsai" have now been published in book form in many languages. <http://www.orsai.es/>

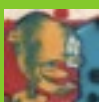
### Bongo Celebrity

You'll soon discover that many blogs are devoted to celebrities and tabloid gossip. There is nothing new about that. But where else might you find a blog focused specifically on Tanzanian celebrities? Most of the posts are written in Swahili. <http://bongocelebrity.com/>

### Chilanga Banda

Chilanga Banda is what is often referred to as a 'metro blog'; that is, a blog that covers a particular city and is authored by multiple people. In this case, Chilanga Banda reports on the latest events and best places to go in Mexico City. <http://www.chilangabanda.com/>

### Kubatana.net



Kubana.net is a group blog written by Zimbabwean activists who demand an end to the Mugabe dictatorship. <http://kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/>

### EastSouthNorthWest

Chinese blogger Roland Soong has become an important bridge between China and the West thanks to his blog where he translates various newspaper articles and blog posts from Chinese to English. <http://zonga.europa.com/weblog.htm>

### Mentalacrobatics



Nairobi-based Kenyan blogger Daudi Were covers an impressive number of topics ranging from Kenyan politics to Pan-African identity to new advances in technology. [www.mentalacrobatics.com/think/](http://www.mentalacrobatics.com/think/)

### Tharum Bun



Tharum is often credited as being the first Cambodian blogger. His online journal is a rare glimpse into the life of a young, middle-class Cambodian as his country heals from the violent era of the Khmer Rouge and starts to integrate into the global economy. <http://tharum.info/>

### Konfused Kid

One of the thousands of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan, 'Konfused Kid' helps explain the complexities of Iraqi society and the Arab world. <http://ejectiraqikk.blogspot.com/>

### Desi Pundit

Desi Pundit is another group blog which covers India-related topics and is authored by mostly Indian bloggers who live around the world. <http://desipundit.com/>



### Blog Pasa en B.A.

Even city governments - like Buenos Aires - are blogging. <http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/blog/pasaenbsas>



anything that comes from 15 minutes of celebrity fame.

There are also very few blogs that are able to make much money by posting advertisements. The majority of bloggers can only expect US \$3 - \$10 a month. However, there are other ways in which blogging can help you realize your dreams. Many people have been offered jobs or partnerships because of the expertise they demonstrate about a certain topic on their blog. Others start to build a reputation and are invited to speak at international conferences. Business owners are able to write about their products and services in a way that is more meaningful (and much cheaper) than traditional advertising. Finally, blogging introduces you to people with similar interests who may live thousands of miles away. Those contacts can be valuable when you need help or assistance, or even if you just have a question. You can get more ideas about why people start to blog by reading the case studies on the previous page.

## Find new voices

The previous page gave us a few examples of people who are using blogs in creative ways. By visiting their blogs you can get a good sense of the length of their posts, the comments they attract, and the style of their writing. Unlike standard journalism, blogging tends to be more informal and conversational.

A valuable resource to find blogs that match your interests is a website called Technorati. It is similar to Google, but rather than searching all of the internet, it only searches citizen media like blogs, photographs and video. Let's say, for example, that you live in Mexico and you would like to find some blogs that discuss your country. All you have to do is point your browser to <http://technorati.com> and then search for "Mexico". You can then narrow down



*Tanzanian blogger Ndesanjo Macha writes in both English and Swahili so that he can communicate with global and local audiences.*  
[www.digitalafrica.blogspot.com/](http://www.digitalafrica.blogspot.com/)

your search by looking at just blogs, posts, photos, or videos. If there are too many blogs and it is too overwhelming, you can search for your specific city or even neighborhood. Alternatively, if you're passionate about a certain music group, football player, or book, you can search for it and see who else shares your interests. We will review all of this in further detail in the guide titled "Intro to RSS."

## Choose your news

One of the most useful aspects of blogs can also seem like the most confusing. Rather than visiting dozens of different websites, you are now able to read all the latest posts from all of your favorite blogs on a single web page. That single web

page is called a feed aggregator and it is helpful to think of it as your own online newspaper – you are able to select which articles appear each day based on which blogs you subscribe to.

This is thanks to a technology called RSS (or, Really Simple Syndication). Every time you publish a post on your blog, the content of that post appears both on the blog itself as well as in a RSS feed that can be displayed on other websites and by software programs that sit on your computer. This will all make more sense once we run through how to use one of the most popular feed readers - Google Reader - in the guide titled "Intro to RSS".

## Have fun

Of course, most important is that you enjoy yourself and that blogging is a fun and rewarding way to spend your time. We can now share our experiences and stories with the rest of the world. And we can learn about the rest of the world from people just like us.

## Abhijit Nadgouda shares what he has gained from blogging

1. Writing helps you think better and deeper

By writing down a thought and sharing it with others, you are often forced to examine it more critically and honestly yourself.

2. Blogging has no rules

You can be as creative and imaginative as you like.

3. Archive your brain

By taking 30 minutes out of each day to write down our thoughts and experiences, we can look back and see how we've grown and changed.

4. Connect with people you otherwise wouldn't meet

By writing your own blog and reading the blogs of others, you can meet people from other countries and cultures who share your interests.

<http://lorelle.wordpress.com/2007/08/06/why-blog/>

## Blogging Anonymously

There are many reasons to blog under your real name, including credibility, honesty, and reputation. But some people live in places where what they write could threaten their safety. For this reason, Global Voices has put together a guide on how to blog anonymously and hide your online identity.



[advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org](http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org)

## Photo Bloggers



Tanzanian blogger Philemon Msangi complements his posts with captivating photographs.

[mwenyemacho.wordpress.com/](http://mwenyemacho.wordpress.com/)



In his photoblog, *Windy Skies*, Anil P. documents scenes of daily life from all around India. Above, a coconut vendor prepares a refreshing drink.

<http://windyskies.blogspot.com/>



Emmanuel Bensah's blog, *Accra by Day and Night*, shows daily glimpses of life in Ghana's capital city. Often, the images - like the above newspaper vendor - inspire a brief commentary on life in Accra.

[accradailyphoto.blogspot.com/](http://accradailyphoto.blogspot.com/)



Sabri Hakim shows a side of Jordan and the Middle East that most of us would never experience on our own.

<http://www.sabrihakim.com/>



<http://www.khosoof.com/> is one of the most popular photoblogs in Iran.

Some of his photographs have now been published in the BBC and

Washington Post. A photograph he took of women activists in Iran attracted over 50,000 views in just one day.

## Let your camera speak for you

As is so often repeated, "a picture speaks a thousand words." Although many of us enjoy writing and reading, others prefer to communicate with images. As digital cameras become cheaper and as more cell phones can now take digital pictures, it has become easier to share photos of our friends, families, and communities with the rest of the world.

Most of us don't have the desire to become professional photographers — we simply enjoy documenting what we see and sharing those photos with our friends and anyone else who might be interested. There are now several websites which allow you to publish your photos for free to the internet. You can also publish photographs on your blog. Sometimes the best way to tell a story on a blog is by using a combination of photographs and captions.

In the guide titled "Introduction to Photo-Blogging" we will explain how to publish and find photographs on the internet.

## Our cameras connect us

Websites like <http://flickr.com> and <http://picasa.com> are more than just places where you can publish photos for free. They are also communities with groups, forums, and other social features. For example, there are many groups dedicated to sports photography or photos of cars.

You can also add geographic information to your photos and view a map of the world to discover who else is posting photographs in cities and villages both near and far.



In this video produced by Jay Dedman, Thai blogger Chiranuch explains how to publish video to the internet at a workshop in Bangkok.

## Make your own movie or Internet TV show

Ten years ago almost all movies and television shows were made in Hollywood, California. To watch a movie you had to buy an expensive ticket at the movie theater. Many people had dreams of becoming a famous actor, actress, or director, but we had neither the money nor equipment to realize our dreams.

Today everything has changed. For just US \$100 now anyone can make a television show and distribute it online. All you need is a video camera, a computer, an internet connection, and an idea for a show.

In the accompanying guide titled "How to Make Internet TV" we will explain exactly how you can start your own Internet TV show and offer some tips about how to make the most compelling videos. We will also talk about ways in which you can use your mobile phones to record short video clips and then publish those clips to the internet. Some news websites are even offering small amounts of money to

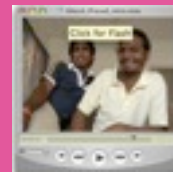
people who capture video of news-worthy events on their cell phones.

## But first a warning

While video is lots of fun to make and watch, it is also much more time consuming to produce and publish to the web. Because internet connections are still slow in much of the world, it takes many people over two hours to download a single internet TV show. Obviously, this excludes anyone who accesses the internet at a cyber-cafe. On the other hand, it usually takes no longer than 5 - 10 seconds to view a weblog. And if you're using a RSS reader like Google Reader, then in just a few seconds you are able to read the latest content from hundreds or even thousands of blogs.

In other words, think about what you are trying to accomplish and who are you trying to reach? What is the objective of your Internet TV show and are you able to achieve those same goals using a combination of photos and text?

## Case Studies:



*Swajana* is a collection of video vignettes which offer a glimpse into daily life in India. Recent

shows have covered spiritual pilgrimages, after-school programs, and a nearby flour mill. <http://swajana.com>



*Something to be desired* is a weekly Internet comedy sitcom about the lives of a group of recent university

graduates living in Pittsburgh in the United States.

[www.somethingtobedesired.com](http://www.somethingtobedesired.com)



*Alive in Mexico* is one of the only bilingual Internet video shows, showing life in Mexico to local and

global audiences.

[www.aliveinmexico.org](http://www.aliveinmexico.org)

## Protect Human Rights with your cell phone

Though still in its infancy, the WITNESS Video Hub will be a participatory website where anyone, anywhere can upload human rights related media that can be used to create change. If you have witnessed police brutality, or any other kind of human rights abuse, and captured it on your cell phone or video camera, here is a way to safely and anonymously document what happened and help put an end to it.



[www.witness.org/hub](http://www.witness.org/hub)



## Great Podcasts:



*The Kamla Bhatt Show* is an independently produced podcast that features aspects of modern India that most of the world is not

familiar with.

<http://www.kamlabhattsshow.com>



*Tango City Tour* is produced in Buenos Aires by two passionate lovers of Tango Music. Through the songs and musicians they feature

on each podcast, we learn more about Buenos Aires and Argentina.

<http://www.tangocitytour.com.ar/>



*CitizenReporter.org with Bicyclemark* is a weekly podcast produced by a Portuguese-American

living in Amsterdam. Each week he covers a new topic in a new country and often interviews local bloggers to get help understanding the latest news.

<http://www.bicyclemark.org/blog/>

## What you'll need

- A microphone - A cheap headset meant for Skype or voice-chatting also works well.
- A computer - Located in a quiet place so there is little background noise.
- Editing software - In the guide titled "Intro to Podcasting" we will explain how to use the free software program, Audacity, to edit and produce a professional sounding podcast.
- An Internet connection - Although podcasts take much less time to publish to the Internet compared to video, it can still take up to 30 minutes to publish a podcast and another 30 minutes to download one.



*Georgia Popplewell, the first podcaster from the Caribbean, interviews a young kite-flyer in Trinidad and Tobago. On Caribbean Free Radio, she interviews local artists and personalities, sharing little-known aspects of Caribbean culture with the rest of the world.* <http://www.caribbeanfreeradio.com/blog>

## Take the radio with you

Just as anyone can now produce a TV show from his or her bedroom, it is also possible to now produce your own radio program on a regular basis and distribute it via the Internet. This new kind of Internet radio program is called a 'podcast' - a play on words which combines 'broadcast' and 'iPod', the popular mp3 player.

Internet TV requires that you sit in front of your computer to watch the show. A podcast, on the other hand, is something you can take with you and listen to in the car, while you're going for a walk, or while you are sitting on the bus or metro. MP3 players are becoming cheaper every month and a lot of new cell phones also allow you to play audio files (such as podcasts) through your headphones.

Although podcasts don't allow you to see a person's facial expressions or the moving images that make video so appealing, they do let you hear the tone of a person's voice, the sounds from his or her country, as well as music. Unlike traditional radio programs which require that you are near a radio at a certain time and day each week, podcasts are available to listen to whenever you want. If you believe that part of the program is boring, you can simply fast-forward. Wouldn't it be nice if we were able to fast-forward through all the boring parts of radio?

## Creative Commons and a culture of sharing

As soon as people discover the power of podcasting, often times they want to start a music podcast to share their favorite music with others. Unfortunately, most songs are under copyright restrictions, which means you must first pay an expensive fee to the musician's record company. Fortunately, many musicians who are more interested in sharing their music than making money are starting to publish their songs under Creative Commons licenses, which allow you to use their works so long as you give them credit. Some Creative Commons licenses even allow you to remix their songs and/or make money from them. We'll look at ways to find songs with Creative Commons licenses in the guide, "Intro to Podcasting." An example of a Creative Commons music podcast can be found at <http://indieish.com/revolution/>.



## “Don’t hate the media, make media.”

### To conclude



We’ve now seen many ways in which the Internet is having a profound effect on the global

media and how we communicate with each other. 10 years ago very few people participated in the process of making media. Today, professional media outlets like newspapers, magazines, TV shows, and radio programs still exist, but they are also being complemented by a new group of media makers - everyday citizens of the world, just like you and me.

It does not matter if we live in a rural village in Tanzania or in a bustling major city like Beijing – anyone and everyone with an Internet connection can now take part in the process of making media. If we feel that our community’s journalists are failing us, we can show them how to do better.

This exciting (and sometimes overwhelming) world of blogs, podcasts, and online video is often referred to as “citizen media.” Most likely, it won’t replace traditional journalism – we still need the investigative reports of trained professionals. But online media, which allow anyone to take part and voice an opinion, might be the first step to a world which allows for more participation, more diversity, and more transparency.

### Next step, participate

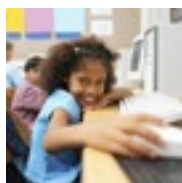
We hope that this introductory guide has given you a better understanding of citizen media. We hope that you feel inspired to spend time getting to know some of the blogs, podcasts, and

Internet TV shows that we have listed as case studies. We hope that you search for even more citizen media. And, above all, we hope that this introduction inspires you to move on to the next guide and learn how to participate.

Each of the guides is designed so that you can read it separately from the rest. If a certain topic interests you more than the others, feel free to read it first. However, we suggest the following order:

1. Intro to Citizen Media
2. Intro to RSS
- 3(a). How to use WordPress  
(b). How to use Blogger
4. Intro to Online Photography
- 5(a). Intro to Podcasting  
(b). How to use Audacity
- 6(a). Intro to Online Video  
(b). How to use Movie Maker

### Join the global conversation



Global Voices is a community of citizen media enthusiasts from around the world which aggregates, curates, and amplifies the international online

conversation. Whether you’re looking for podcasts from Japan or captivating photos from Macedonia, Global Voices is an online village of everyday people sharing stories, photographs, and opinions from their corner of the world to yours.

We hope that you take part in the conversation.

[www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)

### Veteran blogger Joi Ito recommends these five tips to all bloggers

1. Be modest - The Internet is a big place and it is more than likely that someone else out there knows more about the topic we’re writing about than we do. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t write about it, just try not to sound like a know-it-all.
2. Ask for help - If you are grappling with a problem that you need help figuring out, ask your readers. It’s also a good way to start a conversation.
3. Take a position - Other websites like Wikipedia request neutrality and objectivity, but weblogs are great places to both state opinions and be tolerant of other opinions that might differ from yours.
4. Link - Try to search around other blogs before publishing something yourself. If you find others discussing a similar topic, then link to their posts. Try to participate in a conversation rather than stand on a soapbox.
5. Write early, write often - Focus on communicating your points clearly. It’s good to use proper spelling and grammar, but it’s more important to just write and participate.

[http://joi.ito.com/archives/2005/10/10/blogging\\_style.html](http://joi.ito.com/archives/2005/10/10/blogging_style.html)

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