

# **GOING SELF-HOSTED WITH WORDPRESS**

**A Wolfie Guide**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **What's it all about?**

In December 2007 I moved my blog, The Wolf's Howl, from its first home at Wordpress.com to a new, self-hosted home. Along the way, I found many little odds and ends that were not immediately obvious regarding the whole self-hosted experience.

I started to write about them for two reasons; firstly as a reminder to myself about what problems I'd encountered and how I'd solved them and secondly as a guide for others who were thinking of taking the leap to being self-hosted.

I've now collected those articles into this one document, which I'm making available as PDF, so that anyone who feels it would be of use can have it as a handy desk reference. That way, they don't need to be connected to The New Wolfs Howl all the time they're reading it.

The self-hosted experiment is still ongoing and I will no doubt add more articles soon. When I do, I'll also update this PDF. If you want to be emailed when a new version becomes available, please use the Contact form on The New Wolfs Howl to tell me.

WolfieB  
January 2008

<http://wolfshowl.com>

## PART ONE

### To self-host or not to self-host

As I've mentioned, I started blogging nine months ago using the multi-user platform Wordpress.com. It is a great introduction to the world of blogging, as it makes it really easy to get yourself set up and publishing - the only thing holding you back is whether you can think of something to write about.

But as you go on, you start to realise that, good as it is, Wordpress.com is quite restrictive in what it allows you to do. You can't have javascript in your sidebar widgets; you can't alter your theme unless you buy the CSS upgrade - and even then you can only alter the way it looks, not the way it works; you can't have anything commercial, like Adsense or services like PayPerPost; and a host of other things, which will be more or less important depending on what you want to achieve with your blogging.

There are alternatives, like Blogger, which still do all the work for you but give you more control over what you can do - but they're not as nice to use as the Wordpress software. So you start to consider the possibility of buying yourself a domain name and hosting the blog yourself. This is what I've recently done with The New Wolf's Howl.

People start to worry when you talk about self-hosting; they look at you as if you're talking some sort of strange, new foreign language. They assume that it's really technical and they won't be able to do it, or they assume that it's really expensive and it's not worth it. I'll be honest, it's not the ideal solution for everyone but it doesn't have to be technical and it doesn't have to be expensive. The question you need to ask yourself is whether your blog is worth a little bit of effort to learn some new skills and perhaps install a new piece of software? There are things that Wordpress.com does for you at the moment that you will have to do for yourself if you move - are you prepared to put in that extra bit of work for the extra freedom you'll get? Can you handle a little bit of FTP?

If you're tech-savvy enough to be thinking about moving because you can't have javascript in your sidebar widgets, or you're thinking of getting the CSS upgrade because you want to be able to change the header image on your theme then you should have no problems going self-hosted. If you're perfectly happy with what Wordpress.com provides for you and there isn't anything about your blog you need to change then I'd suggest that you don't need to go self-hosted - at least not yet.

The first thing to consider is what you need your website to do; the possibilities are endless and you can pretty much do anything you want. But you need to decide first (at least roughly) what you want your website to do, as this may influence the services you buy and the level of technicality that will be involved. For the purposes of this guide, we're going to assume that all you want to do at this stage is host your blog.

So the first thing you need to do is to get yourself some hosting. There are literally thousands of companies out there that will offer you this service, and they'll offer it to you at all sorts of prices. As with many things, you do get what you pay for so beware

of anything that's really cheap - but at the same time, don't go spending lots of money on things you really don't need. There are two services that I would recommend:

**A Small Orange:** I heard about this one from Timethief, and they offer various hosting plans to suit all different needs and budgets. I've gone for their Tiny plan initially, as this gives me everything I need to get up and running here at The New Wolf's Howl with the option to increase the services if I need to. I paid \$10 to register the domain name (<http://wolfshowl.com>) for a year, and I paid \$15 for a six-month Tiny plan. (A full year is only \$25, but I wanted to try out the service).

**Hosting Unlimited:** this is a UK based service that offers, again, a choice of plans to suit your needs. They'll charge you £8.50 to register a .com domain and £22.95 for their Standard plan for 12 months. I've used this service through the company I work for.

Both of these services are basically the same, but the refinement of what each package offers is slightly different. Both sites can register your domain for you as part of the sign up process, both will give you email addresses, web space, a decent amount of bandwidth per month and online technical support. I haven't had to use the support for Small Orange yet, but Hosting Unlimited is very good. There's plenty of information available about each of the services to enable you to make your choice.

The big advantage for someone wanting to move to a self-hosted Wordpress blog is that both of these services offer cPanel (many other hosting companies do). cPanel is where you control everything about your new website, from setting up your email accounts to managing your SQL databases. But, daunting as that may sound to some of you, it's actually really easy.

What we want to know is how to install Wordpress. Well, that takes about five clicks of a mouse; included within cPanel is a service called Fantastico. This is a resource for lots of functionality you can add to your website - message boards, shopping carts, guest books, etc - but which has all been set up in such a way that it gets installed for you. To install Wordpress from within Fantastico, you just need to tell it what folder you want to install it to (if all you want on your website is your blog, you don't even need to give it a folder), give it a username, password and email address and that's it. Click a couple of "Continue" buttons and you'll get a "Finished" message. It takes less than a minute.

Assuming you've installed Wordpress in your 'root' folder (you didn't enter a folder name when asked), when you visit your website now at <http://yourdomain.com> you'll be presented with your blog. You'll notice that there's nothing there yet (just the usual Wordpress "Hello World" entry) but that's because you haven't made any entries yet.

When you use Wordpress.org software - which is what you just installed through Fantastico - you still get a dashboard like you do with Wordpress.com. To access it, just add "/wp-admin" to the end of your domain name - <http://yourdomain.com/wp-admin>. That'll present you with the familiar Wordpress log in screen; enter the username and password that you created in the set up process and you're in.

The first thing you'll want to do is to bring in all your posts and comments from your Wordpress.com blog. Again, this is just a question of a few clicks of a mouse. First of

all, go back to your Wordpress.com dashboard, and click the “Manage” button. You’ll see there are various options, including one called “Export”; click that and you’re presented with a simple screen. Leave ‘Restrict Author’ set to the default of “All” and click the “Download Export File” button.

What you’re now doing is downloading an XML-format file that contains all of your posts and comments; don’t let that XML nonsense put you off - all you need to do with the file is save it somewhere so that you’ll be able to find it later (the desktop is usually a good place).

Now go back to the dashboard of your shiny new domain (<http://yourdomain.com/wp-admin>). You’ll see that it looks pretty much the same as the Wordpress.com one; there are a few differences, but we’ll get to those later. For now, what you need to do is reverse the process you’ve just gone through - you need to import what you just exported.

So, staying on your self-hosted dashboard go to “Manage” again. This time you need to click “Import”. This will then present you with a list of blog types that you can import from. As you’ve just created your export file in Wordpress, that’s the one you need to click on.

You’ll be asked to put in the path to the export file you made; click the “Browse” button and locate the file on your desktop (or wherever you saved it) and then click the “Upload file and import” button. Wordpress will then upload your XML file and import all your posts and comments to your new blog. Again, a simple process that should only take a minute or two.

So, from a content point of view your new, self-hosted blog is now exactly the same as the one that was hosted at Wordpress.com. But it probably doesn’t look the same, and this is where the differences between the two breeds of Wordpress start to make themselves apparent.

Your Wordpress.com blog has a particular look to it - a theme. You chose it from the relatively small number that are available to Wordpress.com users in their dashboards, under the “Presentation” tab. Wordpress.org also uses themes, but there are 100’s available to you through Wordpress - and probably 1,000’s more available from websites all over the Net. Unfortunately, only two come installed as standard and if you want more, you have to install them yourself.

This isn’t a difficult process, but if you haven’t done it before it can seem a little overwhelming. To do it, you have to use a process known as File Transfer Protocol - FTP. Basically, your computer talks to another computer that is hosting your website and says “Here you go; have some files!”. There are many different programs out there that will allow you to transfer files in this way, and the one that’s right for you will vary depending on how simple you need the process to be. If you already know how to FTP, you’ve probably got your favourite but if you’ve never done it before here are a couple that I’d recommend:

For Mac users: Cyberduck. This is donation-ware (in other words, you don’t have to pay for it but if you find it useful, you could make a donation to help keep the project going). Whilst it offers all sorts of bells and whistles that make it appealing to the

tech-heads, it's also really simple to use for anyone that's never done this sort of thing before. You just need to know a couple of bits of information - your domain name and your username and password - and your set.

For Windows users (if we can't persuade you to move to a Mac): CuteFTP. This you'll have to pay for (a trial version is available) but it is one of the best Windows FTP programs available. Again, fairly simple to set up - the instructions supplied are pretty good - but you'll need to supply a bit more info. Don't worry, though, it's all info that you'll have been given by your hosting provider.

If you've gone with one of the hosting providers that offer cPanel, you can even install your FTP program through them. From your cPanel, click the option for "FTP Accounts"; you'll then be presented with a list of "Account Management" options; on the line that contains either your username click "Configure FTP Client". This then takes you to another screen where you can install either Filezilla or CoreFTP for Windows and Cyberduck for Mac. Each program is given dedicated instructions, and the process will also set up the correct settings for you to access your online files.

Once you've got your program installed and set up, then using it is like using Finder on Mac or Explorer on Windows; you transfer files from one folder to another as you would on your computer normally; the only difference is that you're doing it between two computers that are connected over the Net. If you've got a home network already, you'll be familiar with the concept.

So you've got yourself all set to use FTP to upload your new theme; you just need to find it. A lot of the themes that are available on Wordpress.com are available to Wordpress.org users. Go to the Theme Viewer and you'll see that there are over 100 pages of them! Luckily, there's a search function, and you can use the sorting options to narrow the selection down to ones that interest you.

Once you find one you like, download it. Again, put the file somewhere you can find it - the desktop is a good place. It'll only take a matter of seconds to download. What you get is a ZIP file; double-click it to unzip it and within there should be a folder, which contains all the files needed for your new theme. This folder is what you need to upload (FTP) to your website. Using your chosen FTP program, upload the theme folder to the folder called wp-content/themes that you'll find on your website.

When that's done, go back to your dashboard (<http://yourdomain.com/wp-admin>), click the "Presentation" tab, and select the theme you've just uploaded and make it the active theme. Now when you look at your website, you'll see all your content, looking really good in the theme you've chosen for it.

So that gets you up and running with either the same theme you had at Wordpress.com, or one that you like better. The next installment of this Guide will go into a bit more detail about what other differences you might come across and the new things that you can do with your self-hosted blog.

## PART TWO

# Of Blogrolls and Widgets

I realised that there were a couple of major elements that I didn't cover in my recent post about going self-hosted with Wordpress. Those were importing your Blogroll and which Widgets you can have as standard and which ones you'll have to hunt for. These two items, plus what I covered in To self-host or not... should then put your blog back into the same state that it was when it was hosted at Wordpress.com.

So, Blogroll. You've probably got loads of links in yours - I certainly had quite a number in mine when I decided to transfer - but they don't get exported with everything else when you create your export XML file. Not sure why, but the way they're managed in the dashboard probably has something to do with it.

At the time that I transferred this blog, I didn't know that you could export them; I could see an "Import" button in the Blogroll dashboard, but not an "Export" one. So I moved all mine by hand, one by one. I decided to dump a few of them during this process, so it did allow me to do a bit of spring-cleaning that I perhaps might not have done, but it was a slow tedious process. But you don't need to go through that process; there is a quicker, easier way - it's just not obvious.

The "Import" function requires an OPML file. Apparently this stands for Outline Processor Markup Language; what that means I have no idea, but it's a file type related to XML (what you used to export all your posts) which, as I understand it, should be understood by pretty much any system going. So how do you get your Blogroll into an OPML format?

Well, you don't really need to if you're importing from a Wordpress.com blog. Go to Blogroll in the dashboard of your self-hosted blog and click "Import". Here you're presented with two boxes - one asking for an Internet address or one offering the opportunity to upload a file from your local machine. You want the first one.

In this box type the URL of your Wordpress.com blog, followed by "/wp-links-opml.php" (so it would look like this: <http://yourusername.wordpress.com/wp-links.opml.php>). Before you click "Import OPML File" a word of caution; if you have your links in categories (like I have Wolfs Links and Wolfs Reading"), you will have to re-assign the categories once you've done the import; the import process will not recognise them. Now go ahead and click the button; you'll get a screen that will tell you which links have been imported and you can then manage them in the usual way.

So that's your Blogroll done. Now onto widgets.

Widgets, as we know, can be immensely useful and we've all got quite a few on our blogs, I'm sure - even if we've just stuck with the default ones that come with our theme. If widgets are not something you use, you've got nothing to worry about, otherwise there's some information that you might find useful.

Not all of the Wordpress.com standard widgets are available with Wordpress.org. Well, that's not quite true. They are available (probably), but they're not available as

standard. “Top Posts”, for example, is not available as standard, nor is “Blog Stats” and while you can have a “Tag Cloud” you can’t have a “Category Cloud”. If any of these (or things like Flickr and Sonific) are important to you, be aware that you will have to go looking for them on the Wordpress.org site, download them and (using FTP) install them yourself. It’s not that difficult a process, but can be daunting for a new user.

Well, that covers importing your Blogroll and gives you a heads-up on the widget front. Your blog should now be at a stage where you’re happy enough for readers to come calling. Everything else is really just tweaking and in upcoming articles I’ll try and cover subjects like:

Where are my Wordpress stats?  
How do I install new widgets?  
What’s all this about editing my theme?

I’m really on a journey of discovery as far as self-hosting is concerned and am learning to do these things as I go along. These are the issues that I’m finding are relatively easy to do once you know how, but finding out how can sometimes be tricky.

## PART THREE

# Plug-ins for Wordpress.org

In previous installments of the Guide, I've talked about how to transfer your existing Wordpress.com blog to a self-hosted Wordpress.org installation, including uploading a theme, and about the blogroll and widgets. Those two posts, hopefully, got you started and your blog looks pretty much how you want it to.

But looking at your Dashboard you'll see that there are some things that are missing because they don't come as standard with the Wordpress.org software. So this post is going to look at plug-ins that you can use to add extra functionality and improve your Wordpress.org experience.

### *What is a plug-in and where do I find them?*

At its simplest explanation, a plug-in is a file or group of files that - when uploaded to your Wordpress installation - give it instructions for carrying out extra tasks. Plug-ins exist for all sorts of functions, some really useful, some less so, and they can be installed with ease.

You can find them everywhere on the Net, but one of the places to start is at the Wordpress plug-ins directory.

### *How do I install plug-ins?*

Sorry, but you're going to have to FTP again, like you did to upload your theme. But you're OK with that now aren't you? As I said before, if you can't handle a bit of FTP action then you're probably better off sticking with Wordpress.com.

Most plug-ins are supplied in compressed files, so the first thing to do is uncompress them, using your favourite utility (or the built-in ability of your operating system). Then you'll either be presented with a folder, or just a couple of files. Whichever you get, there should be a file that gives installation instructions, but in general you just need to upload the folder or the files into the wp-content/plug-ins folder on your server. You should make a note, though, of any special instructions for your plug-in; most are very simple, but some can be complicated; if you don't think you can manage it, don't install the plug-in.

Once you've uploaded a plug-in, it will need to be activated. This is done from the Dashboard > Plug-ins screen. Just click the "Activate" button next to the plug-in that you've just uploaded. If there are no special instructions you need to carry out for the plug-in, then that's it!

### *Which plug-ins do I need?*

Well, I suppose you don't really need any of them, but there are some that you might want. Particularly if you're coming from Wordpress.com. These are the ones that I've tried out so far and found useful (I've tried a bunch of others that I haven't found useful, but I'll leave those out). It should be noted that there are many, many plug-ins out there and you'll probably find others that do the same job as the ones listed here; this list is not a recommendation of these plug-ins over any others, it's just a list of ones that I've found useful and use on The New Wolfs Howl. If you find any that do

the same job but better, let me know.

- Wordpress.com Stats

You'll have noticed that your Dashboard doesn't have a link for Blog Stats; this is the plug-in that will restore that functionality for you. This isn't an ideal plug-in because it requires a Wordpress.com API key (a string of letters and numbers that you'll find on your Wordpress.com Dashboard at Users > Your Profile). The reason this isn't ideal is because it creates unnecessary confusion between .com and .org blogs, as well as meaning that you won't be able to get rid of your .com account.

Once you've activated the plug-in, you'll get a message telling you that you need to enter an API key. Enter it at Dashboard > Plug-ins > Wordpress.com Stats. After that, the Stats function just like they do on Wordpress.com

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/stats/>]

- Defensio Anti-Spam

Your Wordpress.com account comes with Akismet Anti-Spam, and your .org installation also includes it - although it is not activated. If you want to use that, then you'll need your API Key again. But, Akismet comes in a for a lot of stick, being accused of creating many false positives (blocking comments that are not spam) and also being criticised by people who are not fans of those that run it.

An excellent alternative, which gives you more control over the functionality, is Defensio. This also requires an API Key, but you have to sign up for a (free) account with Defensio. If you don't want yet another online account, stick with Akismet but if you want good quality spam filtering, this is the one to go with.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/defensio-anti-spam/>]

- Contact Form 7

On Wordpress.com, if you want to add a contact form to a page or post, you just enter one line of code. This plug-in allows you to do just the same thing with a .org installation, but with flexibility over the way the form looks, how many different forms you can have, etc.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/contact-form-7/>]

- Wordpress Admin Bar

One of the biggest things that's missing from a .org installation is the blue admin bar at the top of the screen, that allows you to get to your Dashboard, your Stats, etc. This plug-in will give you back the blue admin bar, but with greatly increased functionality. When viewing your blog (it will only be shown when viewing your own blog, not on every .org blog), it will give you dropdown menus for every item on your Dashboard menu. It is probably the most useful plug-in I have so far found.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wordpress-admin-bar/>]

- Subscribe to Comments

This is great piece of extra functionality that is sorely missing from Wordpress.com. What it does is add a “Subscribe” option to the comments form on each post, which allows your commenters to stay updated by email of when anyone else makes a comment.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/subscribe-to-comments/>]

- Brian’s Threaded Comments

This one isn’t available from Wordpress.org, you’ll need to download it from the developer. You’ll have seen on many blogs that specific comments can be replied to and the reply will be indented, or linked in some way to the comment it is in response to. This is called ‘threading’ and it’s what this plug-in does for you. Some people love threaded comments, some hate them, but at least now you have a choice.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://meidell.dk/archives/2004/09/04/nested-comments/>]

- Absolute Comments

One thing that really bugs me about comments on Wordpress.com is that if I want to reply to them I either have to edit the comment and add my reply to it, or go to the post concerned and add my comment there. I don’t like the first option because I prefer not to mess about with comments at all and the second option is a drag. Which is where this plug-in comes in, as it allows you to reply to comments directly from the Dashboard - and also allows you to thread them or not.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/ozh-absolute-comments/>]

- Popularity Contest

One of the widgets that you’ll notice is missing is Top Posts. I’m not sure why this isn’t included as it’s one of the most useful, but there you go. This plug-in will take over the role, but also gives you much more information about what’s popular as well as allowing you to alter the ‘weighting’ for each element (permalink views, archive views, etc).

Be aware, though, that this plug-in doesn’t automatically display any of these results on your blog. You can put them wherever you like, but you will need to enter some code yourself. The easiest way is add a widget to your sidebar; if you want to do that, though, you’ll need the next plug-in as well.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/popularity-contest/>]

- Daiko’s Text Widget

You’re familiar, I’m sure, with sidebar text widgets. They can be useful for displaying all sorts of things like links, pictures, and so on. But they are limited; you can’t, for instance, enter PHP code (the code that your Wordpress.org installation is built on) in them. But with Daiko’s you can. That way, following the instructions from Popularity Contest, you can add a widget to display your Top Posts.

[Link for this plug-in: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/daikos-text-widget/>]

So there you go. Some information about plug-ins and how to use them, as well as ones that I'd recommend. Happy plugging.

## PART FOUR

# Domains

In the first installment of this Guide, I covered getting yourself some hosting for your very own website, but I didn't really go into depth about domains; since then I've had a couple of requests to cover that subject a bit more fully and now seemed like the right time.

### *What is a domain?*

Simply put, it's an Internet address, like wolfshowl.com. It's a unique name that identifies a website on the Net. It can be a "friendly" address (words that you can understand) just a group of numbers, like 192.168.0.1.

You may also hear terms like "top-level" and "second-level" when referring to domains; this refers to the extension at the end of the address. For example, wolfshowl.com is a top-level domain, whereas wolfshowl.co.uk would be a second-level domain. As far as I can see, there is no practical difference, except for the snob value of having a top level-domain.

### *How do I choose a domain?*

This can be trickier - all of the good ones are gone! Basically, decide first what domain extension you want; would you prefer the one specifically for your country (so for the UK you'd be looking at .co.uk), do you want a .com, or do you want one of the more academic ones like .org or .info?

Then think about what you want after the www; if you run a company, you'll probably want to have the company name or perhaps your best-selling product. For bloggers, you might want your name or the name of your blog. Any and all of these are valid options, but remember that you may not be able to have your first choice because someone will have got there first. You have no rights whatsoever to your name as far as domain names are concerned; it's first come, first served.

Finally, go to who.is and enter what you'd like in the search box. The results page will tell you whether it's available, who owns it if it's not and what related domains may still be available.

### *I've decided what I want. How do I buy it?*

Here you have loads of choice. There are sites all over the web at which you can register a domain. If you just want to register the name but don't want any hosting at the moment, do a Google search for "domain registration" and see what comes up; the maximum I would pay would be £8.50 (about \$17), which should get you a .com for a year or a .co.uk for two years. There are many sites out there with headline prices much lower than this; just make sure you read the small print.

If you want hosting as well, then I suggest you register your domain name when you sign up for your hosting package. That way, all the paperwork is taken care of in one go. The two companies I mentioned in the previous article (A Small Orange and Hosting-Unlimited) will both do this for you.

Make sure that, whoever registers it for you, it gets registered in your name not theirs. I've heard that some of the companies offering rock-bottom registration prices don't register them in your name but in theirs. That way, it becomes difficult for you to do anything with the name because it is more difficult for you to prove ownership.

Now I've got it, what next?

Well, now you need to set up your site. Use the information in the previous articles if you need help on this.

*Wordpress.com offer domain mapping. What's that?*

This paid add-on to the free Wordpress.com blogging service lets you buy a domain name and then have it re-direct to your free-hosted blog. That way, you look like you're self-hosted but you're not and you remain bound by the Wordpress.com Terms of Service.

The problem with the domain mapping add-on is that it goes the wrong way. Most people will have started with a free-hosted blog and will be looking to move to self-hosted, and so would want to point their free-hosted blog to their brand new site. That way the traffic and readership they've worked so hard to build up on the free-hosted site would be re-directed to the self-hosted site, helping it to establish itself and build up traffic, Alexa Rank, Real Rank and Google Page Rank quickly rather than having to start from scratch.

## PART FIVE

# Why go self-hosted?

Another question that I've been asked in the course of writing this sort-of Guide to self-hosting is why you would want to go self-hosted in the first place, and what skills you need to be able to do it? I touched on this subject in the first post in the series but I'm going to try and go into a little more depth here.

### *Why go self-hosted?*

The biggest reason is freedom. Whichever blogging service you're currently using, you'll be using it under their terms of service which will restrict you from doing certain things. For instance, if your blog is at Wordpress.com then you can't:

- Edit your theme, or download and install new ones from the Net
- Change the way your blog works
- Add new features, like a blog search, if your theme doesn't already support them
- Use Javascript in your widgets, or anywhere else
- Use forms, other than those created by Wordpress
- Have Google AdSense or any other form of advertising

If you think that you will ever want to do any of these things, then you need to start thinking about self-hosting.

Another reason for self-hosting is to get some protection for your blog. At the moment, your Wordpress.com blog is not really under your control; at any time Wordpress could delete it for a Terms of Service violation, without telling you about it first. You may not think this could happen to you, but seeing as the ToS are really quite vague (and one important prohibition is actually in the FAQ and not the ToS) there's always the possibility that it will even if you didn't mean to do anything wrong.

Once you go self-hosted, you don't have to worry about any of this stuff - it all becomes possible and if your experience is anything like mine, you'll immediately see an increase in readership and visitors to your blog.

If you're at all interested in the way blogs work underneath, then go self-hosted. You can set-up a test blog in addition to your main one and experiment with everything. If you want to learn CSS, then playing about with your blog's theme is a good way to see how it all works. If you want to add features like threaded comments, or comment subscription, then self-hosted is the way to go. If you want to add a message board (like this one) to your blog, then self-hosted is definitely for you.

### **What skills do I need to go self-hosted?**

You need to have a certain amount of computer-literacy, but then you've probably got that if you're already running a blog. You'll need to know that some of what is done for you at Wordpress.com, you will have to do yourself. Most of it, though, is not hugely different.

If you use the tips in the first article, then installing the Wordpress software is a matter

of a few clicks; this will get you up and running. You can then follow the tips in the later articles to add features. The only thing you really need to learn - at least to begin with - is how to successfully use an FTP client. File Transfer Protocol is what takes the files from your local PC and uploads them to the webserver that your site is loaded on. It's just like transferring files using Explorer - just that one of the folders is on a remote machine. There are various FTP programs you can use - Cyberduck for Mac, CUteFTP and Filezilla for Windows - all of which work basically the same and make the task really easy.

The only other thing that could be a barrier is cost - and with hosting packages starting from as little as \$25 (about £12.50) per year there's really nothing to stop you is there?