



# To Blog... or not to Blog

**B**logging is a one-way trip to the unemployment line for a superintendent ... you can quote me on that."

That word of warning came from a respected industry veteran who had been asked to list golf course superintendents who host web logs, the latest Internet craze.

As a "blogger" who has gone to bed only to wake up wondering what dumb thing I had posted the night before, I might agree. Except that a blog could just as easily become the most important communications tool in a superintendent's arsenal.

So what's all this blogging madness and what do you need to know about it?

Let's get the nitty-gritty out of the way for those who aren't even sure what's being discussed here.

According to Wikipedia.org, the free online encyclopedia (and a handy online information resource):

*A web log (usually shortened to "blog" but occasionally spelled "weblog" or "web log") is a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles (normally in reverse chronological order). Although most early web logs were manually updated, tools to automate the maintenance of such sites made them accessible to a much larger population, and the use of some sort of browser-based*

*software is now a typical aspect of "blogging."*

So in a nutshell, a blog is an Internet site that you host as a journal for the entire world to see. Sort of.

Wikipedia again: *Like other media, blogs often focus on a particular subject, such as food, politics or local news. Some blogs function as online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images and links to other blogs, web pages and other media related to its topic.*

If you know nothing about blogging or maybe glance at a few political or sports blogs each day, I could understand why you might think blogging and greenkeeping would mix as well as Primo and Scotch.

Here's the hitch: Most web hosts now make it remarkably easy and inexpensive to post photographs. Combine images and a little creative writing, and this is how blogging could transform the maintenance industry.

## To blog . . .

Those cool "before" and "after" pictures of a rebuilt bunker? Post them online for all of your members to see.

The images of storm damage along with the heroic repair efforts and news that the course is going to be closed for a few days? Hit the "publish" button.

The latest photos of your course before the

Web logging has its benefits. And drawbacks, too

By Geoff Shackelford,  
Contributing Editor



spring opening? Post them. What members won't check in for the latest update and a few pictures to whet their appetite?

If you host a course blog properly, you'll be able to drop hints on where things stand and when golfers can expect conditions to reach their best. Blogging could also provide the means to subtly inject a bit more patience and knowledge through the golfers' notoriously thick skulls.

But beyond posting photographs with informative comments, blogging presents many other possibilities for the superintendent.

Maybe there was an important article about the state of the game or agronomy that you would like golfers to read. Or there is an emerging issue affecting your course and you want the interested golfers at your course to read it.

Or maybe you simply saw a funny story from the world of golf and you want to show golfers that you love the game as much as they do.

Blogging sites make it remarkably simple to post the address of an Internet story for all to read. Many web-hosting services also create easy ways to set up forums where golfers can exchange comments or ask questions of you, the superintendent.

Perhaps you have been looking for a way to answer thoughtful questions from golfers who take the time to write, while allowing others to read the exchange? A "discussion group" or active "comments" section would do the trick.

With blogging there is an almost endless list of possible ways to educate, inform and entertain the golfers who love your course.

And best of all, you never have to talk to them. Just tell them to bookmark your Internet address and check in for updates.

Blogging is more than just an immediate, 24/7 version of the club newsletter. There are dimensions to golf course blog-

ging that haven't even been explored yet because so few superintendents are trying it.

Which brings me to the pitfalls of blogging and why so many superintendents are not trying it.

### Or not to blog . . .

There is remarkable freedom in posting your thoughts or feelings or utter frustration with the completely ridiculous ways of the 21st-century golfer. Maybe

too much freedom for some.

But assuming you can control your desire to tell customers how little they actually know about golf course maintenance and construction, I can recommend setting up a blog, with caveats.

The greatest blogging pitfall is the immediacy with which one can put something up for all of the world to see.

A very simple cure for this dilemma

*Continued on page 44*

**GREENS QUALITY SOD**

**SUPREME**

**NOW AVAILABLE!**

**NEW  
NEW  
NEW  
NEW  
NEW  
NEW**

John Marman

Tom Stafford

ORDER HOTLINE 888/893-TURF

www.westcoastturf.com

**WEST COAST  
TURF**  
*Life is short. sod it!*

### Recommended Blog Hosts

- ▶ <http://www.blogger.com>
- ▶ <http://www.typepad.com>
- ▶ <http://www.squarespace.com>





### Shack's Blogging Tips

- ▶ **Writing blog posts** – Make sure you let them sit for a few hours before re-editing them and posting them. Actually, that's good advice for all writing because it's easier to spot mistakes.
- ▶ **Photo resizing** – Make sure you know how to use digital photo software and that you understand how to resize images. You don't want people getting frustrated with your site because the photos take too long to load. Also, many sites won't upload photos over a certain size.
- ▶ **Succinct matters** – Keep posts as short as possible and post as many photos as you can. People love pictures.
- ▶ **Attitude** – For some reason online readers tolerate a lot more attitude, as long as you are self-deprecating, too. This doesn't mean you pat yourself on the back relentlessly, but in posting about your course or a project, don't hesitate to be proud of what you've done. Arrogance and humorless writing do not go over well on the Internet.
- ▶ **Don't cover up mistakes** – Most blog sites offer you the chance to cross out text. Instead of editing a mistake off of a site, simply cross it out and add the correct information.

*Continued from page 43*

is to prepare a "post," then sit on it for a few hours or even days. The more you can write, get away, and come back to your copy, the more efficient your message becomes.

With a golf maintenance blog, you would rarely be posting something that could be called "breaking news." Instead, you are posting items related to your course. So take your time.

Immediacy is a secondary concern to sharing information that enlightens and entertains your golfers.

### How do I do it?

As the benefits of blogging have become apparent to businesses, writers and everyone else in the free world, more Internet "hosts" (lingo for people you pay to hold the information that becomes your site) have been embracing blogging.

Still, many have not quite refined their blogging software. Although you can make a blog out of a blank web page, that's a lot of work for which not many superintendents have time.

It's much more fun and affordable to work within the confines of a finely tuned blog framework. After trying a few, I ended up using a smaller but technically efficient site for my daily mix of posts on the state of the game and my books. I also selected a host that would allow me to keep my domain name.

But if you don't want to go to the trouble to create something that works within the confines of your course's web site, there are a few big-name, efficient and user-friendly blog hosts that can get you started. You might get a long web address such as Bushwood-Maintenanceblog.typepad.com, but don't worry. After people get to the site once, they can "bookmark" it and they never have to type the address again.

As for blog hosts, I would highly recommend checking out either blogger.com or typepad.com or squarespace.com, all of which allow you to start a free blog to see what it's all about. You can play around, test things out, see how easily photos upload, and do it all without anyone knowing. Both also provide the opportunity to easily upgrade a trial blog.

But be careful. When you publish your blog to the Internet and give the OK to make the site public, you won't believe how quickly the search engines can pick up your site.

The better hosts allow you to create blogs where a password is required for readers (ideal for private clubs), or where you can control what information gets out to the public.

In other words, the more you pay, the more control you get.

But don't worry, blogging is cheap. If you are paying more than \$25 a month, you're paying too much. If you are going the free route, you will quickly find you may be restricted in what you can do. Expect to pay something in the \$10 to \$20 per month range.

The ultimate key to blogging? Making it fun for you and entertaining for the reader.

Of course, that's the danger of blogging, too. ■

---

*Geoff Shackelford is a contributing editor to Golfdom. If you want more blogging tips or suggestions, contact him at [geoffshac@aol.com](mailto:geoffshac@aol.com) or through his web site, [www.geoffshackelford.com](http://www.geoffshackelford.com).*