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Kelly Senyei

Creator of the blog Just a Taste



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***Food
Blogging***
FOR
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Kelly Senyei



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About the Author

Kelly Senyei is a multimedia food journalist, stylist, photographer, and chef. She joined the food blogosphere in 2008 with the launch of her blog, Just a Taste (www.justataste.com), which chronicles her culinary musings tied to everything from easy appetizers and creative cocktails, to quick-fix meals and endless desserts. Kelly is a big proponent of keeping things light in life (and she's not talking about calories) and was motivated to launch her blog to share her family's rich recipe history.

After receiving her master's degree in broadcast television from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, she joined the editorial team at FoodNetwork.com as an intern, where she wrote features and blogged on Food2.com. Unable to quiet her longstanding desire to attend culinary school, she enrolled in the Culinary Arts diploma program at The Institute of Culinary Education (ICE), where she conceptualized and launched the school's first official blog, DICED. For seven months, she photographed and blogged about every intricate detail of life as a culinary student, and in 2010, she received the People's Choice Award for Food Photography by the International Association of Culinary Professionals.

Kelly graduated with highest honors from ICE and honed her culinary skills by externing in the Food Network Kitchens, where she cross-tested recipes, prepared food for photo shoots and TV productions, and had the lucky chance to cook in a practice battle of *Iron Chef America* (the secret ingredient was popcorn!). She was then invited to join Condé Nast in reimagining the iconic *Gourmet* magazine in digital form. Kelly presently works as the Associate Editor of *Gourmet Live* writing articles for the app and *Gourmet.com*, managing the brand's blog and social media presence, and art directing and prop styling for photo shoots.

Through her work at *Gourmet Live*, Kelly has interviewed everyone from Eric Ripert and Tom Colicchio to Wolfgang Puck and Frank Bruni. She's also written in depth about the topics of cooking in the 1800s, nocturnal sleep-related eating disorder, the frozen yogurt fallacy, extreme couponing, low-carb diets, kitchen traumas, and more.

Kelly makes regular, expert appearances in all types of food media and has spoken at BlogHer Food and Food Blog Forum. Her work is featured on *Gourmet Live*, NBC, FoodNetwork.com, Glamour.com, and Food2.com. When not busy keeping up with the latest food media news and trends, she can be found in her New York City apartment, experimenting with ingredients and creating recipes.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family, who are the most loving, supportive, and hilarious people I know.

Author's Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my family — Mom, Dad, Alison, Grant, Grandmom, and Julio. Thank you all for breathing life and inspiration into *Just a Taste* and into me. I cannot thank you enough for your patience over these past six months and for your constant encouragement to pursue my greatest passion. You are all my eternal support system on speed dial, and for that — and for keeping me well-caffeinated — I am forever grateful.

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Without each and every one of you, *Food Blogging For Dummies* would not be a reality. I raise a glass to toast to you, that you all may enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

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Introduction

Food blogging. Five years ago those words carried little weight in both the culinary and digital worlds. There were plenty of food writers, and even more bloggers, but there were very few who actually combined the two crafts. What began as a handful of tastemakers who took their ideas to the web has since evolved into an epicurean explosion whereby food enthusiasts of every age and every skill set can lend their voice in text and visuals (or should I say victuals?) to a community growing at an unforeseen pace.

Where would anyone be without the invention of food blogs? A few things are certain: You'd never have witnessed the proliferation of cake pops. You'd never have read the first blog-to-book cookbook. You'd never have experienced food porn in all its hi-res digital glory.

This book is for anyone who has a love of food, and an even bigger love of sharing their food experiences with others. I designed this book as a resource that's hopefully entertaining. After all, you're blogging about food, not nuclear fission. I'll warn you that I'm not afraid of a good food pun to help convey a point (and luckily — or unluckily — for you, I'm not short on them either).

About Food Blogging For Dummies

I'm the type of person who eats breakfast while daydreaming about lunch, and who digs in at dinner while strategizing about dessert. If you love food as much as I do, chances are you also love sharing that passion with others.

Food Blogging For Dummies is the ultimate recipe for taking your passion from your kitchen to the World Wide Web. From strategizing your blog's name and designing an effective home page to editing your photos and making the most of social media, this book addresses all of the essential ingredients for creating and maintaining a successful food blog.

I begin by whetting your appetite with a look at the current state of the food blogosphere, which provides an insider's perspective of the robust online food blogging community bubbling with complementary and contrasting voices, visuals, opinions, and passions. Discover your place in the greater food blogosphere as you get your creative juices flowing.

Here's a sample of the tools and information included in the book, which will help you

- ✔ Set up the technical elements of your blog.
- ✔ Find your food niche while making the most of your layout and design.
- ✔ Determine your mix of content by evaluating a variety of post topics.
- ✔ Join the food community through online and offline interactions.
- ✔ Master the ins and outs of social media, marketing, and earning an income.
- ✔ Style, prop, and photograph food using resources you own already.

Foolish Assumptions

Everyone knows making assumptions is a bad idea. But because I'm writing a book on a topic as expansive as food blogging, I inevitably have to assume a few things about you, dear reader:

- ✔ You are interested in not only creating food-centric content, but also sharing that content with an online audience.
- ✔ You know what a blog is, but not how it is set up or maintained.
- ✔ You have access to the Internet and know how to surf the web.
- ✔ You like to eat (a lot).

Conventions Used in This Book

Conventions are a fancy way of saying that information presented to you in this book is done so consistently. When you see a term *italicized*, for example, look for its definition, which is provided so you can understand the meaning of the term in the context of food blogging. If step-by-step instructions are required to complete a process, they appear numbered with the actionable items designated in **bold**. And finally, all references to website addresses (or URLs) and e-mail addresses are in `monoFont` so they're easily distinguished from plain text.

What You Don't Have to Read

I have written this book so that each chapter stands independent of the others, meaning you can scan and flip through to whichever topics interest you the most. You can also skip over any sidebars and stick to the main material, which provides insight for completing the task at hand or points you toward the next steps in a process.

How This Book Is Organized

Food Blogging For Dummies is divided into six parts. Although you don't have to read the chapters, or even the individual sections, in order, I advise you to stick to the chronological layout if you're really looking to build the ultimate food blog from the ground up.

Use the Table of Contents and the index for quick references to locate information about specific topics, and make sure you spend some time studying (or drooling over) all the colorful visuals in the book. In this section, I provide you with an appetizer-size version of each of the main parts.

Part I: Whetting Your Appetite

From preserving your family's food legacy on the web to kick-starting your culinary empire online, the motivations and goals for launching a food blog are vast and varied. Although some may be in search of fame, fortune, or even a cookbook deal, others strive to simply establish their voice and create an online community of food-loving enthusiasts. Regardless of your aspirations, knowing who already dominates the digital space, finding your niche, and strategically setting up the backend of your blog are all critical aspects that should be thought about well before your first post ever goes from private to public.

Part II: Finding Your Voice

Just because photography plays such a critical role in the digital culinary scene doesn't mean good old, plain text should be pushed to the backburner. Establishing your voice and fine-tuning the tone of your blog is an evolving process that includes setting your content menu while paying particular attention to consistency and frequency. Discover the power of going public with your content, plus get a primer in food blog legalese as you discover the sticky world of recipe copyright law.

Part III: The Soup to Nuts of Design

Where is the search bar? Who is this person? Why can't I leave a comment? If you want to lose readers, just leave them asking any of those questions. Although the content you publish is undoubtedly an important aspect of your food blog, the bottom line is this: The superficial stuff matters. Enter the fabulous world of layout and design, from polishing your blog's first impression to crafting a confusion-free roadmap for your readers. Get ready to get your garnish on.

Part IV: Eating with Your Eyes

One of the biggest draws to any popular food blog is the photographs. Although a recipe for a sour cream chocolate chip bundt cake can make a reader reach for the Preheat button, what's really going to lead them from his couch to his kitchen is the drool-worthy photo of a cake that looks so moist he can almost taste the half-melted chunks of bittersweet chocolate and tender morsels of cake while scrolling down the page. But not everyone has the resources, space, or time to splurge on a professional photography setup. Find out about the power of the point-and-shoot, the insider's guide to Food Styling 101, and how you can create your very own in-home studio without blowing your budget.

Part V: Marketing & Monetization

After the creative stuff is under control, focus on promoting and distributing your content while entertaining the options for making bank from your blog. Discover the strategic steps for maximizing your blog's rank in search engines, extending your brand, tracking your progress, and diversifying your sources of online income.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

It wouldn't be an iconic *For Dummies* book without the inclusion of the Part of Tens. In this part, I serve up two essential ten-tip guides. Chapter 15 discusses the ten things I wish I had known before starting my food blog (with the eleventh tip obviously being that someone had written a guide to prevent me from making those mistakes). Don't miss that chapter! Chapter 16 introduces you to ten of the hardest foods to photograph. Go face-to-face with the divas of the food world and figure out how to prevent them from having meltdowns while maximizing their charm on set.

Icons Used in This Book

What's a *For Dummies* book without icons pointing out useful tips, interesting facts, and potentially dangerous pitfalls? Familiarize yourself with the three icons here and their identifying qualities to make sure you don't miss out on the meatiest parts of the book.



TIP

The Tip icon points out helpful information designed to make your job easier.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon marks an interesting and useful fact — something you might want to keep in mind for later use.



WARNING!

The Warning icon highlights lurking danger. When you see this icon, I'm waving at you from the sidelines telling you to pay attention and proceed with caution.

Where to Go from Here

Hungry yet? Grab a fork and start digging in to any chapter you choose. Start by scanning the Table of Contents to discover which sections pique your interest and head straight to the source for the information — for example, head to Part III for the lowdown on setting up your blog's technical framework — or start with page one and devour the whole book from the beginning, savoring each section as if it were the next decadent dish in an irresistible six-course meal.

I want to be the first to welcome you to the expansive food blogging community! I hope *Food Blogging For Dummies* provides answers to all your questions and needs, but if you're ever stumped or are just looking to chat with an equally as passionate food lover (who once wrote a 750-word article entirely about parsley), please feel free to e-mail me at kelly@justataste.com.

6

Food Blogging For Dummies

Part I

Whetting Your Appetite



In this part . . .

Get your first taste of the food blogosphere by taking a careful look at how past moments in culinary media have shaped the present-day community. As you meet your fellow food bloggers, you'll discover that the motivations for launching a food blog are vast and varied, from perfecting your slicing and dicing to kick-starting your culinary empire online.

Although some bloggers may be in search of fame, fortune, or even a cookbook deal, others strive to simply establish their voice and create a network of food-loving enthusiasts.

In Part I, you begin to zone in on your own aspirations as you discover the key factors to think about before your first post ever goes from private to public.



The Many, The Proud

In This Chapter

- ▶ Assessing the current state of the food blogosphere
- ▶ Understanding the many roles of food bloggers
- ▶ Finding your voice in text and visuals
- ▶ Meeting other food bloggers
- ▶ Setting yourself up for the sweet taste of success

Creating, launching, and maintaining a food blog can be a casual hobby or a serious business. Regardless whether you're a home cook and amateur writer, or a professional chef and James Beard award-winning author, managing your food blog will lend you a spatula to help shape the growing culinary scene.

Whether your goal is preserving your family's legacy through food or becoming the next Pioneer Woman of the digital Wild West, the reach, popularity, and influence of food blogs is a rapidly expanding sector of the online realm that's impossible to ignore.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the wide world of food blogging by providing context in terms of its size, scope, and robust growth over the past five years. As you look to the past, you can find your food blogging place in the present while planning for a beautifully designed, easily navigated, one-of-a-kind online journal. Understanding the many roles of a food blogger helps you in crafting a strategic and realistic approach to success, no matter how you measure it.



Assessing the Food Blogosphere

The field of food blogging represents an explosion of popular culture, and in this case, popular cuisine. From Bakerella's cake pops to Hungry Girl's Fiber

One chicken strips, food blogs have cultivated some of the culinary industry's biggest trends.

Where else can you discover the current craze — in the form of Oreo-stuffed chocolate chip cookies or the latest incarnation of bacon — than the thriving world of food blogging? Every day a new tastemaker launches a blog and joins the growing throngs of impassioned, dedicated, and driven food enthusiasts who are ditching the ketchup-stained 3x5 cards and taking to the web to publish and share content.

Food blogging on the rise

Five years ago, Smitten Kitchen, Orangette, Homesick Texan, and Simply Recipes could very well have been the names of my favorite local hangouts — the corner café I go to for my morning coffee, the downtown diner with the key lime pie, the steakhouse with the famous filet, or the bakery with the unbeatable sticky buns. And the names Deb Perelman, Molly Wizenberg, Lisa Fain, and Elise Bauer might as well have been the names of my favorite singers, or painters, or even childhood friends.

But if you ask any food blogger in 2012 whether they've ever heard of Smitten Kitchen, you might as well be asking them whether they've ever heard of a guy named Elvis.

A few of my personal heroes — Deb, Molly, Lisa, and Elise — are among those who have helped usher the field of food blogging from a quiet corner of the web to one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the modern digital era. Elise, for example, launched her wildly popular food blog, Simply Recipes, in 2003 as a way to document her family's rich recipe history. Since, she has inspired countless readers whose eyes graze her page to do the same. Elise's clear and concise policy regarding comments on her blog has set the tone for transparency and accountability in food blogging, and her generosity in advising less-experienced bloggers has advocated for a supportive community surrounding the creation and sharing of content online.

Food blogging has become a phenomenon whereby impassioned foodies have come to know these bloggers' names, and countless others, through every typed word, every calculated recipe, every comment, every photo, *every single thought* — blogged publicly for the rest of the world to read, enjoy, react to, and most importantly, draw inspiration from.

So just how far-reaching is this epicurean explosion?

Technorati, an online search engine that tracks blogs, estimated in a *Times Online* article from February 2009 that there were roughly 33,000 food blogs on the web. That number has gone nowhere but up in the past three years.

BlogHer, one of the most expansive and robust communities of bloggers across every niche, reported a 70 percent increase in unique visitors — specifically to its Food Channel — from October 2010 to October 2011. As a result, the Food Channel has become BlogHer’s largest category of blogs in the entire network.

Aside from dominance in the digital realm, food bloggers have extended their reach by making the reverse trek to the world of print via cookbook deals. Clotilde Dusoulier of *Chocolate & Zucchini* was the first food blogger to go from blog-to-book, and many others followed suit, including Adam Roberts of *Amateur Gourmet*, Amy Sherman of *Cooking with Amy*, Angie Dudley of *Bakerella*, and the list just keeps on growing.

If the cookbook craze isn’t enough to demonstrate the power and proliferation of food blogging, just tune in to the Television Food Network for a look at the *Pioneer Woman* in action as food blogger extraordinaire Ree Drummond hosts her own cooking show.

The number of food blogs is growing, and so too are appetites — not only for food, but also for content that is entertaining, engaging, useful, and inspiring. Bloggers are following their passions to fill every niche, from budget-conscious meals on *\$5 Dinners*, to gluten-free recipes on *Celiac Teen*, as shown in Figure 1-1.

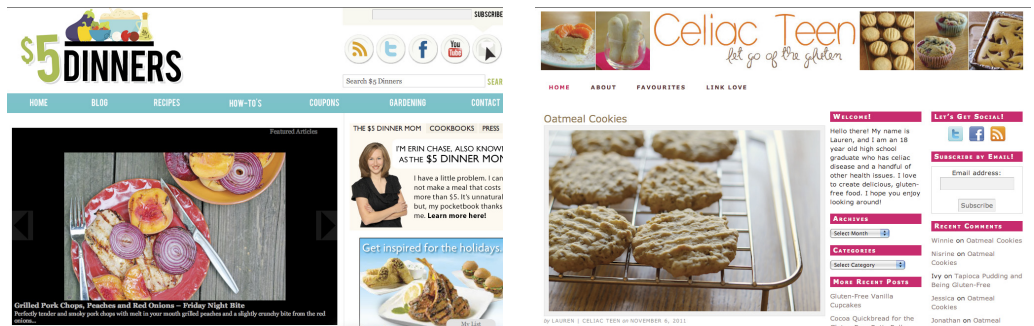
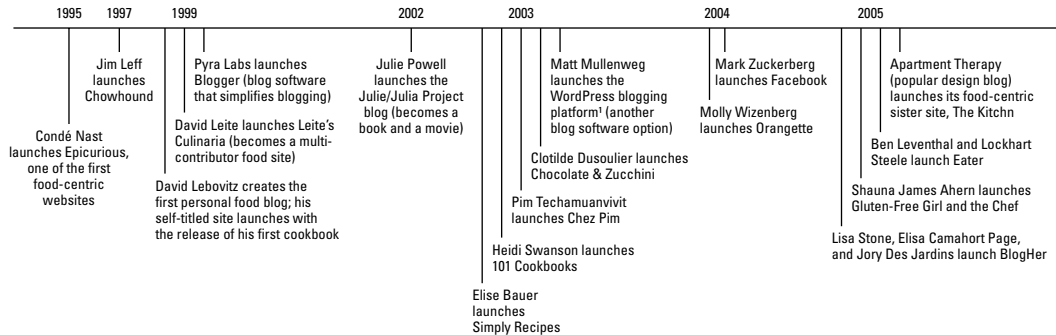


Figure 1-1: Food bloggers follow their passions.

Over the past 15 years, food blogs have helped usher food from dinner tables to mainstream media channels by championing every topic from specialized diets and restaurant reviews to video tutorials and original recipes. The following timeline shows some of the most influential moments, and although not all-inclusive, it highlights turning points that represent moments of progress in the digital sphere. I’ve also noted the launch dates of a handful of the most popular blogs still in existence to this day so that you get a sense of the timing and evolution of the food blogging industry.



Surveying the scene

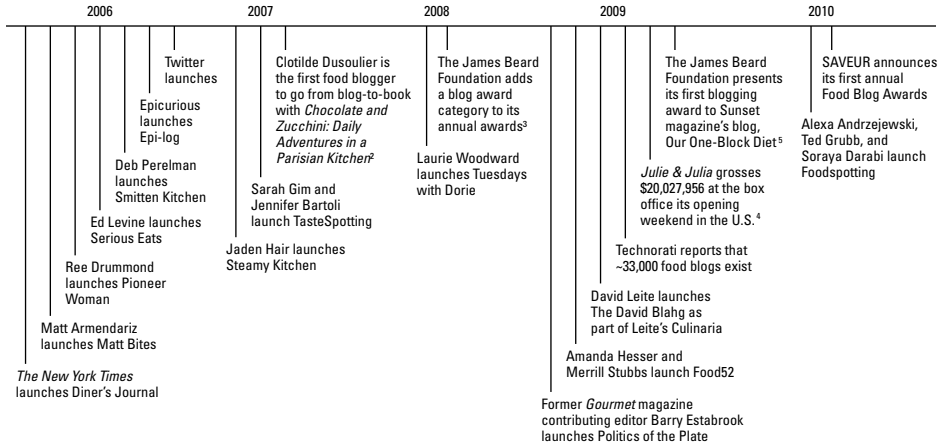
I could think of no better way to discover the who, what, why, when, and where of the current food blogging scenes than by going straight to the source with an exhaustive The State of the Food Blogosphere survey. I wrote this survey and then posted a link to it on Facebook and Twitter, asking food bloggers across the country and across the world to weigh in with their thoughts. Fellow food bloggers and food media industry professionals re-tweeted and re-posted the survey link, encouraging their followers to do the same.

Over a three-month period, more than 135 veteran and beginner food bloggers alike participated in the survey, which featured 20 questions tied to every aspect of food blogging, including the motivations for joining the community, the frequency and consistency of posting, the average monthly ad revenue earned, the preferred type of camera, and more. I've sprinkled the results throughout the relevant chapters to provide perspective on the thriving and inviting community you're joining.

Although respondents were required to provide their name and blog information to participate, all published results from the multiple-choice survey remain anonymous.

Making your move

Start preheating your oven because there's no time like the present to kick your food passion into action by launching your blog. Don't let the tens of thousands of food bloggers already in the online space prevent you from wanting to dive right in. The sheer number of impassioned foodies may be overwhelming, but it's also even more reason to not waste another minute getting started.



1 www.wordpress.com; 2 Published by Clarkson Potter; 3 http://www.jamesbeard.org/files/2009_JBFAwards_Entry_Press_Release.pdf; 4 [The Internet Movie Database \(www.imdb.com\)](http://www.imdb.com); 5 http://www.jamesbeard.org/files/2009_JBFAwards_Winners.pdf

The State of the Food Blogosphere survey produced some surprising and encouraging findings for first-time food bloggers. As the results in Figure 1-2 show, roughly 30 percent of respondents reported launching their food blog less than one year ago. Translation: You did not miss the boom. You're living (and eating) in it!

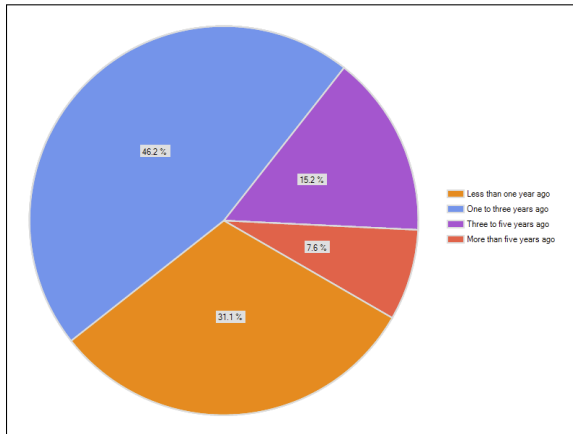


Figure 1-2: Roughly one-third of survey respondents reported launching their blog in the past year.

Beginner bloggers often face barriers with the technical aspects of setting up a blog. But lucky for you, this book walks you through the technical requirements that could block the path to publishing success. But there is one intangible roadblock with the potential to leave you more frozen than a Lean Cuisine: perfection.



Countless food bloggers with talents in recipe development, food writing, photography, food styling, and beyond wow me on a daily basis. And most of them have no formal training in their craft. Their work is inspiring, but I also realize it can be paralyzing, which is why you have to approach the start of your food blogging journey with the following mindset: Your blog does not have to be perfect on the day you launch.

There's no day like today to dive into the necessary prep work required prior to launching your blog. Like all new endeavors, there will always be elements to adjust days, months, and even years after you launch. That's what blogging is all about — growing, evolving, and constantly improving.

Understanding the Varied Roles of Food Bloggers

Maintaining a food blog is very similar to owning and running a restaurant. Countless tasks require attention each day to ensure your haute hangout stays up and running and customers stay satisfied. But imagine if you are the only person responsible for every task at your restaurant. You take on the roles of owner, chef, waiter, manager, accountant, bartender, and yes, even dishwasher. Welcome to the realistic life of a multi-tasking food blogger.



Regardless of your blog's niche, every food blogger has duties extending beyond the basics of cooking and writing. Here is a list of 13 possible roles tied to the creation and maintenance of an average food blog. Your blog may not require you to take on the entire dozen, but it's important to understand running a food blog involves much more than simply cooking, writing, and consuming calories:

- ✓ **Cook:** Shopping for ingredients and preparing dishes featured on your blog
- ✓ **Recipe developer:** Creating original recipes by drawing inspiration from the people and places surrounding you
- ✓ **Recipe tester:** Verifying the accuracy and reproducibility of recipes to ensure your readers will have success in the kitchen
- ✓ **Food stylist:** Plating and styling food so it's visually appealing and an accurate representation of the accompanying recipe
- ✓ **Prop stylist:** Selecting the appropriate props to create a mood and establish a space around your food
- ✓ **Photographer/videographer:** Taking photos and/or video of your culinary creations and finishing any required touch-ups with a few tweaks using photo-editing software

- ✔ **Writer:** Writing succinct copy that is inspiring, entertaining, and engaging
- ✔ **Editor:** Editing the copy you write to ensure it's free of spelling and grammatical errors and follows your established style guide
- ✔ **Managing editor:** Creating an editorial calendar to ensure consistency and frequency in your posting and managing all business-related decisions
- ✔ **Technical director:** Overlooking the technical maintenance of your blog, whether that means you troubleshoot issues yourself or you find (and possibly pay) the right expert to make the fix for you
- ✔ **Chief Financial Officer:** Overseeing all financial decisions and requirements tied to your blog, such as purchasing groceries, paying for restaurant meals, and exploring options for earning revenue from your blog
- ✔ **Social media strategist:** Establishing and maintaining a presence in all social media platforms tied to your blog
- ✔ **Publicist:** Promoting your content online and offline

Although this list of roles is geared more toward bloggers who are cooking and styling recipes at home, a majority of the roles still apply to bloggers who are reviewing restaurants or writing about their culinary travels. All food bloggers take on the roles of photographer, writer, editor, managing editor, technical director, Chief Financial Officer, social media strategist, and publicist — regardless of what topic they're blogging about.

It may seem like a tall order to take on the responsibilities of 12 roles, but believe me, it can be done. Just take Marla Meridith from Family Fresh Cooking, as shown in Figure 1-3, for example.



Figure 1-3: Marla Meridith of Family Fresh Cooking takes on multiple roles to maintain a successful blog.

Marla is a one-woman team (with a few pint-sized taste testers) that develops original recipes, tests those recipes, styles food, provides suggestions for tabletop setups and décor, photographs food, writes inspiring posts, publishes inspiring posts, *and* runs a robust social media campaign. So she may admit to waking up at 4 a.m. every day, but still, Marla is a prime example of a food blogger who successfully wears many toques to maintain the flourishing community centered on her popular blog.

Marla is a prime example of how food bloggers in the current digital age have to be willing and able to take on multiple roles, from creating content to engaging with the larger food community and beyond. By planning ahead and instituting a few tips for time-management success, you'll be wearing multiple toques in no time flat. (See Chapter 5 for more on devising a strategy to keep up with your blog.)

Meeting Your Fellow Food Bloggers

They've been blogging for days, weeks, months, or years. They're professionally trained chefs, amateur cooks, award-winning authors, and spell check-averse writers. They blog for a living, and they blog without earning a dollar. Regardless of their skills, experience, and goals, every food blogger serves as inspiration to one another, helping an already thriving community continue to produce and share food-centric content tied to every topic and every medium.

Why get to know them? Because your fellow food bloggers are skilled advisors on every topic from blog-hosting software and food styling to social media marketing and photo editing. Turn to them for guidance, and if you're lucky, you may even find a lifelong mentor. But even if you aren't in the market for advice, you'll still have the chance to cultivate new friendships online as you bond over your mutual love of doughnuts, tartar sauce, fried ravioli, and any other foods that light your fire.



As you tour the current food blogosphere, notice a handful of common characteristics apparent on many of the more well-known blogs:

- ✓ A passion for their defined niche
- ✓ A unique voice in text and visuals
- ✓ An ability to inspire through words and photos
- ✓ A presence in social media
- ✓ An active community on their blogs

A closer look at three popular food blogs reveals these five characteristics in addition to countless other identifying elements that not only make their food blogs successful, but also make them uniquely theirs.