



# WordPress MU 2.8

Lesley A. Harrison



## Chapter No. 7

### "Sticky Features for your Blog Network"

## In this package, you will find:

A Biography of the author of the book

A preview chapter from the book, Chapter NO.7 "Sticky Features for your Blog Network"

A synopsis of the book's content

Information on where to buy this book

## About the Author

Lesley Harrison has more than ten years of experience working in the world of IT. She has served as a web developer for various local organizations, a systems administrator for a multinational IT outsourcing company, and later a database administrator for a British utility company. Today, Lesley runs her own video gaming site, Myth-Games.com, and works as a freelance web developer. She works with clients all over the world to develop Joomla! and WordPress/WordPress MU web sites.

Lesley has enjoyed seeing the Internet develop from the days of newsgroups and static HTML pages, to the vast and interactive World Wide Web of today.

She worked as a reviewer on Daniel Chapman's *Joomla 1.5 Customization* book, which was published by Packt Publishing in August 2009.

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I would like to thank my husband Mark for his patience while I was writing this book instead of leveling one of my many characters.

I would also like to thank Blaenk Denum for his help with the reCAPTCHA plugin, and the Packt Publishing team for their patience and guidance over the past year.

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# WordPress MU 2.8

In today's digital world, it seems that everyone has a web presence—be that a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook, a blog hosted by Blogger or WordPress.com, or their own web site.

General networking and blogging sites are useful for keeping in touch with old friends, but their search tools are less effective if you are trying to find people with similar interests to your own or who work in the same industry.

The multi user version of WordPress, called WordPress MU, is an ideal solution to this problem. WordPress MU, paired with forum software such as bbPress and the BuddyPress suite of social networking tools, allows you to start your own blog network with social networking features such as friends lists, status updates, and groups. Using these tools, you could start a social network and blogging site for a local social group, a fan club, or your company.

Throughout this book, we will build a blog network called SlayerCafe. This blog network is aimed at Vampire Slayers and their Watchers, as well as other people who are interested in joining the fight against demons of the night. The Slayers and Watchers will be able to share information, swap tips, update each other on their activities, share videos, and discuss demonic goings-on in the site's forums. The Slayers feel they need such a site because they found that public social networking sites such as Facebook weren't suitable for discussing vampires and werewolves. Their serious conversations were invaded by fans of *Vampire: The Masquerade and Twilight*, which made it too difficult to separate the real vampires from the fictional ones.

This book will explain how to set up WordPress MU and how to seamlessly integrate WordPress MU with bbPress and BuddyPress. You will also learn how to promote your blog network and attract new users, as well as how to keep your site safe, secure, and free from spam.

Running a successful blog network requires a good web server; however, it does not have to be expensive to get started. You will learn about the different hosting options available to you, along with the ways to optimize WordPress MU so that the server load is reduced as much as possible.

If your site is a business venture, then you will be interested in learning how to make money by charging for premium memberships, selling site-related merchandise, or by using advertising. All those options will be discussed.

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## What This Book Covers

*Chapter 1*—Introducing WordPress MU will introduce WordPress MU, bbPress, and BuddyPress and explain the hosting requirements of those sites. You will learn about shared hosting, Virtual Private Servers (known as VPSes), and dedicated servers, and you will get an overview of the benefits and downsides of each of those hosting options. Finally, you will learn how to plan the development of your site so that it has all of the features that you want to offer to your prospective users.

*Chapter 2*—Installing WordPress MU will discuss setting up a local copy of your site for testing purposes and installing WordPress MU on your web server in subdomain configuration so that users can have WordPress.com style "myusername.theblogsite.com" blog addresses.

*Chapter 3*—Customizing the Appearance of Your Site will cover installing and customizing themes and how to offer a range of theme choices to your users. You will also be introduced to some plug-ins that offer community features so that your blog looks like it is a part of a network, rather than a standalone blog.

*Chapter 4*—Letting Users Manage Their Blogs will cover more about the multi user aspects of WordPress MU and setting up some features that allow users to manage their blogs, including allowing them to add and remove plugins and widgets, change their themes, and even have their own domain name point to their blog.

*Chapter 5*—Protecting Your Site will explore some security options that will make life harder for spammers and hackers, keeping the site clean, safe, and stable for your users. You will learn how to reduce spam, block known bad visitors, and automate backups, so that if the worst happens, you can restore a backup of your site quickly and easily.

*Chapter 6*—Increasing Traffic to Your Blog Network discusses some simple promotion techniques that will make it easy for you and your site's users to bring in visitors to their blogs. You will learn how to offer RSS feeds that interested visitors can subscribe to, and how to "converse" with other bloggers via trackbacks. You will also learn how to use pings to tell blog directories that your blog has been updated and how to promote your blog on Twitter.

*Chapter 7*—Sticky Features for your Blog Network tells what is meant by a "sticky" site and how to make your visitors feel like they are part of the community, encouraging them to return to the site and promote your site to their friends.

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*Chapter 8*—Adding Forums with bbPress introduces the bbPress forum software. You will learn how to install it and how to integrate it seamlessly with WordPress MU. Not only will the two parts of the site look like they fit together, but they will behave like they are part of the same site, too. Your users will need to register for an account once and, when they log in to the site, they will have access to both the blog network and the forums.

*Chapter 9*—Social Networking with BuddyPress will help us add some social features to our site. BuddyPress offers several features, including friends lists, groups, and The Wire (a feature similar to Facebook's Wall). Along with setting up and optimizing BuddyPress, you will learn how to allow your users to log in to your site with Facebook Connect and how to integrate BuddyPress with Twitter—the popular "microblogging" service.

*Chapter 10*—Monetizing Your Site will show how to monetize your site. We will explore several different options, including advertising, revenue sharing, donations, and subscriptions. Which model (or models) you choose will depend on the kind of community you are running. You will learn about several different revenue models so that you can find the one that suits your site best.

*Chapter 11*—Site Optimization will explain some ways to reduce the load generated by your visitors, enabling your existing server to handle a greater amount of traffic. You will also learn about some cheaper ways to increase your server's capacity.

*Chapter 12*—Troubleshooting and Maintaining your Site will give an overview of how to maintain your site and how to troubleshoot common issues with upgrades and plugins. You will see some common error messages and learn what they are likely to mean and how to fix them.

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# 7

## Sticky Features for your Blog Network

*One trap that many web site owners fall into is spending lots of time pulling in traffic but not offering anything to encourage visitors to return. This leads to a rather self-defeating cycle where the site owner is forced to constantly promote their site to keep bringing in the same number of visitors, eating up valuable time that could be spent improving the site in other ways.*

*Fortunately, a little time invested during the early days of building a site can pay off very well in terms of encouraging repeat visitors.*

In this chapter we will:

- ◆ Learn what is meant by making a site "sticky"
- ◆ Look at ways to build conversations with visitors through comments and contact forms
- ◆ Make our visitors feel like they are part of a community with avatars, polls, and welcome messages
- ◆ Find out how to encourage visitors to subscribe to the site, and keep them coming back

So let's get started...

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## **What do people mean by "sticky"?**

If you have ever ran a blog or web site before, you may have noticed that it's fairly easy to get a spike in traffic by submitting a good story to a few social bookmarking sites or by being lucky enough to get a link to one of your posts from a much larger site.

The problem is that after a day or so, when the submissions fall off the front page, it's likely your traffic will die down to its usual levels again. Some site owners fall into the trap of chasing after the next traffic spike, using "linkbait" articles with intentionally controversial titles and content, when they should really be focusing on quality content, improving the site, and working towards sustained growth.

Many bloggers submit their site to `StumbleUpon.com`. StumbleUpon is a web service where users can enter their interests, and be sent to a random site that will match those interests. Those users can then either give a "thumbs up" to the site they are sent to indicating that they like the site or a "thumbs down" if they don't like it. Those votes are used to improve future suggestions and increase the chances of the next site that they "Stumble Upon" being one that they are interested in.

Other popular sites for increasing traffic include Technorati (a site that measures the "authority" of a blog based on how many other bloggers are linking to it), and the news/story-related sites Reddit (a general interest site with everything from politics to gadgets-related news), and Digg (a site with a focus on tech and gaming news).

A sticky blog is one that doesn't just attract new visitors, it keeps them. Instead of having a visitor click through from a link on Technorati or visit by using the Stumble! feature of StumbleUpon, skim the page they land on and then leave, a sticky blog would make that visitor stay around a little longer.

Ideally, visitors would read the article they were interested in and then find themselves intrigued enough to read more articles. They may comment on some articles and then keep returning to read answers to their comments. Or, they may decide to subscribe to the blog so that they can read future posts.

A sticky site encourages readers to become engaged with the community, resulting in long-term increases in traffic. When new readers arrive at the site for the first time, they get involved themselves and keep coming back. They may also tell their friends or link to the site from their own sites, giving you free promotion.

## **Letting readers and authors communicate**

Interesting content is vital, but one of the best ways to get people coming back to your blog network is to give them a chance to interact with the site's authors and with each other. This not only makes the readers feel valued, it also opens up a dialogue that encourages repeat visitors.

## Contact forms

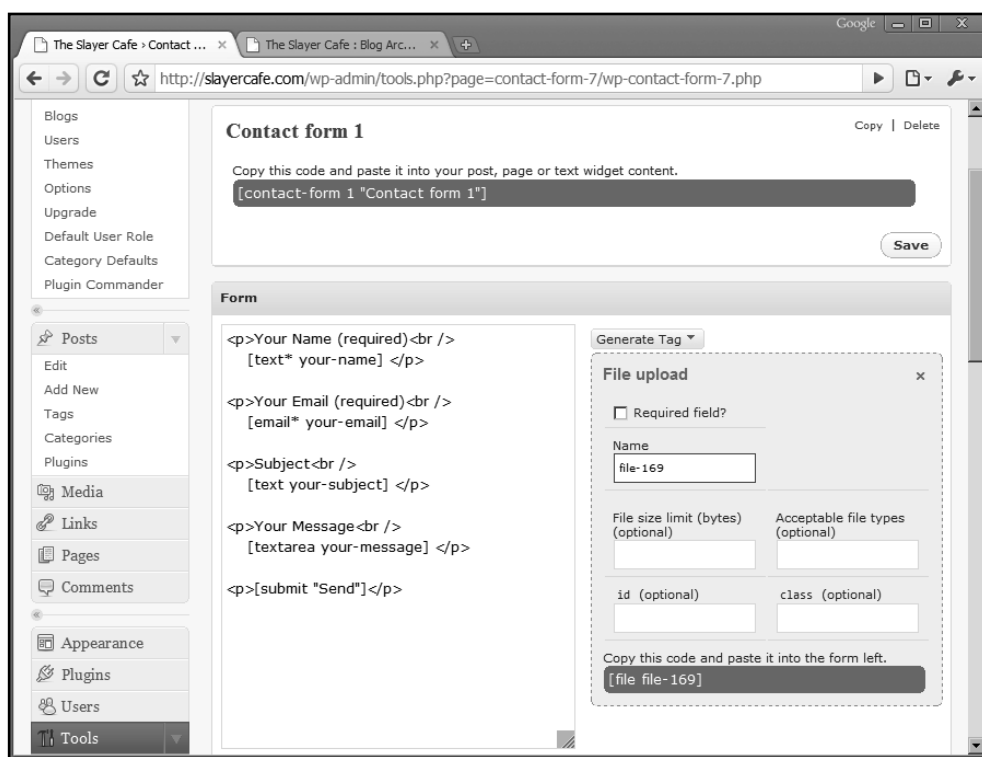
Providing visitors with a way to contact you privately is useful for several reasons. The visitor may want to discuss advertising opportunities, submit some news you may be interested in, or ask for help with a problem they have accessing part of the site.

You could post your email address on the site, but this makes you vulnerable to spam attacks. A contact form is a safer way to allow your visitors to contact you.

### Time for action – setting up contact forms

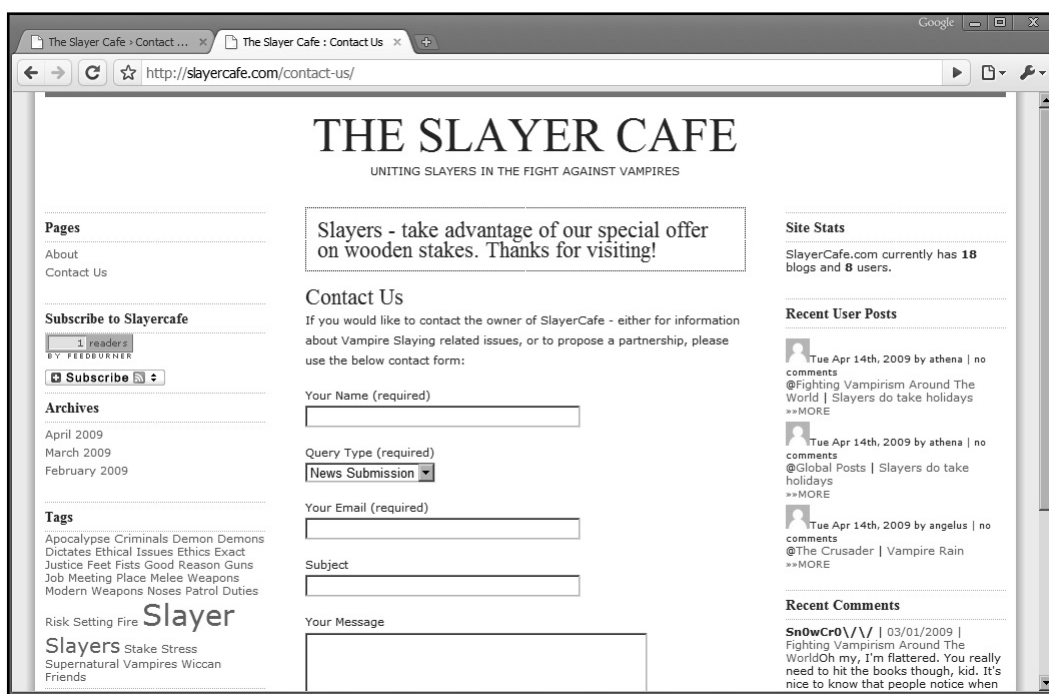
Let's set up a contact form:

1. Download Contact Form 7 from <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/contact-form-7/>.
2. To install, upload the contents of the archive file to `/wp-content/plugins`.
3. Activate the plugin and go to the settings page (**Tools | Contact Form 7**). You can also access the page by clicking **Settings** under the plugin name, which appears on the **Manage Plugins** page.





4. You can add new fields using the **Generate Tag** drop-down menu.
5. Further down the admin page you will see options to set error messages (such as the message users will see if they miss out a required field, or if they try to upload a file that is too big).
6. Once you have created the form, make a note of the tag at the top of the screen (in our case this was `[contact-form 1 "Contact form 1"]` ).
7. Create a new page (**Pages | Add New**) called **Contact Us**, add a short message to the page, and then paste the contact form tag into the page.
8. Depending on the theme you are using, you may need to add the **Pages** widget to your sidebar so that visitors can find the new page.
9. Your page should look something like this:



## ***What just happened?***

Contact Form 7 is a powerful contact form tool that supports CAPTCHAs (via the Really Simple CAPTCHA plugin), file uploads, drop-down menus, and more.

You can define multiple contact forms and have each one submit to a different email address. This could be useful if you wish to have different people contacted for, say, advertising queries, news submissions, and tech support.

You can also have a contact form submit to multiple email addresses. So, as well as having the relevant person receive a copy of each message, the site administrator could ensure they receive a copy of all messages too.

You can set a prefix for each message, in addition to the subject line the visitor sets. For example, if you set the prefix to [Slayer-Form1], all emails from that contact form will have a subject line that begins with that text. You can use this to set up filters in your email application, making it easy to prioritize emails from different contact forms.

## **Improved comments**

The basic WordPress MU comment feature allows readers to post their thoughts about a blog post, but it is not very good for encouraging discussion. One useful service for bloggers is **IntenseDebate**. This service allows for threaded discussion in comments, subscription to comments by RSS and email, and the ability to tie blog commenting in with other social networking sites and follow comments made by other blog readers.

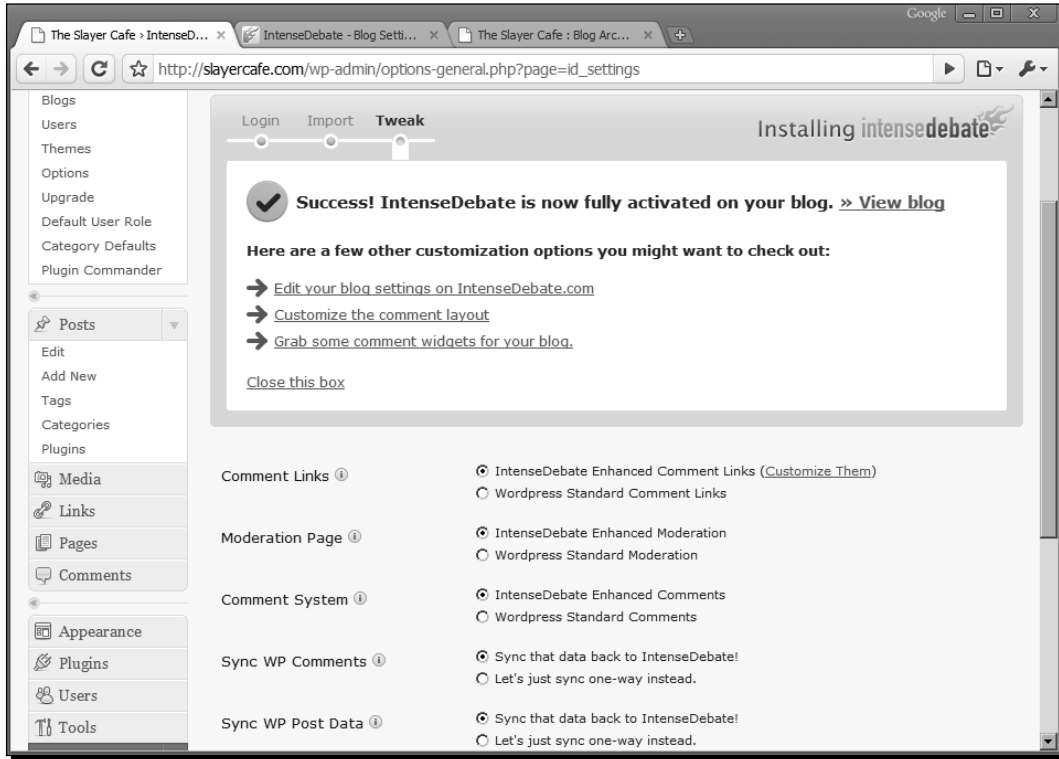
### **Time for action – IntenseDebate Comments**

- 1.** Download the IntenseDebate Comments plugin from <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/intensedebate/>.
- 2.** You will need to sign up for an account at <http://intensedebate.com/>.
- 3.** Activate the plugin.
- 4.** Go to **Settings | IntenseDebate**. You will be presented with a login screen. Enter the account details for the account you created in step 2.
- 5.** Once you have logged in, click **Start Importing Comments**.
- 6.** The import process can take a very long time, even if you don't have many comments to import.

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7. Once the import process is complete, you can tweak the settings to suit your blog—although I found the default ones were a good starting point.

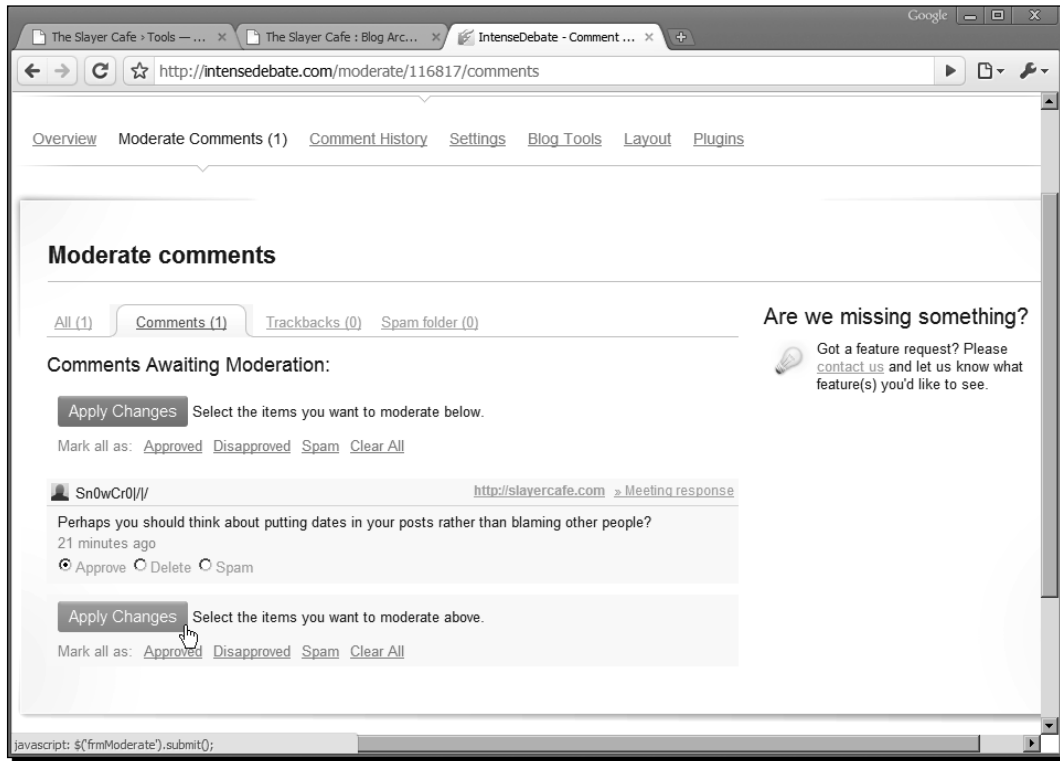


8. The IntenseDebate Comments plugin has its own **Comments** caption, so you may want to remove the Comments header from the `index.php` file in your theme folder.

## 9. The new comment box should look something like this:



10. You can moderate comments using the already familiar WordPress MU interface or the dashboard on the IntenseDebate site.



## What just happened?

IntenseDebate is a commenting system that sits on top of WordPress and WordPress MU. It is ideal for all blogs, whether they are part of a blog network, or a standalone blog. It does not replace the existing WordPress comment system; it only complements it. This means you can use IntenseDebate in conjunction with other plugins that rely on the WordPress MU comment system.

Readers can comment on your blog using the IntenseDebate comment system. If they have JavaScript turned off, they will be presented with the normal WordPress comment system instead.

IntenseDebate has lots of useful features that will make your users feel a greater sense of engagement with your site's authors. Those features are described below:

◆ **Threaded discussions:**

IntenseDebate supports threaded comments. This makes it easy for readers to follow the discussions going on in the comments section. Readers can reply to the blog post itself, or reply to a specific comment, and IntenseDebate will break related comments into threads so that the discussion is easy to keep track of.

◆ **Track comments or comment anonymously:**

Readers can comment anonymously, or, if they have an IntenseDebate profile they can log in to it and comment using it. Any comments made will be stored in the WordPress comments database and also be sent to IntenseDebate.

◆ **Subscribe to comments:**

Readers can subscribe to comments on a particular post by email or through their favorite RSS reader. If they have an IntenseDebate account, they also have the option to send a Twitter message or "Tweet" to alert their friends that they have commented on a particular post.

◆ **Reputation and voting:**

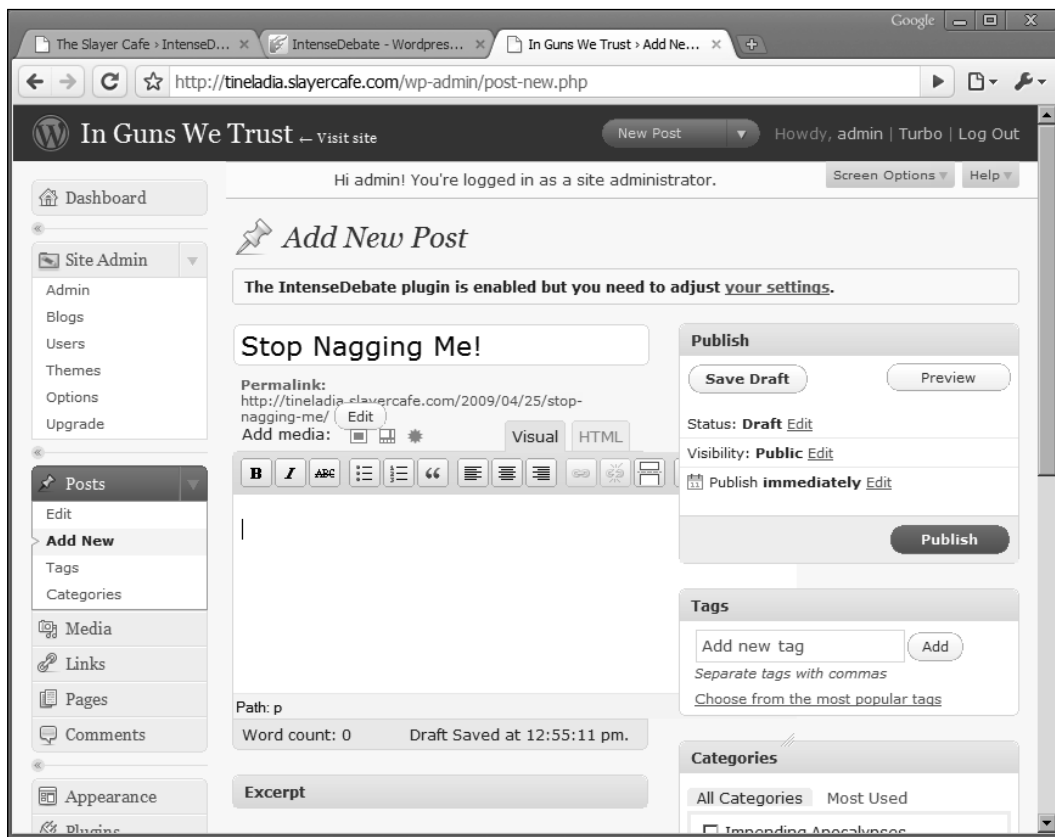
Another useful feature is the reputation system. Visitors can vote on comments, and comments that get a lot of negative votes will be hidden from view unless a user requests to see them. This is a handy form of "self moderation" for the community. The reputation system applies to only logged in users and gives each user an overall rating based on the quality of their comments on sites all over the Internet.

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## Activating IntenseDebate on your users' blogs

One important thing to remember is that even if you set IntenseDebate to automatically activate for your users, it won't do anything unless they set it up. Your users will still have the original WordPress MU comment system. They will be alerted to the fact that the plugin is not working for them by a message that will appear at the top of every page in their admin panel.



## Have a go hero – tweaking IntenseDebate

IntenseDebate has so many features that there is not enough room to cover them all here.

Take a look at the Extras (<http://intensedebate.com/extras>) page for some widgets that you may want to add to your blog.

Also, check the **Settings** page for your blog in IntenseDebate. You can edit the moderation settings on that page. The default settings include a list of spam words that will cause comments to be flagged for moderation. Comments will also be flagged for moderation if they contain more than two URLs.

You can tweak the commenting system's settings to filter by IP address, email address, key words, and profanity. You can also alter how the comments are displayed, the text displayed when people report comments, the layout, and the location of the blog's RSS feed. You may want to change that to use the FeedBurner version of the RSS feed.

## Community features—gravatars

**Gravatars** are **Globally Recognized Avatars**. They allow people to carry the same avatar from site to site without having to register at each site and take the time to upload an image.

Gravatars are supported by IntenseDebate by default. If a user has a gravatar and gives the email address that the gravatar is tied to when they make a comments, then the gravatar will be displayed beside that comment.

Since version 2.5, WordPress MU has had gravatar support built in. Let's add gravatars to our post pages.

### Time for action – gravatars in WordPress MU

1. Open your theme's `index.php` file. In our case we are editing the Blue Zinfandel theme.
2. Find the section that begins with `<div class="contentdate">`.
3. Remove all markup up to the closing `</div>` tag and insert the following code:

```
<?php
$email = $authordata->user_email;
$hash = md5($email);
$url = 'http://www.gravatar.com/avatar/' . $hash . '?d=identicon&r
=any&size=80';
$headers = wp_get_http_headers($url);
if (!is_array($headers)) :
    echo "<h3>";
    echo the_time('M');
    echo "</h3><h4>";
    echo the_time('j');
    echo "</h4>";
```

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## Sticky Features for your Blog Network

```
elseif (isset($headers["content-disposition"]) ) :
    echo get_avatar( $authordata->user_email, $size = '50') ;
else :
    echo "<h3>";
    echo the_time('M');
    echo "</h3><h4>";
    echo the_time('j');
    echo "</h4>";
endif;
?>
```

4. Save and upload the file.
5. If you wish to use avatars on user blogs, you will also need to edit the user's version of the theme file.
6. Now, if a post author has a gravatar, it will be displayed in the title section of their posts. If not, the default **Date of Post** box will appear instead.



## What just happened?

We have used the built-in WordPress MU gravatars function to display a member's gravatar in the title section of any posts they make.

As the default **No Gravatar Set** image is rather boring, our code checks to see if the author in question has a gravatar. If the author does not, or if the Gravatars web site is not accessible for any reason, then we display the normal post date icon instead.

Gravatars provide a way for people to carry their identity from site to site. Showing a recognizable face for your site's authors builds recognition among readers and helps readers and blog authors to build a relationship with each other.

You might be wondering why the output in the previous code is broken into several `echo` statements. I have chosen that method purely because I find it more readable. You could save yourself some typing if you built an `echo` statement similar to this one:

```
echo "<h3>". the_time('M')."</h3>"
```

## Have a go hero – gravatars and themes

The code used to edit the SlayerCafe blog theme was very simplistic. The theme you are using for your site may be structured differently.

In the theme for the SlayerCafe, the calendar icon that shows the date of the latest post is coded into the CSS file. The change I have made to the `index.php` file does not prevent the calendar icon from being loaded. The gravatar image simply loads over the top of it.

Try reworking the theme file to correct this. One way to do so would be to create a copy of the `contentdate` class in the `styles.css` file, which does not load the calendar image. Call the new class `contentgravatar` and then create different `<div>` tags to be displayed depending on whether you wish to show the calendar or the gravatar.

## Encouraging sign-ups with downloads for members only

If you offer file downloads, restricting some of them to only members is a good way to encourage people to sign up. It is a good idea to offer some file downloads to visitors who are just passing through so that you can build up their trust, as some people are uncomfortable giving out their email address to an unknown web site. Also, some people do not want to take the time to register to download a file, especially if they don't know if it is going to be a worthwhile download.

A good compromise is to offer some files to everyone and other files for members only, or to offer some content on your blog and then a download in a more convenient form.

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As an example, some of the Watchers on SlayerCafe could run tutorials about demon identification and slaying techniques. They may offer text and image versions as blog posts, with an MP3 version of the lesson that registered Slayers could download to listen to while they are on patrol. This is likely to have a high conversion rate in terms of registrations; the visiting Slayers will hopefully be impressed by the quality of the information in the tutorials and want to download the audio version.

One useful plugin that restricts downloads to registered users only is the User Only Downloads plugin available at <http://wpmudev.org/project/user-only-downloads>. This plugin is very easy to use. For some reason the author uploaded the plugin to WPMU Dev as a text file, so you will need to rename it to a `.php` file before you can use it. Just upload the renamed file to your `mu-plugins` folder and tell your users that they can restrict file downloads to members only by using the following tag in their posts:

```
[user_download URL]
```

Logged in users will see a download link, while everyone else will see a bold message telling them that they need to be logged in to download files.

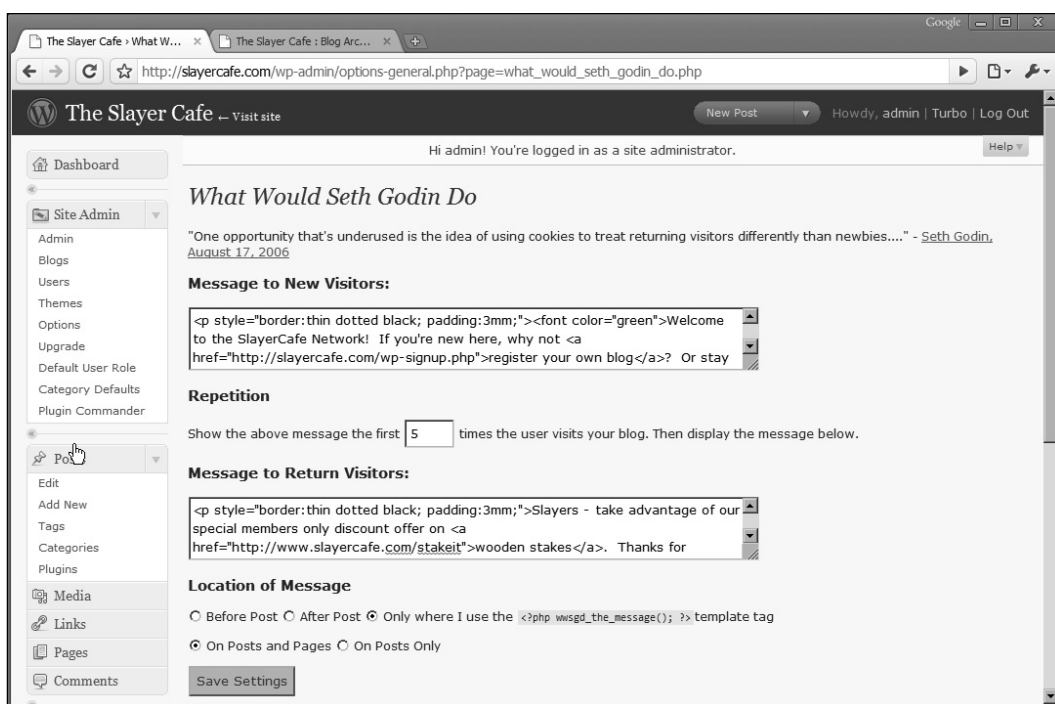
## Welcoming new visitors

Blog networks can be confusing when you first visit them. Why not ease the confusion a little by showing first-time visitors a special welcome message at the top of the page, which explains what the site is about and invites them to get involved in some way?

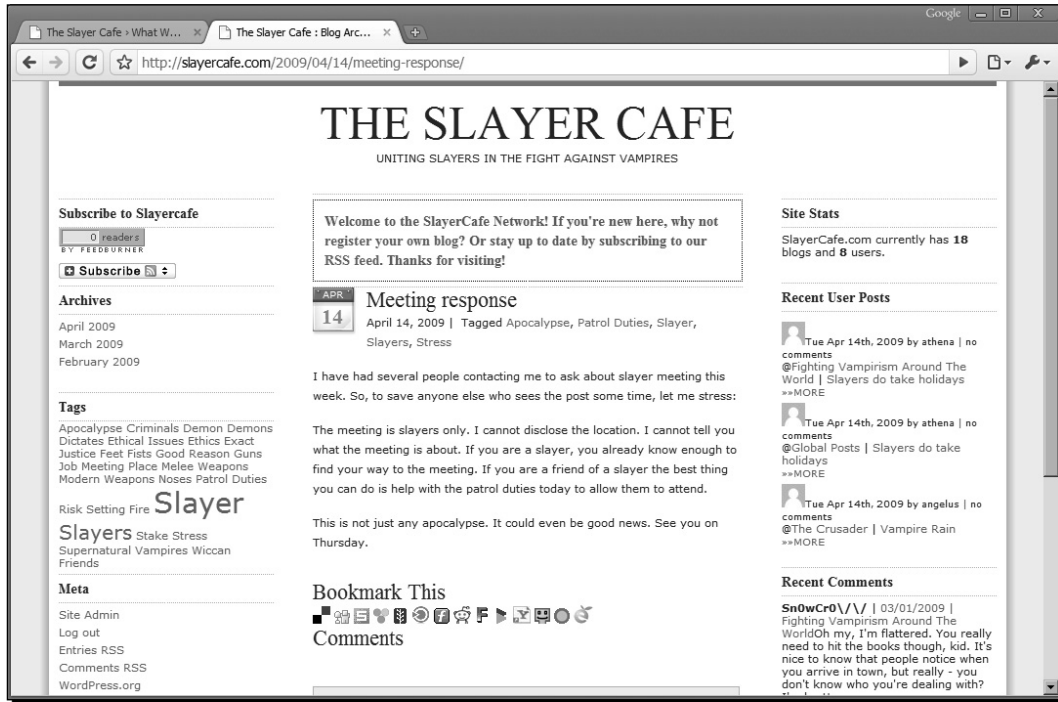
### Time for action – creating a welcome message

1. Download the What Would Seth Godin Do plugin from <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/what-would-seth-godin-do/>.
2. Copy the `what_would_seth_godin_do.php` file to your `/wp-content/plugins` folder.
3. Activate the plugin in your admin panel.
4. Turn on auto-activation using Plugin Commander.
5. Go to **Settings | WWSGD** and add a welcome message for new members.

6. Leave the **Repetition** setting at the default (first 5 visits).
7. If you have something you would like to alert regular visitors of, you can use the **Message to Return Visitors** box.
8. I recommend testing the plugin with the **Location of Message** set to **Before Post**. If you don't like the location of the message, change the setting to use the template tag instead.



9. New visitors to your site should see a welcome message like this one:



### What just happened?

The What Would Seth Godin Do plugin uses cookies to distinguish between first-time visitors and regular visitors. You can use this knowledge to offer visitors a different experience depending on how many times they have visited the site.

If a visitor comes to your site via a link on someone else's blog, they may not realize that they are visiting a blog network and may not understand what the site is about. A simple message letting them know the subject of the site and inviting them to create their own blog or subscribe to the site's feed should help to point them in the right direction.

You may not want to show a message to returning visitors all the time, but if you have a promotion or special offer that you'd like to display prominently, then using the What Would Seth Godin Do plugin is a convenient way to do so.

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The default **Before Post** setting did not work well for SlayerCafe, so I edited the `index.php` and `home.php` template files to get the welcome message to appear in the right place. For the theme I was using, the code `<?php wsgd_the_message(); ?>` should be placed below the line that says `<div id="contentmiddle">`.

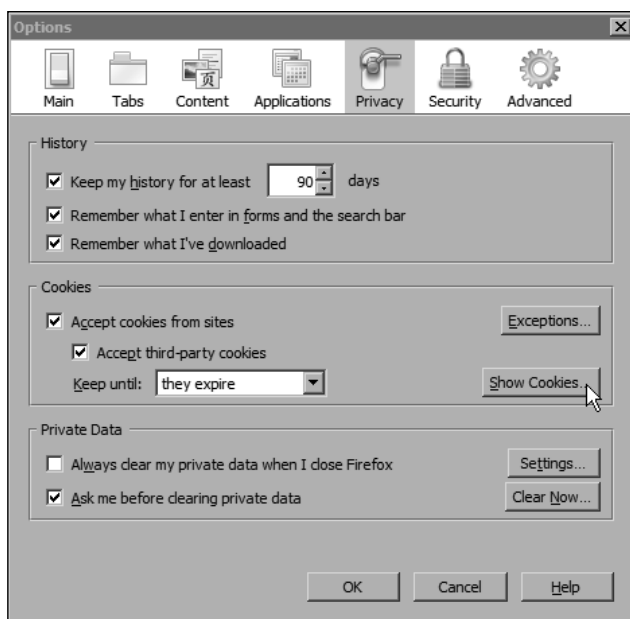
If you decide to use template tags to display the welcome message, don't forget to add the tags to all of the themes that you will be allowing your users to select.



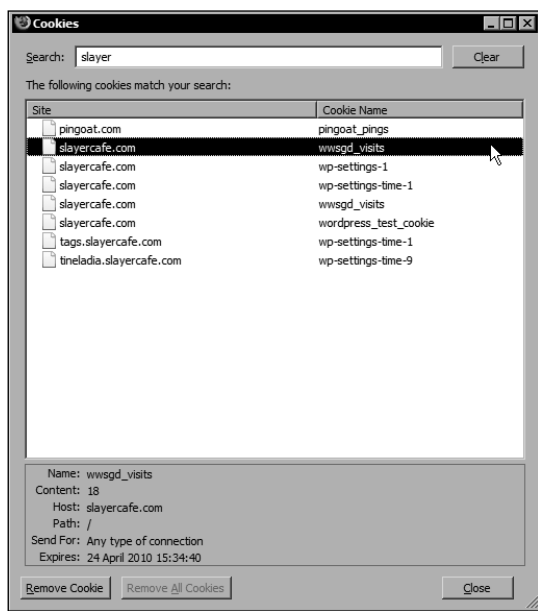
#### Welcome message not showing up?

If you can't see the welcome message, you may need to clear your cookies, or at least delete the cookies for the blog network. Most browsers make it easy for you to find the cookies that belong to a particular site. For example, in Firefox just go to **Tools | Options**, click on the **Privacy** tab, and then click **Show Cookies**..... Use the search box to find the cookie you want to delete, select it, and click **Remove Cookie**.

See the following screenshots for a clearer idea of what you're looking for.



The Cookies screen allows you to see a list of all the cookies Firefox has stored, and you can find the cookies related to your site by using the search box.



## Related posts for visitors from search engines

If visitors arrive on your blog network via a search engine, it's likely that they are looking for some information about a specific topic.

Why not take advantage of that by showing search engine-referred visitors a list of posts related to the keywords they searched for?

One way to achieve this is to use the Search Engine Related Posts plugin available at <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/search-engine-related-posts/>. Just install the plugin as normal and then add the markup `<div style="display:none" id="search_content"></div>` to your theme files at the point where you want the list to appear. For most people, this would be after the post display section of their `index.php` file.

The plugin will check the referrer details of your visitors and only show a list of related posts to the people who have been referred by a search engine. This increases the chance of those visitors staying around to read more articles, finding what they need, and becoming a regular reader of your site.

Regular visitors are probably reading your blog to stay up to date with the latest news and don't need to see a list of links to older posts, as it is likely that they have already seen them.

## Other ways to engage the community

The above are just a few ways you can engage your visitors. There are many others that you may want to look into. Here are a few for inspiration:

### Polls

Allowing your members to create polls is a useful way to get feedback from your members and to add a little interactivity to the site. If your site's authors pick the right questions, the information gathered from the polls can be useful, too.

A good polls plugin is: <http://wpmudev.org/project/powpoll-for-wpmu-27>.

This is one of the easier plugins to get working with WordPress MU. Many of the standard WordPress poll plugins require several steps to activate them on each member's blog, but PoWPoll can be set to automatically activate on new blogs.

The plugin supports voting restrictions, such as one vote per IP address, and restricts vote casting to logged-in visitors.

### Sitewide searching

Making it easy for your visitors to find the content they are looking for is an important part of making a sticky site. With a niche blogging network, it is likely that someone who is interested in the posts of one member will also be interested in the posts of others. They may want to search for posts on a specific topic contained anywhere within the network.

There are a number of ways you could implement a sitewide search feature. There are some plugins, such as One Search (<http://jason.ungos.com/projects/one-search-wpmu-plugin/>), that tie in to WordPress MU to allow sitewide searching, or you could use Google's Site Search.

One Search requires that the user who is accessing the WordPress MU database has the rights to create VIEWS. At the time of writing, the code available on the plugin author's web site will also need to be tweaked to work with WordPress MU versions 2.7.1 and above.

It is possible to integrate Google Custom Search Engine so that the results page fits with your template. You can learn more at <http://www.google.com/coop/cse/>.



## **Pop quiz – doing the thing**

1. What do people mean by "sticky"?
  - a) A web site that is difficult to navigate, so it takes you ages to find things you need.
  - b) A web site that engages readers, making them want to return.
  - c) A web site that takes a long time to download, so it makes the browser "stick".
2. What are avatars?
  - a) Graphical Avatars.
  - b) Graphic, Realistic Avatars.
  - c) Globally Recognized Avatars.

**Answers: (1) b, (2) c.**

## **Summary**

This chapter covered ways to make your site sticky so that when you attract new visitors, they stay around and become part of the community.

We learned about using contact forms to make it easy for our visitors to contact us, and adding a more personal feel to blog posts through the use of avatars. We also learned about comments and how to make the discussion that takes place in the comments sections of our blogs easier to follow through rating, threaded discussions, and subscription options.

We discussed the value of related posts links to help our visitors find posts that may interest them, and we talked about using polls and searches to draw users in to the site encouraging them to explore everything the site has to offer and making them feel like a part of the community.

We also discussed some other ways to improve the experience for both new and regular visitors, including displaying different messages to new visitors to help them "find their feet" on the site.

So far, we've looked at ways to encourage readers to engage with the authors who own blogs on our site. This is a good way to build regular readers. Many people enjoy joining in with discussions on the Internet, but do not want to run their own blog—perhaps because they don't have the time to commit to writing on a regular basis. Such people may still want to discuss issues relating to our site's niche in more depth, however, and so our next chapter will look at adding forums to our network. That way, bigger discussions can take place in one central location instead of being spread out across various blog comment sections.

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