

The Virtual Quilting Bee:

how quilters connect online

by Michele Foster



A couple of weeks ago, I was putting together a mini quilt top when I came to a stand-still, stuck on what I should do for the borders. What did I do? I posted a few photos on my blog with a couple of ideas I had for possible fabrics. Then I posted my dilemma to Twitter and Facebook, linking to the blog photos. Within 15 minutes, I had several great suggestions and happily returned to my sewing.

Never before have quilters around the world been able to connect so easily with each other. Every day is a virtual, non-stop quilting bee. We're connecting, sharing and inspiring each other with blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, mailing lists, chat rooms and more.

BLOGS

Blogs, or weblogs, are personal journals. They are a wonderful way to share your quilting and life experiences. They are a great idea for quilt shops and quilting professionals to easily and inexpensively communicate with customers.

Quilters use blogs to share their quilting journeys, show off accomplishments, share patterns, host challenges and swaps, etc. Each and every blog is different. Reading blogs is like having a 15 minute conversation with every member of your quilt guild.

If you decide to jump into the blogosphere and create your own blog, have fun with it. It's a wonderful way to make new friends, and a great creative outlet. Your blog can be about whatever you like – use it to share family photos and videos, express your opinions, share recipes, or publish free quilting patterns and tutorials. What and how often you post will depend on your own goals.

To get started, you'll need a blogging platform or

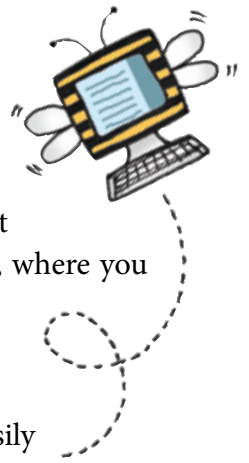
software. Here are the most popular ones:

- <http://blogger.com/>
- <http://wordpress.com/> or <http://wordpress.org/> (a self-hosted solution)
- <http://movabletype.com/>
- <http://typepad.com/>

If your main reason for blogging is to communicate with customers, then I recommend posting 3-5 times a week. Keep it friendly and informative, but leave out the politics. You want to encourage readers to visit your blog on a regular basis.

Some tips for successful blogging:

- Blog on a regular basis, especially if the blog is part of your business.
- Reach out and comment on other people's blogs.
- Share tips, tutorials, techniques and advice freely.
- Make it easy for others to subscribe to your blog via RSS, email, FriendConnect, etc.
- Reply personally to all comments left on your blog if you have an email address, as well as directly on your blog. This fosters communication and helps build community.
- Be kind to others. Don't leave unkind or inappropriate comments on another person's blog. If you disagree with the author, just go somewhere else.
- Keep your blog friendly and focused. While it is your space to write what you like, is it really the best place to vent about your marital difficulties?
- Respect copyright. If you blog about something you found elsewhere, ask permission before using their images or content.
- Join the Quilting Bloggers directory [<http://quiltinggallery.com/quilting-bloggers/>]



something in the “What’s on your mind” box, your friends will see what you posted on their own Facebook home page. Likewise, you’ll see what they are sharing on your home page, where you can easily add your own comments.

Some tips for using Facebook:

- Create groups of your friends to easily streamline your home page.
- Hide quizzes, games and other items you are not interested in from showing up on your home page.
- Share photos, videos and web links you find interesting.
- If you have a business or are a designer, you might want to create a Fan Page to allow your customers a place to chat and share.
- Never post items you wouldn’t want a potential employer to find.

Facebook is the second thing I do each morning after checking email. Aside from my own blog, it’s the number one way I keep up with my quilting friends around the world.

TWITTER

<http://twitter.com/>

Twitter is an excellent way to communicate and stay connected with friends, family and customers. It’s micro-blogging based on the premise of answering one simple question, “What are you doing?” in 140 characters or less.

Once you join Twitter, you can use the search to find others that are talking about quilting, read their tweets and decide if you would like to follow them. The tweets from those that you follow will appear in your stream.

Another great way to find other quilters to follow on Twitter is to join a quilting-related Twibe [<http://www.twibes.com/>]. A twibe is a group of Twitter users interested in a common topic who want to communicate with each other.

Similar to Twibes above, Wefollow [<http://wefollow.com/>] allows users to search for like-minded people and join virtual groups.

BLOGS BY CANADIAN DESIGNERS

Dorothy Baker (Ontario)
<http://dorothybakerdesigns.blogspot.com/>

Marlene Biles (Manitoba)
<http://sipiweskequilts.blogspot.com/>

Cori Derksen and Myra Harder - Blue Meadow Designs (Manitoba)
<http://bluemeadowdesigns.blogspot.com/>

Daphne Greig (British Columbia)
<http://daphnegrig.blogspot.com/>

Horizons: Valerie Hearder on the Art and Soul of Quilting (Nova Scotia)
<http://www.threadlink.typepad.com/>

Lorraine Lefort and Lydia Quigley - The Rabbit Factory (Ontario)
<http://therabbitfactory.blogspot.com/>

Lisa Michelle Design (British Columbia)
<http://lmdandmyworld.blogspot.com/>

Pippa Moore (British Columbia)
<http://kitambaa.blogspot.com/>

Dale Anne Potter
<http://www.daleannepotter.com/blog/>

Susan Purney Mark (British Columbia)
<http://susanpm.blogspot.com/>

FACEBOOK

<http://facebook.com/>

Facebook helps you connect and share with family, friends, co-workers and customers. You can post photos, videos, web links and snippets about your daily life. You can join groups and fan pages for products and people. You can also use Facebook to organize events and campaigns. It’s a powerful tool with many options.

Once you’ve joined Facebook, search for friends or groups of interest. There are lots of great quilting groups and fan pages for you to join. When you enter

OTHER SITES AND TOOLS

To communicate with someone specifically on Twitter, use the @ symbol in front of their username. For example, posting “@MishkaOttawa I like your web site” will flag the message directly to me, as well as share it with all of your followers.

If you wish to send a private message, add dm in front of the username, e.g. dm MishkaOttawa. (Of course, keep in mind that while the message is private, Twitter is not secure; never give out your password, credit card info, etc.)

Some tips for using Twitter:

- Get a tool that works for you; I've listed a few of the popular ones below.
- It's OK not to read all of the tweets that come your way. You'll become an expert at skimming.
- Don't spam Twitter. Remember it's about communicating, sharing and developing relationships. Yes, it's fine to tweet about your new blog post, or a fabric sale you're having, but don't make that the only thing you do.
- Avoid, like the plague, any site that says it'll get you hundreds of followers in one day. They are spam and will take over your Twitter account.
- Don't cross-post your tweets to Facebook. It's annoying for those that are connected to you in both places.

While you can tweet and follow Twitter from the web site, these desktop tools make it much easier to keep in touch with your followers:

- Twhirl - <http://www.twhirl.org/>
- Tweetdeck - <http://tweetdeck.com/>
- Twiterrific - <http://iconfactory.com/software/twiterrific>

Mailing Lists: MapleLeafQuiltGuild is a Canadian-based online quilt guild. Quilt Art is dedicated to contemporary art quilters. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MapleleafQuiltGuild/> and <http://quiltart.com/>

Pen Pals: Benita Skinner maintains a list of quilters looking for pen pals. <http://victorianaquiltdesigns.com/VictorianaQuilters/Sharing/SharingwithQuilters.htm>

Quilt Shop Locator is part of my Quilting Gallery site. I created it to help quilters plan excursions and find new quilt shops and quilting professionals near and far. <http://quiltshoplocator.com/>

Flickr allows for easy sharing of photos. It's also great for creating groups so your quilting friends and customers can share their creations. <http://flickr.com/>

YouTube allows you to upload and share videos. It's a great way to learn new quilting techniques too. Just search for quilting, patchwork or a specific technique, to find videos of interest. <http://youtube.com/>

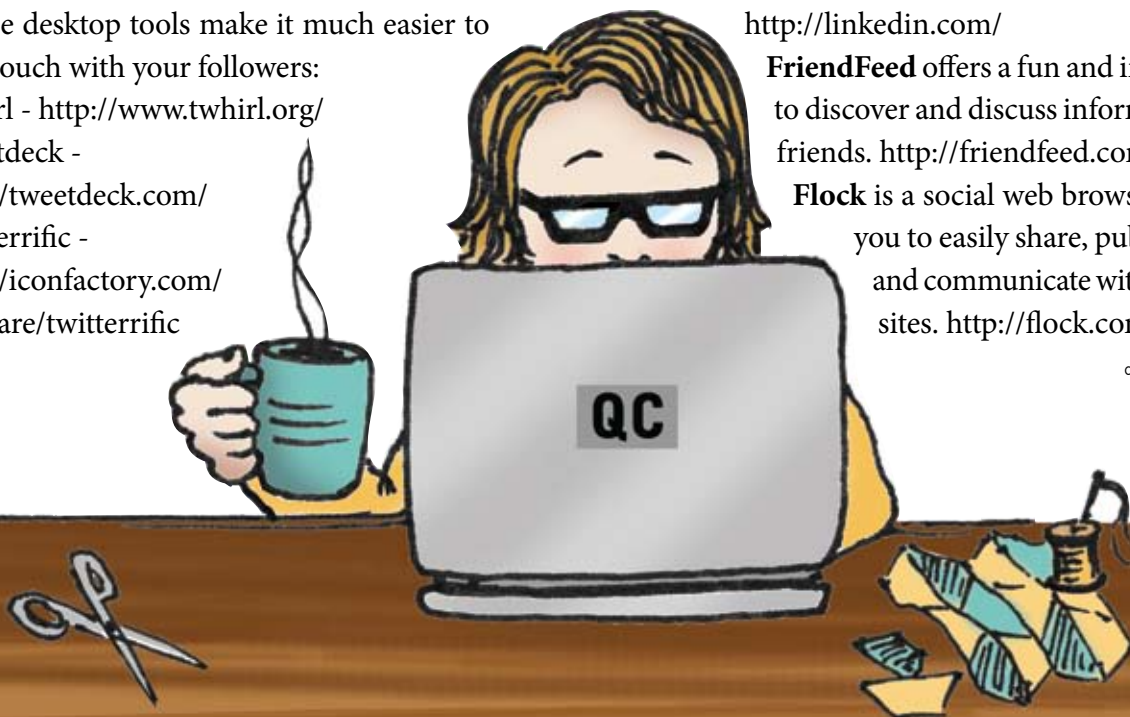
StumbleUpon helps you discover and share great websites. When you Stumble, you'll see pages that friends and like-minded stumblers have recommended. <http://stumbleupon.com/>

LinkedIn helps you connect with like-minded professionals from around the world to share information, ideas and opportunities. I know several quilt artists that use LinkedIn to their advantage. <http://linkedin.com/>

FriendFeed offers a fun and interactive way to discover and discuss information among friends. <http://friendfeed.com/>

Flock is a social web browser that allows you to easily share, publish, discover and communicate with social media sites. <http://flock.com/>

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Google Friend Connect makes it very easy for others to join your site and discover other members. <http://www.google.com/friendconnect/>

Backtype is a conversational search engine. They index and connect millions of conversations from blogs, social networks and other social media so people can find, follow and share comments. <http://backtype.com/>

Technorati is a blog search engine. <http://technorati.com/>

I have become a much better quilter since I started connecting with other quilters online. I've participated in swaps, tried many new techniques, learned of new products and received invaluable advice and encouragement when needed. I've had the pleasure of meeting several quilters in-person at various shows that I first met online. It's been a wonderful experience.

While there are many web sites and tools that make it very easy to connect with others, always keep in mind your safety. Think about what personal information you divulge

and how/ if it could be harmful if the wrong person knows it. You really don't know who it is behind a computer name.



Michele Foster is an Ottawa-based, quilting web developer. She's the creator of the web site Quilting Gallery that is dedicated to bringing quilters together from around the world. The site features the Quilting Bloggers directory, the Quilt Shop Locator, free patterns and tutorials, guest bloggers, swaps, give-aways, videos, and many new features coming this Fall. Michele can be found at:



Quilting Gallery blog and web site - <http://quiltinggallery.com/>
Facebook - <http://facebook.com/michele.foster>
Twitter - <http://twitter.com/MishkaOttawa>
Email - michele@quiltinggallery.com

