

Serendipity Is The Best Open Source Blog Engine

Who am I to determine that Serendipity is absolutely best blog software on the planet? Well, I'll admit I've only been using blog software for 6 months. I've only tried Serendipity, Word Press and Nucleus. However, I have created over 20 full web sites using software from all areas. I've used Mambo, Joomla, Nucleus, Word Press, Serendipity, Java Servlets and JSPs', plain HTML pages and Serendipity is my favorite.

I have worked as a professional programmer for 15 years and with Java (as a software engineer) for the last 10 years. I've spent most of that time dealing intimately with various web technologies. Certainly I am no blog expert, but I have a bit of experience with software. Serendipity is good software.

Serendipity is a blog engine. A blog is simply a series of postings to a web site, sometimes organized and sometimes random. They are meant to quickly collect ones thoughts, but more recently entire web sites are being created out of sophisticated blog engines. I believe the blog engine and full fledged CMS solutions are converging. If what you need is a simple menuing system and a way to get content up on the net, then perhaps a blog engine, specifically Serendipity, is what you want.

Installation of Serendipity was a breeze, both on GoDaddy and HostGator. The default install went well, with the exception of course that GoDaddy does not put your MySQL database on "localhost", but on another server. Once you know the name of that server it's all good.

Once installed, changing styles is also easy. Serendipity comes with a number of built in themes/templates which are a snap to install. Basically you just go to Manage Styles in the administration menu and choose your new theme. It couldn't be easier.

Modifying templates is also quite simple. Most users simply want to change colors or graphics and this can all be done withing the style.css file for your template. I chose to make a copy of the "competition" template and modify my copy. All I had to change was the info.txt file and style.css, add my images to the img directory and I was good to go. Of course, it is not necessary to do this, just if you want a more unique look to your site.

Adding content is where Serendipity shines. I found the interface easy and intuitive, especially for media management. Imagine that you are adding an item and you want to add an image. Just click on media, put in the URL of the item you want to add and serendipity goes out and pulls it down and puts it in it's own directory. Then you can choose how you want it to appear in the text (left, right, on it's own) and whether or not you want the full image or thumbnail. Excellent!

Defining and using categories is equally easy and you can nest categories if you'd like. Each category can have a description and image. The description displays when the user put's their cursor over the category, I am not sure when/if the image gets displayed.

Serendipity has options to use search engine friendly URLs, but for some reason I wasn't able to get these working properly on GoDaddy. I'm sure there is an easy fix, I could ask at the Serendipity forum, but haven't yet. Adding a trailing slash to the rewritten addresses seems to bring up the page, but my ".htaccess" knowledge is not good enough to fix it myself. The URL rewriting works just fine on HostGator. Remember, using the non friendly URLs doesn't mean you won't get indexed, just that it may take a little longer. Also, the SEO friendly URLs tend to boost your ranking a little because they have the subject matter right in the URL.

What about integrating Ads in Serendipity? Serendipity has a solution for that too. There is a plug in (comes with Serendipity) called HTML Nugget. It allows you to add arbitrary HTML to one of the sidebar columns, perfect for those tower Google Ads or links to affiliate programs. It takes me all of 5 minutes to set up the ads on one of my sites. Nucleus took me quite a bit longer, I had to manually edit some of their files. Not very friendly.

All in all, I like Serendipity, it is right up there with Joomla as my favorite piece of open source software. The development team has done a fantastic job and I look forward to more great releases from them.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Jon is a software engineer with 25 years of programming experience, 15 as a professional. Check out some of his Open Source site at <http://www.open-source-depot.com/> and some of his Serendipity based work at <http://www.north-pole-christmas.com/>