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Lisa Sabin-Wilson
Author of WordPress For Dummies

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BuddyPress FOR DUMMIES®

BuddyPress FOR DUMMIES®

by Lisa Sabin-Wilson

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About the Author

Lisa Sabin-Wilson is a creative designer and owner of E.Webscapes Design Studio (`www.ewebscapes.com`) and has worked hard at providing her clients with custom designed WordPress blogs and Web sites since 2003. Lisa is a frequent speaker at WordCamps and other national conferences, such as South by Southwest Interactive and meet ups local to her Southeastern Wisconsin home, like Milwaukee's Web development group, Web414. Lisa is highly regarded as a WordPress expert who specializes in helping users take full control over their Web publishing efforts through the use of the WordPress platform. She reaches thousands of people worldwide with her WordPress services, skills, and experience.

Lisa is the author of the popular *WordPress For Dummies*, first published in 2007. Her experience and knowledge of BuddyPress came from the rapidly emerging popularity of the platform; as more and more of her own clients started requesting BuddyPress integration on their Web sites, Lisa had no choice but to dig right in and figure out what it was all about! She's glad she did — it's a dynamic addition to any WordPress-powered Web site.

Lisa operates a few blogs online, all of which are powered by WordPress. Her personal blog (`lisasabin-wilson.com`) has been online since February of 2002 and her design business, E.Webscapes (`ewebscapes.com`), has been online since 1999. She also operates a successful Web hosting service, BlogsAbout Hosting (`blogsabout.com`), which caters to blogs and bloggers on a global scale, with an emphasis on WordPress users.

When she is not designing, or consulting with her clients, you can usually find her either at her favorite coffee shop sipping espresso, on a mountaintop somewhere hitting the slopes with her family, or 100 feet beneath the ocean waters, scuba diving with her husband and swimming with the fishes.

Lisa is actively involved in online social communities and you can find her on Twitter: @LisaSabinWilson or Facebook at `http://facebook.com/lisa-sabinwilson`.

Dedication

My family deserves all of the credit, for their love, support, and encouragement. My husband, Chris Wilson, gets an extra mention for being my rock and my reliable sounding board.

Author's Acknowledgments

When people use free and open software for community use, the people that spend countless hours and days developing the software sometimes get lost in the excitement. Because BuddyPress is incapable of running without the WordPress MU software, the first kudos go out to Matt Mullenweg, the founder of WordPress, and Donncha OCaoimh, the lead developer of the WordPress MU platform.

Andy Peatling is the lead developer of the BuddyPress project and has been the driving force behind development and community involvement. BuddyPress is truly a project driven by the community; Andy, and his team in the BuddyPress Forums (`http://buddypress.org/forums`), really does listen to user feedback, testers, and reports to improve existing features — and build new ones — for BuddyPress. Andy is also my technical editor for this book, so special thanks to him for keeping me on track.

To every WordPress and BuddyPress plugin developer and theme designer who donates his or her time, skills, and knowledge to provide the user community with invaluable tools that help us create dynamic Web sites, thank you a million times! And to the hundreds of volunteers and testers who destroy all those pesky pre-release bugs for each and every new version release — your time and efforts are so very appreciated.

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To my family and friends, some of whom I have neglected during the process of writing this book, thank you for not abandoning me. Also, to my clients, many of whom showed incredible patience and encouragement during the months of writing these chapters.

Finally, thanks to my family — my husband, Chris; my son, Ben; my daughter, Melissa and my parents, Don and Penny Sabin — for their support for this book, and in life.

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Introduction

BuddyPress allows users to create their own social community on their Web site. BuddyPress entered the scene and began to gain attention in the blogging community during the summer of 2008, and brought a suite of plugins and add-ons to the very popular blogging platform, WordPress. Today, anyone can host a social community on their own Web site through the combined use of WordPress and BuddyPress. The really good news is that you can accomplish this on your own Web site for the cost of exactly nothing. BuddyPress is free, open-source software that you can download, install, and begin building your own social community on the Web today. Whoever said, "nothing in life is free" hasn't met the folks behind the BuddyPress and WordPress software development!

Social communities on the Web are all the rave today. They started with sites like MySpace (`www.myspace.com`) and Facebook (`www.facebook.com`), where people can go to the Web site, join, and immediately start connecting with other people who share similar interests, hobbies, ideas, and talents. These communities allow you to share photos, music, videos, news, information, and even personal anecdotes about you and your life. You're able to network with other people from around the world who share the same interests as you through searching for them, joining groups and discussion forums, and then creating friendships so that you can keep track of and stay in touch with the people you've met. Social communities are an event on the Internet in a room that's never empty and in which the party never ends.

BuddyPress isn't a stand-alone program; it requires the use of the WordPress software. This means that you have to be running WordPress on your Web site before you can add the BuddyPress component. WordPress is an insanely popular (and free) blogging platform that's open source, easy to install, and used to power the content management of your Web site. After you install WordPress, you can add BuddyPress and start building a community. As you'll find in the pages of this book, BuddyPress is easy to install and gets your site up and running in a very short amount of time.

Niche communities are popping up all over the Web. These communities encourage social groups that focus on specific topics, ideas, and talents to share information and enable community members to network with one another, regardless of geographical location. By using BuddyPress on a WordPress-powered site, the possibilities of social networking on the Internet are endless! Political groups, environmental groups, businesses large and

small, knitting groups, bowling groups, sports groups . . . any special interest group of any kind can build a community space on the Web where people with the same interests can connect, discuss, and share.

BuddyPress, with WordPress, gives you several features that will make your community very attractive to visitors and members, including the following:

- **Extended Profiles:** Members can fill in bits of information that let other members of the community get to know them better.
- **Avatars:** Members can upload a photo of themselves to display on their profile and various areas of the community.
- **Friends:** Members can connect by sending and accepting friendship requests and creating a list of friends within your community.
- **Private Messages:** Members can send and receive private messages from their friends within your community.
- **Activity Streams:** A display of all your activity within the community, such as comments, blog posts, friendships, wire posts, and group activity.
- **Blog Tracking:** A display of blog posts that a member has made on his blog(s) within the community.
- **Forums:** Allows community members to create and manage their own discussion forums.
- **Community Blogs:** Using WordPress MU, users are able to create and manage their own blog within the community.

The really nice thing about the BuddyPress features is that you can use only the ones you want. You don't have to use all the available features — you can disable the ones you don't think you'll need and use only the ones you want. BuddyPress is flexible enough to help you create and customize your own social community.

This book presents an in-depth look at the BuddyPress platform and integrating BuddyPress into your existing WordPress-powered Web site. I cover the basics of setting up the WordPress software on your Web site as a foundation; however, if you need more comprehensive information on how to use Word Press, you might want to pick up a copy of my other book, *WordPress For Dummies*.

BuddyPress For Dummies, like all *For Dummies* books, focuses on you, the user — in this case it focuses on how you can build a social community on your Web site using the WordPress platform. This book does not cover PHP or MySQL programming, nor will it turn you into a WordPress or BuddyPress developer (for that, you might want to pick up *The WordPress Bible* by Aaron Brazell, published by Wiley). What this book will do is take you step-by-step

through the process of installing, configuring, using, customizing, and maintaining a BuddyPress community on your Web site using all of the tools packaged within the BuddyPress and WordPress software.

About This Book

This book covers all the important aspects of using the BuddyPress platform to create a social community on your WordPress-powered Web site, including

- Registering a domain name, obtaining Web hosting, and exploring the basic tools needed to manage the WordPress and BuddyPress software on your Web server.
- Laying the foundation by installing and setting up the WordPress software on your Web server.
- Installing and configuring the BuddyPress software.
- Setting up BuddyPress and configuring such features as extended profiles, avatars, activity streams, blog tracking, friendships, groups, forums, and more!
- Discovering profile fields and individualizing them for your Web community.
- Integrating blogs by using WordPress and the blog-tracking component in BuddyPress.
- Displaying community activity and searchable directories for members, blogs, and groups within your community.
- Enabling and creating groups.
- Finding tips and advice on running and managing a large social community on your Web site, including advice on customer service and technical support.
- Finding and installing free BuddyPress themes.
- Customizing BuddyPress themes by tweaking existing free themes, or creating your own custom BuddyPress theme from scratch.
- Using BuddyPress widgets to add interactivity and community navigation options for your visitors.
- Understanding how to use BuddyPress plugins to extend the functionality of your BuddyPress community.
- Integrating popular social media memberships in your community, such as Twitter and Facebook.

- Finding out how to obtain BuddyPress support and assistance through community forums, groups, and Web site resources.
- Discovering real world examples of BuddyPress in action to see how BuddyPress looks and functions.

Conventions Used in This Book

Consistency is a good thing when you're taking on the task of learning new things. Throughout this book, you can count on a consistent set of typography conventions I've used to help guide you through the information presented:

- When I ask you to type something on your computer, you'll see the text I want you to type printed in **bold**.
- When I suggest a keyword or phrase that you may want to type in a search engine, the keyword or phrase is printed in *italics*.
- Text that appears in this `special font` is sure to be a URL (Web address), e-mail address, filename, folder name, or snippet of code.
- When I feel the need to define a word that I think you might not be familiar with, the word appears in *italic* text to let you know that I go on to define it next.

What You Are Not to Read

BuddyPress For Dummies is meant to assist and guide you through the mechanics of using and setting up BuddyPress and the various features of the BuddyPress platform on your Web site to build your successful social community. It isn't meant to be read from cover to cover. Rather, the information is organized in a logical order and presented in such a way that you can jump from one section to another to enable you to take what you need, and leave the rest for your neighbor.

Although this book doesn't contain extensive coverage of the WordPress platform, Wiley Publishing offers two books that comprehensively cover the use of WordPress. *WordPress For Dummies,* by (yours truly) Lisa Sabin-Wilson, focuses on the beginner-to-intermediate level WordPress user; and the *WordPress Bible,* by Aaron Brazell, goes in-depth on WordPress development,

including plugin and theme development with the more advanced WordPress user in mind.

Visit the Table of Contents to discover the content covered in this book and flip to the pages that discuss the topic you need the most assistance with. For example, if you need the basics on setting up the WordPress foundation of your Web site, be sure to read Chapters 2 and 3, but if you already have WordPress set up on your Web server, you can skip Chapter 2.

If you need more of an introduction to the BuddyPress platform, be sure to read Chapter 1; then move on to Part II to discover the steps you take to set up the software and begin configuring the available options and features.

If you want to customize your BuddyPress-powered site with a really cool visual design and layout, then make sure you head to Part IV, "Customizing BuddyPress," in which you discover the default BuddyPress themes and information on how to customize the themes with HTML and CSS.

In a nutshell, you're safe to take what you need from this book and apply your new knowledge to your BuddyPress community. Then pass on your new found knowledge to your friends and wow them with your supreme geekiness!

Foolish Assumptions

I try not to make assumptions about people I've never met; however, for the purpose of this book, I have made a few assumptions about you:

- You have access to a computer — PC or Mac, this book covers both.
- Your computer has access to the Internet.
- You know how to type on a keyboard.
- You have a basic understanding of what blogs are and how they work.
- You know what WordPress is and have some basic experience with using the platform to run and maintain a blog or Web site on the Internet.

I've also assumed that you have a big interest in learning how you can create and maintain a social community on your Web site using the BuddyPress platform. If I'm right on that assumption, then you are definitely in the right place!

How This Book Is Organized

BuddyPress For Dummies is organized into 6 parts that encompass 17 chapters of information you need to know in order to use the BuddyPress platform.

- **Part I: Introducing BuddyPress** gives you an introduction of the BuddyPress platform and the advantages you will find in using it to build a social community of users on your Web site. In this part, you discover the tools you need to run BuddyPress on your Web site, including domain registration, obtaining a Web hosting provider, and using FTP (File Transfer Protocol) to transfer the necessary software files. Additionally, this part introduces you to the basics of the WordPress MU software requirements that need to be in place before you can install the BuddyPress platform on your Web site. This part also includes a basic run through of the WordPress dashboard and options, once you have WordPress installed and running on your Web server.
- **Part II: Getting Up and Running with BuddyPress** introduces you to the methods of installing BuddyPress on your WordPress-powered site: auto-installation with the WordPress plugin installer, or manual installation with BuddyPress by downloading the software and using FTP to upload it to your Web server. This part gives you a full understanding of the directory structure of the BuddyPress software files. In this part, you configure BuddyPress, set up the components you want to use within your social community, and set up the profile fields for your community members.
- **Part III: Understanding BuddyPress Features** takes you through all the exciting BuddyPress features that will make your social community a smashing success with your visitors. You explore how your users will benefit from such features as community registration, extended profiles and avatars, friendships, private messages, activity streams, community blogs, searchable directories, groups, and forums.
- **Part IV: Customizing BuddyPress** introduces you to BuddyPress themes and template tags that you can use to create a visual display that is individualized and unique to your community. Although BuddyPress comes bundled with nicely designed default themes to get you going right away, you'll find information on basic CSS and HTML that will help you tweak an existing free BuddyPress theme that you are using, or help you create your own custom theme. This part also takes you through the differences between the BuddyPress Home theme and the BuddyPress Member theme.

- **Part V: Extending BuddyPress** gives you the opportunity to explore how you can add different features to your BuddyPress community through third-party plugins developed by BuddyPress and WordPress community members. This part introduces you to the methods of finding, downloading, installing, and using BuddyPress plugins on your Web site. Additionally, this part also shows you how you can integrate other popular social network sites and communities (say Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) in your own BuddyPress-powered community.
- **Part VI: The Part of Tens** is a staple in all *For Dummies* books. This Part of Tens explores real world examples of BuddyPress implementations on the Web so you can see how others are using the software to run successful communities. This part also explores some popular BuddyPress plugins and themes that will help you extend your BuddyPress site and create a community that will receive rave reviews from your members!

  The Appendix covers some information for the true geeks out there! BuddyPress gives you the chance to use cutting-edge versions of their software before it releases to the public. This Appendix covers where to find a program called SVN (Subversion) to update your BuddyPress version to the latest cutting-edge (Beta) version.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you can't miss the little icons that appear in the margins that spotlight certain points I want to emphasize. They highlight items you need to remember, warnings you need to be aware of, technical advice, and "how-tos" or tips that I think will really help you on your way. Here's what to expect when you see these icons throughout the pages of this book.

This icon appears next to information that I think you'll find very useful — advice and gems of information that I've discovered in my experiences with the BuddyPress software.

This icon looks like a little bomb for a reason! You definitely need to pay attention to these items because they contain information on things you should be doing — or not doing — when setting up and using the BuddyPress software.

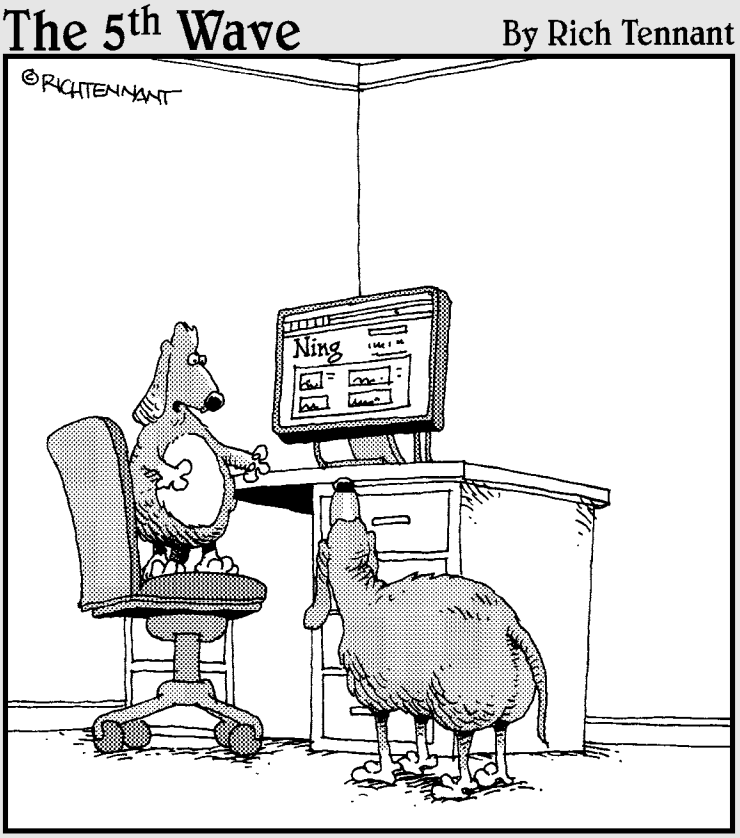
This icon flags important points that I want you to remember while you set up and use your BuddyPress/WordPress-powered Web site. When I use this icon, I want you to read it two or three times and brand it into your brain forever and ever.

Let's face it, building Web sites, blogs, and social communities is kind of a geeky adventure. I use this icon to point out some technical mumbo jumbo — the sort of technical information that geeks love — that might be helpful while you set up your social community empire.

Where to Go From Here

I think I've gone on enough to give you a good understanding of what this book contains — it's time to get started! This book is a handy reference guide that contains information, tips, ideas, concepts, and tools that you need to start using BuddyPress. As I mention in the "What You Are Not to Read" section, thumb through the Index or the Table of Contents to find the sections that you feel will be most helpful to you. You can find this book's Cheat Sheet online at `www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/buddypress`.

Part I
Introducing BuddyPress



"Basically, it's a car-chasing network, but it's also much more. We discuss mail carriers, UPS trucks, vacuum cleaners..."

In this part . . .

If you're ready to start building your own social community on the Web, you're in the right place! This part introduces you to the wonders of the BuddyPress platform and the WordPress blogging platform that you build your BuddyPress community on. I tell you all about social communities, why you want to include one on your Web site, how to lay the WordPress foundation required to begin the magic and give you a tour through the WordPress dashboard to make sure you can find your way around.