



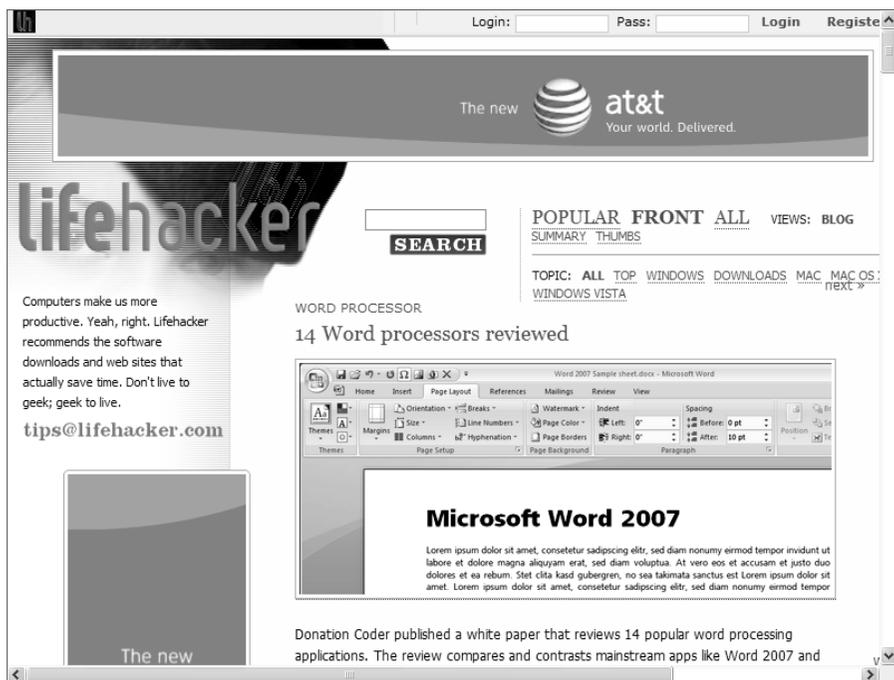
# Gina Trapani Lifehacker

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*“The blogosphere is filled with undiscovered gems.”*

—Gina Trapani

**G**ina Trapani is the founding editor of Lifehacker.com ([www.lifehacker.com](http://www.lifehacker.com)), a blog devoted to clever shortcuts and faster methods of completing software and personal productivity chores. Lifehacker finds and shares downloads, tips, and techniques that actually make you more efficient without costing you time. Whether it involves computing (Mac or PC), the Internet, or life and technology in general, there’s always something at Lifehacker.com to make your day easier. And you don’t have to be a computer whiz to benefit.



As the site's motto states, "Don't live to geek; geek to live!" Like many who work from home, Gina Trapani has a full schedule. Lifehacker.com is updated at least 20 times per day, which means she has to get an early start—a very early start. She lives on the West Coast and begins posting the day's tech news at 6:00 AM, because it's 9:00 AM on the East Coast and big news has already broken.

The news done, she catches up on e-mail and postings, and researches and writes her major posts. The day is otherwise spent communicating with her co-editors and writing less-important posts. She sometimes works during dinner and into the evening, but tries to avoid that as much as possible because "computer-free time is important." In fact, she characterizes herself as a big fan of being away from the keyboard.

As busy as it keeps her, Lifehacker.com isn't Trapani's only professional activity. She builds websites and Firefox extensions, and her writing has appeared in a several popular magazines, including *Wired*, *Time*, *Popular Science*, and *Newsweek*. Her column, "Easy Way," appears in *Women's Health* magazine every month.

Interestingly, Lifehacker was her first paid writing job. She did no magazine writing until after she began Lifehacker. Before all that, Trapani was a run-of-the-mill code monkey, working for various startups.

In 2006, Wiley published *Lifehacker: 88 Tech Tricks to Turbocharge Your Day*, by Gina Trapani. Like the website, *Lifehacker* the book empowers readers to apply technology creatively.

The idea of turning a blog into a book might seem to be a step backwards, moving content from the latest-generation technology to one that is centuries old. But as demonstrated by bloggers such as Chris Anderson and Frank Warren, it's a viable concept. As Trapani puts it, "A blog is a great way to test a concept and see if it can attract a large audience with a low barrier to entry. Whether in print or online, readers want compelling content."

Although she is pressured to turn out a lot of copy quickly, Trapani still finds time to check out her favorite blogs, among them *Tricks of the Trade* ([www.tradetricks.org](http://www.tradetricks.org)), *43 Folders* ([www.43folders.com](http://www.43folders.com)), and *A Whole Lotta Nothing* ([a.wholelottanothing.org](http://a.wholelottanothing.org)).

## Don't Live to Geek; Geek to Live!

Founded in 2005, Lifehacker received the 2006 Rave Award from *Wired* magazine and the 2007 Bloggies award for the Best Group Weblog. CNET listed

Lifehacker in their “Blog 100” in 2005. That same year, *Time* magazine listed Lifehacker as one of its “50 Coolest Web Sites,” and in 2006 the blog made *Time*’s list of “Sites We Can’t Live Without.” *PC Magazine* also listed Lifehacker in its “100 Blogs We Love” in 2007.

### What attracted you to blogging?

I started blogging back in December 2001, mostly as a means of self-expression. I was always a writer—journals, stories, et cetera—and blogging allowed me to connect with an audience for that writing. I’ve blogged on several sites in the past six years.

*“I think of Lifehacker as self-help for geeks”*

Today, primarily it’s Lifehacker.com, a blog which is updated about 20 times a day by my three co-editors and me. Lifehacker’s mission is to help people become more productive using the lat-

est in software, web applications, and DIY [do it yourself] projects. Last year Lifehacker turned into a book [see [www.lifehackerbook.com](http://www.lifehackerbook.com)]. The site isn’t there to support the book—just the opposite. The book complements the website.

I write, edit, and manage posts; moderate comments; answer reader e-mail; and work with our developers on site interfaces and vetting bug reports. I also code internal posting tools (bookmarklets and such) for myself and my editors, and I code software that we release on the website in our Lifehacker Code section [[lifehacker.com/software/lifehacker-code](http://lifehacker.com/software/lifehacker-code)].

### Are you achieving what you set out to do with your blog?

I think of Lifehacker as self-help for geeks. Our goal is to help people, and I sure do hope we’re achieving that goal! Based on reader feedback via e-mail and comments, we are.

### What sort of background do you bring to blogging, as far as experience in mass communications?

I was an English major in college, with a concentration in creative writing.

### Did you begin blogging with the intention of becoming famous or making money?

Not at all. I was interested in attracting a small audience for my writing, so I could get better at it. And when I started, making money at blogging

wasn't a possibility. On my personal blog, which I post for my own pleasure and at my own pace, [making money is] not at all [important]. Lifehacker is a paid blogging job, so it is nice to get paid for my work there.

### **What else do you get from blogging?**

The question is more like, what *haven't* I gotten from blogging?! The various sites I've written have gotten me jobs, a book deal, print magazine bylines, friends, professional contacts, and a tremendous sense of satisfaction and connection with readers.

### **What is the most difficult aspect of blogging for you?**

Writing well *and* fast. After almost three years, I'm still learning how to post eight coherent and timely posts each day. Writing well is difficult when you have lots of time to think about it and self-edit! I often publish typos or wish that I'd written a tighter headline, well after the fact. I've gotten much better at it, but I still have much to learn.

*“Lifehacker is a continuous back-and-forth conversation between the editors and our readers.”*

Fortunately, my only job is to write the site. I get paid to post, so it's not an avocation. I spend the majority of my day posting to Lifehacker.com, and after almost three years of doing it, I've developed my sources and the ability to dash off several posts very quickly. Plus my three co-editors and an intern from

Gawker Media [Lifehacker's parent company] who assists with moderating comments also help a whole lot!

Occasionally we get trolls in the comments, but it's pretty rare. Because our commenting system is registration-based, we're able to ban users who don't adhere to our commenting policies.

### **Do you ever get stuck when writing an important feature? What do you do to get unstuck?**

Usually I'll step away from it and work on something else for a while. [If I get stuck], I'll abandon the idea entirely and go with something else. If a feature isn't coming easy, it's probably not the right topic to cover. The nice thing about running the blog is I can make those last-minute decisions myself, without having to check with anyone first!

## **Do you sometimes have to drop articles because they just don't go where you thought they would?**

Yes. This happens more often than I'd like. If software turns out to be a lot less useful than I originally thought, I'll drop a post that I started on it.

## **What was your most gratifying experience as a blogger?**

Getting a "Thank you" e-mail from a reader; [hearing] that something we suggested improved his or her life is the most gratifying experience I've had.

## **What inspires you, topic-wise? Do you simply browse the Web and work with what turns up? Do you set out to find material on specific subjects from time to time? How much do reader questions and input affect your choice of subject matter?**

With Lifehacker, the topic at hand is software and personal productivity, so I choose posts that fit that topic. I subscribe to about 250 website feeds from various blogs, searches, and tech news outlets, which I check every day in my newsreader for post ideas. I also often use reader comments and e-mails (about 100 per day) to find story ideas and guide our coverage areas. Reader feedback counts a lot—Lifehacker is a continuous back-and-forth conversation between the editors and our readers. And there's the tips e-mail box. I listen to family and friends, too.

*"When I look out at the blogosphere, I don't see lots of inconsequential blogs; I see lots of possibility."*

## **Do you have any favorite blog tools or widgets?**

I use a set of Firefox extensions and a couple of desktop applications to help me blog. In Firefox, I always have the Auto Copy, CoLT, NoSquint, and Greasemonkey extensions installed. For quick-post markup entries, I use Texter for Windows and TextExpander for Mac. I've also written a few bookmarklets and user scripts that streamline my posting process in Firefox and Movable Type. And I use TechSmith's SnagIt to do screenshots (because we write about software) and Adobe's ImageReady to edit images. To follow other blogs, I use Google Reader.

**What kind of time does blogging require of you?**

Because Lifehacker's my  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time job, I spend about six hours per weekday blogging and otherwise taking care of site matters (answering e-mail, researching stories, and communicating with readers).

**You don't blog at Lifehacker on weekends?**

I used to, and I may again in the future. Right now we have a weekend editor, Wendy Boswell. Once in a while if a story can't wait, or if I have a software release, I'll hop on and post something quickly on the weekends, but not very often.

**Do you post on others' blogs?**

Not right now, no.

**What is your opinion of the blogosphere? Too many bloggers? Lots of inconsequential blogs?**

Just the opposite—I think it's filled with undiscovered gems. Blogs are just coming into their own now—bloggers are learning how to write more skillfully and make their sites more relevant and useful to others. When I look out at the blogosphere, I don't see lots of inconsequential blogs; I see lots of possibility.

**What sorts of mistakes do you see bloggers making?**

*“A successful blog is like a hungry pet that needs to be walked, fed, washed, cleaned up after, and loved regularly.”*

Two things. First, revealing personal information without thinking about the long-term possible consequences. Second, not actively working on writing well. Most beginner bloggers aren't professional writers, and that shows—painfully, sometimes. I can appreciate the, “This is my site, I'll write how I like” stance, but if you're looking to

come across well and attract an audience, it's up to you to pick up a copy of *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White or *On Writing Well* [by William Zinsser] and apply the principles to your own work.

**What's your advice for someone just starting a weblog? What do you wish you'd known when you started blogging?**

I wish I'd realized what a big task maintaining a blog really is. It's not the sort of thing that you should start on a whim. A successful blog is like a hungry pet that needs to be walked, fed, washed, cleaned up after, and loved regularly.

To make it all easier, blog on a subject you really love. When you care about a subject, it shows in both depth of coverage and the quality of your writing.

**Any tips on getting the word out about your blog, and driving more users to your site? To what do you credit your large readership—are there techniques you use to bring in readers?**

The key to getting more visitors to your blog is to post useful, original, well-written content. If you feel you're doing that but no one is noticing, send a link to one of your great posts to blogs that write about similar things, and when they link it, you'll see traffic, and readers will subscribe to your site. If they don't link it—try, try again. A good blog is a large collection of posts, not just one essay.

I believe we swap ad space with partner sites, but I'm not sure of the details or which sites right now—it constantly changes, and the sales department handles that side of things. (Note: Lifehacker is published by Gawker Media.)

*“Connecting with readers is my favorite part about writing the site.”*

**Can you gauge whether the Lifehacker book has increased traffic?**

Our traffic has grown consistently before and after the book's release, so it's hard to say whether or not it's affected traffic.

**Where do you see yourself in five years? Will you still be blogging?**

I'm not sure where I'll be in five years, but I will most definitely be blogging, if I can help it!

Lifehacker is slowly transitioning from a traditional blog to a community site. We've amassed a huge community of registered users, and our plans

are to roll out more ways for readers to connect with each other, and us, and track their favorite people and posts on the site. Connecting with readers is my favorite part about writing the site, so I can't wait.

## Points to Review

Dubbed the “most organized of all the bloggers” by fellow Gawker Media blogger Brian Lam, Gina Trapani's obsession with organization and quality is a major factor in the success of the Lifestacker book and blog. If you want to emulate her success, keep these points in mind:

- Blogging is an ongoing learning process. If you're looking to come across well and attract an audience, it's up to you to improve your writing style.
- When you get stuck writing a post, step away from it for a while and work on something else.
- If a feature doesn't come along easily, it's probably not the right topic for you to cover.
- When possible, use blogging tools and widgets to streamline posting.
- Reader feedback *does* matter.
- The key to getting more visitors to your blog is to post useful, original, well-written content.