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Introduction to WordPress

This chapter introduces you to WordPress and some of the things you can build with it. You will also be guided through installation and planning.

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Overview

There are quite a lot of people out there who think WordPress is just a blogging platform. This is far from the truth! WordPress can build the simplest blog all the way up to a professional, complex website – there really are no limits! WordPress is a powerful tool, which now accounts for 27% of all websites on the Internet (at the time of writing).

WordPress is becoming a great starter point for new web designers and developers, since it's a great starter point to get your website online, and it's fairly simple to pick up. As new developers become more comfortable with the platform, they can then extend their own skills to advance their own websites.

A lot of professional web developers are turning to WordPress to build sites for clients as it's a powerful tool, it cuts development time, and it provides a great content management system (CMS) so that their clients can add content themselves.

Bloggers are finding it a great platform to work with, as they can add content quickly and easily without having to have a lot of technical knowledge.

This book will provide you with all the basic fundamentals needed to help you on the road to building your website or blog with WordPress. It doesn't matter if you're new to the whole concept of web development or blogging, as the book will guide you through each step with screenshots and detailed text to help you progress through each chapter. If you are a professional web developer, there will be things in the book that can help boost your knowledge of WordPress and how it works. You can then bring this knowledge to your own projects.

What will I need?

For this book you are going to need two things.

- **A domain name:** (For example: **www.hello.com**).
- **Web Hosting:** This is space online that you use to host your website. You pay a monthly or annual fee to rent space online. For the purpose of installing WordPress, I will be using a host called HostGator.

Now you are ready, it's time to get started!

Why Use WordPress?

Web Development was once considered a gigantic task involving hardcore programming skills. Websites were developed using text editors as simple as note pads. However, with advancements in web development technologies, people with little or absolutely no programming experience also began to find their feet in this arena. This happened owing to the development of content management systems such as WordPress, Joomla, Moodle and similar web development platforms. These content management systems allow layman users to develop professional looking websites. Choosing a content management system depends on various factors. However, we will focus on why WordPress CMS is an excellent choice for developing websites.

Based on Open-Sourced Technologies

WordPress is an open source CMS and can be tweaked and edited by anyone to fit their needs. WordPress is based on PHP which is an open sourced server-side programming language. WordPress uses MySQL database for data persistence and storing content such as posts, comments and images etc. MySQL is also open source and freely available.

Easy to Install and Manage

Installing WordPress is an extremely simple task and requires few clicks of the mouse. Most of the domain hosting companies, such as HostGator and GoDaddy, provide one-click installation services for WordPress. Usability of WordPress is not limited to installation; once installed, it is also very easy to manage via WordPress dashboard. For instance, creating menus, pages, posts, adding images and setting titles is a matter of few clicks and entails no programming skills.

Styling using Themes

There are thousands of WordPress themes freely available. These themes can be used to define an overall style for your website. Themes can be tweaked to achieve desired styling functionalities. There are also premium themes out there for a small cost, so no two websites will ever look the same. Themes are a great way for early developers to learn how websites are built and it takes out the technical challenge so you can work on the content and look of the website, without having to worry. For the advanced designer, you are able to use the editor to tweak your themes even further, or even create your own.

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Enhanced Functionality Via Plugins

WordPress websites can be enhanced easily via several “plugins”. WordPress themes, by default, come with basic functionalities. However, additional functionalities can be added via plugins. For instance, if you want to add a login widget to your website, you can use login plugins. Similarly, in order to add a contact form on your website, a contact form plugin can be used, not just to add the form to your page, but also to store and send on any queries that come through your website. There are many freely available plugins that can be used to enhance functionality of a WordPress website.

Great Support via Large Development Community

WordPress has one of the largest software developer communities. The immense developer support allows users to solve their WordPress issues immediately. Also, owing to the large developer community, rapid updates and patches are developed which solve issues that arise in any theme or plugin etc. Additionally, if you ever come across any problems, then you can always post in the support forum and be sure to get a quick response to your problem:

<http://WordPress.org/support/>

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Friendly

WordPress websites are extremely SEO friendly. Companies spend thousands of dollars to rank their websites high on Google page ranks. The good thing about WordPress is that Google, for some reason, rates WordPress websites higher owing to its built-in SEO features. There are also a number of really good SEO plugins out there to help guide you through the process of SEO and help your website rank better with the search engines.

Conclusion

Though there are many CMSs currently available in the market, WordPress is the best place to start, it is extremely easy to learn, flexible to tweak, open-sourced and SEO friendly. Also, with a large developer community, you are likely to get instant help and support for any issue that arises during your website development endeavors.

What Can I Build?

As previously mentioned, WordPress is not just a blogging platform. You can build a number of different websites using WordPress. Here are just a few things you can build when you get more familiar with the platform.

- **E-Commerce Website:** Have you ever wanted to have your own online shop? A website that can accept payments? Well you can do just that with WordPress. There are a number of different plugins you can use, one of which is free is WooCommerce (see Chapter Six).
- **Business Website:** You will be surprised just how many business websites are made using WordPress. You can build a very professional website without having to know any technical languages.
- **Online Forums:** You might think that Forums are extremely difficult to create, but WordPress can make it a lot easier. There are plugins out there to help you create your own message board, so you can build a community in no time (see pages 123-128).
- **Portfolio:** If you are an artist or a photographer, then you might want to build a site to showcase your skills. With WordPress you can do just that, as there are a number of pre-made templates out there to help you show off your talents.
- **Membership Website:** If you are looking to build a site with various membership levels, for example a site with free and premium content, then you can do just that. Yet again, there are some good plugins out there to help you, and you can create numerous levels of membership (see pages 135-140).
- **Responsive Website:** There are plenty of templates out there that will optimize your website across a number of different mobile and tablet devices, so you will never have to worry how your website looks on different platforms.
- **Directory/Listings Website:** Maybe you are thinking of starting a job site? Or a classified ads site? Well you can with WordPress!

The list goes on! This is just a taster of what you can do.



Hosting WordPress through an external host is probably the best way to get your site off the ground, as there are no restrictions and it is the least expensive option.

WordPress Hosting

To install WordPress you are going to need some space online. I recommend a company called HostGator (www.hostgator.com). It is very well priced, offers 24 hour support and is very simple to set up WordPress on. There are various hosting companies out there that provide one-click installs for WordPress these days, which is great for new developers and bloggers. You can choose to set up your site using WordPress.com. However, there are some restrictions (see page 15).

Set up a HostGator Account

To get started, sign up for a HostGator account at www.hostgator.com and if you don't already have one, pick a domain for your site. You can do both on HostGator. This is the first step to getting your WordPress site on the road!

When you sign up you will be sent an email with your Control Panel login – something like the one shown below:

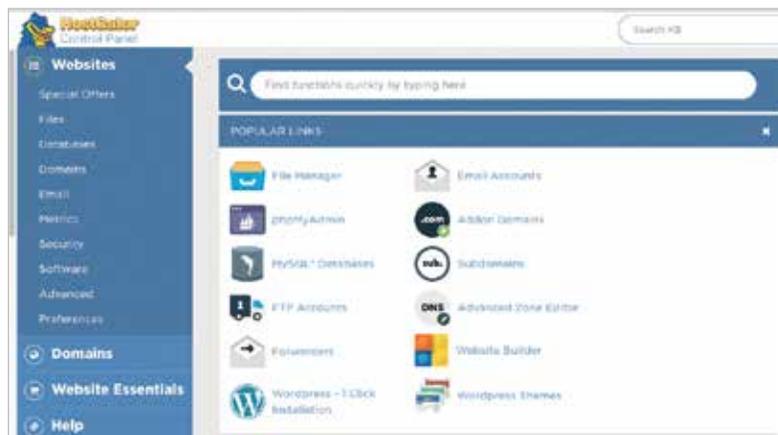
Plan: Shared

Control Panel Address: <https://controlpaneladdress.hostgator.com>

Username: yourusername

Password: yourpassword

- 1 Navigate to the control panel address in your web browser, and enter your username and password to log in to the control panel. You should be presented with something like this:



...cont'd

- 2 Scroll down the Software section and click on **QuickInstall**



- 3 Next, click **WordPress** under the Site Builders & CMS section



- 4 Select your domain from the list, and click **Next**



- 5 Fill out the form; here are some pointers:

Blog Title <input type="text"/>	Admin User <input type="text"/>
First Name <input type="text"/>	Last Name <input type="text"/>
Admin Email <input type="text"/>	

...cont'd

Blog Title: This is what you want to call your blog or website.

Admin User: Enter a username for the main administrator.

First Name: Your first name goes here.

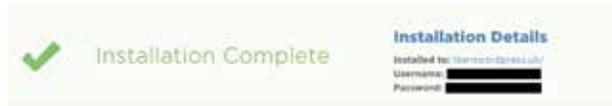
Last Name: Your last name will go here.

Admin Email: Enter the email address you wish to use for admin. Your password will be emailed to this address.

- 6 When you have filled out the fields, click the **Install Now** button

Install Now

- 7 Once installation is complete, you will see a pop-up similar to the one below:



- 8 You can now access WordPress by going to <http://www.yourdomain.com/wp-admin>. Remember to replace *yourdomain* with the domain you registered

You will now be presented with your WordPress login screen.



It can take up to 24 hours for your domain to become active once registered with HostGator, so don't panic if you can't access the admin panel straight away.



This page is where you or any other members of your website will always log in. You can tick the **Remember Me** box so that the website automatically logs you in.

Keep your login details in a safe place.

You can reset your password at the login screen. Click the **Lost your password?** button link at the bottom of the login panel.

Using WordPress.com

If you don't want to go through the WordPress installation stages with an external host, then you can use WordPress.com to host your site. You can host a free site with limitations, or pay a monthly fee to lift the limitations. There are currently four plans in place:

- **Free: \$0 for life**
- **Personal: \$2.99 a month**
- **Premium: \$8.25 a month**
- **Business: \$24.92 a month**

The free package does hold quite a lot of limitations. Firstly, you can't use your own custom domain and you can't customize the design. You will also sometimes see ads on your website. You can pick one of the WordPress domains. For example, if you were creating a website to do with tech startups you might choose techstartups.wordpress.com



The package you choose depends on what functionality you need from your site. It can work out cheaper to use an external host and there are no limitations. However, it is much easier to set up using WordPress.com, and your website is ready to go straight away. Bear in mind that you can only use WordPress.com themes, and you can't use custom plugins or have FTP access to your files.

Once set up, you will be able to log-in in the same manner as you would if your site was self-hosted, by going to:

<http://www.yourdomain.com/wp-admin>



There are more limitations to using WordPress.com than with an external host like HostGator.



FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol. An FTP client is a piece of downloadable software that allows you to easily move files from your computer to a web host or another computer (see page 163).



Planning is a key part of any project. You need to cover everything, all the way from design through to implementation.

Planning Your Website

Now we have gone through the installation stages, before we get our hands dirty with the interface, we are going to have a look at the important process of planning a WordPress website.

- **Research:** The area you should start with is research. Have a look at websites similar to what you want to build. For example, if you are building a technology blog, you may want to look at other technology blogs. Compare the successful and unsuccessful ones. What are the successful ones doing better? What content is engaging to the readers? How are the owners interacting with their customers? **DO NOT** copy other websites – this is key and will get you nowhere. You need to make sure your content is unique. Research is a valuable way to build a more successful site.
- **Brainstorming:** Now it's time to sit down with a cup of coffee and a notebook and start brainstorming your website, what is going to go on there, what pages are you going to have? How often is content going online? Will I use social media? How will my users interact with the website?
- **Page Structure:** Will you have pages and sub-pages on your website? For example, an About Us section might have a jobs section as a sub page. You need to organize your page structure. Here is an example:
 - **Home**
 - **About Us**
 - Jobs
 - Our Office
 - History
 - **Services**
 - Web Design
 - Graphic Design
 - Web Hosting
 - Printing
 - **Events**
 - This Year
 - **Blog**
 - **Contact Us**

- **Plugins:** If you are looking to add functionality to your website, you may need to research which plugins you will need and find out what the best ones are. There are plenty of free plugins out there but if you are going to spend any money on them, then you need to know what you are buying first (see Chapter 5).
- **Project Management:** Do you have milestones or deadlines in mind? Make sure you keep a schedule, and stick to it. If you want to meet your goals you need to keep a tight schedule. It's the key to a successful website.
- **Web Hosting:** Who am I going to host my website with? How much is it going to cost me? How reliable are the hosts? These are all important parts of planning your website.
- **Domain Name:** A domain is a very important part of building a website; you want to have a catchy name. Don't make your domain too long; you want people to remember it. You can always point other domains at your website as well, which is another thing to bear in mind. Domain pointing allows you to direct multiple domains to the same website.
- **Website Backups:** Make sure you are keeping backups of your site; daily would be ideal but if not then every other day. You never know if the web server is going to go down or get hacked. You will sleep easier at night knowing you have a backup (see pages 175-178).
- **Payment Methods:** If you are building a web shop, then you should think about what payment methods you want to offer. PayPal is probably the best and easiest one to set up and most people are using it these days.
- **Social Media:** Whatever website you are building, social media is a very important part of growing your audience. Be sure to share your content through as many social media channels as you can. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn are the main ones.

This may seem like a long list, but it is important to keep each step in mind so that your web development will go smoothly.

Blog vs Website

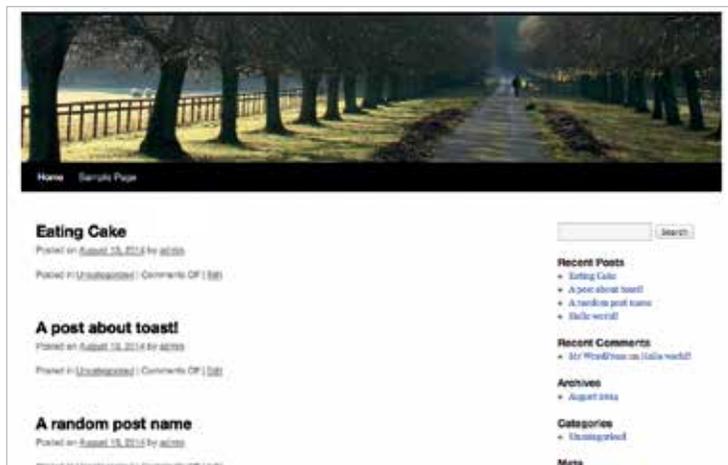
Sometimes there is a lot of confusion when it comes to WordPress. Some people ask things like:

- Does my WordPress site have to look like a blog?
- Does my WordPress website have to have a blog?

Let's clear this up before we start.

WordPress Blog

Below is a screenshot of a blog built with WordPress. You will notice that the homepage lists a number of blog posts created by the user. Now, this may be fine with you, especially if you are building a blog about yourself, but what if you are building a website for your business?



Example Blog

WordPress Website

You can easily specify a different page to become your homepage, if you don't want your website set out like a blog. You don't even have to have a blog on your website if you don't want to. However, you can still have a company blog set up but as a different page altogether. A business is likely to have their services outlined on the homepage.



Business Site Menu

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Example Business Website

Most companies or start-ups will have a blog these days, even if it's not their front page. It's a good way of interacting with their customers and it gives them something to share via social media.

Website

- Content is mainly static apart from a blog or forum section
- More of a digital storefront eCommerce
- Professional look
- Much more functionality
- Pages about products and services

Also, remember that with a website, sometimes the only way for your customers to communicate with you is through the contact form.

Blog

- Content is updated more frequently
- Newest content appears near the top
- Usually arranged by category or date
- Google loves blogs because the content is fresh
- Not formal
- Users can interact via a commenting system

The last thing to bear in mind is that a blog is still a kind of website. Most people used to choose to set up a blog because they lacked the programming skills to create a website, but now WordPress makes anything possible!

Business Websites

The Internet has revolutionized the world – it has become a global village and now everyone is linked by just a few mouse clicks. Businesses are taking advantage of huge customer presence on the Internet. Presently, 99% of successful businesses and industries have Internet presence either via social media networks or dedicated websites. There are several reasons for having a dedicated website for a business.

Huge Number of Potential Customers

The Internet user population is in the billions and many of these users search a product on the Internet before purchasing it. They compare the products offered by different companies and then make a decision about what to buy.

Cost Effective Marketing Tool

Websites are one of the cheapest marketing tools ever invented. A website can cost as little as \$10-20 to start. All you need to do to set up a live website is to buy a domain and hosting and with little knowledge of any of the CMSs, you can create your very own website.

Easy Customer Interaction

Websites allow businesses to rapidly interact with their customers. Most websites now contain a “contact us” form where users can leave comments and queries whenever they want. Also, websites are live 24/7; therefore, potential customers can get information about products or services irrespective of the time-zones.

Global Presence

A company cannot open outlets in every corner of the world unless it generates billions of dollars of revenue, which is not the case with every company. The best possible way to have a global presence and reach potential customers located at diverse geographical locations is to have an international website.

Good First Impression

Companies and businesses with an official and registered website are considered more authentic and garner better customer trust, compared with businesses that do not have a website. A visually pleasing and easy to navigate website creates a good first impression and can be used to convince customers to stay on the website for longer periods of time, eventually resulting in business.