Contents

1 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.

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 powers 33% of the internet and 14.7% of the top 100 websites in the world. WordPress was originally released back in 2003, but version 5 (current version) was released in December 2018.

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:

- **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.

- **A Domain Name**: (For example: **www.hello.com**).

Why Use WordPress?

Web development was once considered a gigantic task involving hardcore programming skills. Websites were developed using text editors as simple as notepads. 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-Source 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 source 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 the WordPress dashboard. For instance, creating menus, pages, posts, adding images and setting titles is a matter of a 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.

...cont'd

Most themes are responsive, so they will look perfect on all mobile and tablet devices. This means you will never have to worry about your visitors having a bad UI (user interface) experience on their device.

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:

https://wordpress.org/support/

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)-friendly
WordPress already comes with a number of built-in SEO features, like the ability for search engines to crawl content, and ping search engines when new posts are created. There are also a number of really good SEO plugins like Yoast, which will guide you through the process of SEO and help your website rank better with 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 source 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.

- **eCommerce 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 which is free is WooCommerce (see Chapter 6).

- **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 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 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 on offer to help you, and you can create numerous levels of membership (see pages 135-140).

- **Directory/Listings Website**: Maybe you are thinking of starting a job site. Or a classified ads site. Well you can with WordPress!

- **Auction Website**: Have you ever dreamed of building your own eBay? There are various plugins and themes that help with this, so you don't have to start from scratch.

- **Mobile App**: There are various tools out there like AppPresser, which can convert your WordPress website into a mobile app.

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

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, depending on the package you select (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 details – something like the one shown below:

Plan: Shared
Your Control Panel: 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:

Hot tip

Hosting WordPress through an external host like HostGator is probably the best option, as you will have full control over your site, without having to spend too much.

2 Scroll down the Software section and click on **QuickInstall**
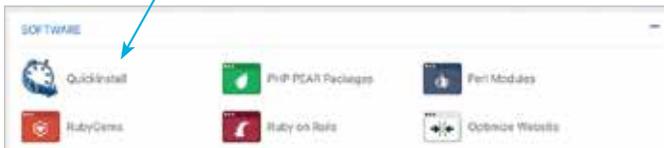
3 Next, click **WordPress** under the Site Builders & CMS section

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

5 Fill out the form; here are some pointers:

...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** button

INSTALL

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

Installation Complete

Installation Details
Installed to: wordpresswings.com/
Username:
Password:

LOGIN
VIEW MY INSTALLS

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.

Username or Email Address

Password

☐ Remember Me   Log In

Lost your password?

This page is where you or any other members of your website will always log in. You can check 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.

14

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. There are currently six plans in place that range from $0 to $45/£0 to £36 per month.
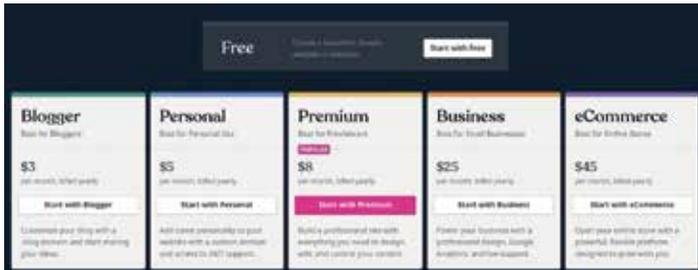
The package you choose depends on what functionality you need for your site. The free package holds quite a lot of limitations. For example, you don't get full control over the design, you will see ads appearing on your website, and you will also be limited to 3GB of storage. Bear in mind that you can only upload themes and install plugins if you have the **Business** or **eCommerce** plan. This is why I would recommend going through the installation process on pages 12-14, so that you get full control.

On WordPress.com, you can pick one of the WordPress domains or pay for a domain name. For example, if you were creating a website to do with antique cups you might choose:
antiquecups.wordpress.com
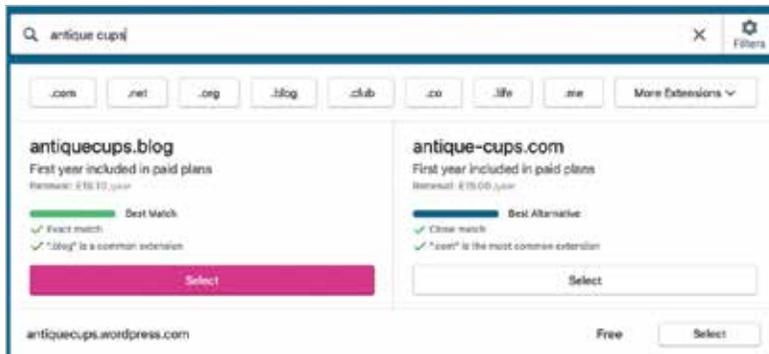
Once set up, you will be able to log in in the same manner as you would if your site was self-hosted, by going to:
http://www.yourdomain.com/wp-admin

15

Planning Your Website

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

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 subpages on your website? For example, an About Us section might have a jobs section as a subpage. 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 on the market 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 blogs and websites. Some people ask things like:

● Should I create a website or a blog?
● What's the difference between a website and 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 wanting to document something like your hobbies, but what if you are building a website for your business?

Example Blog

Hot tip
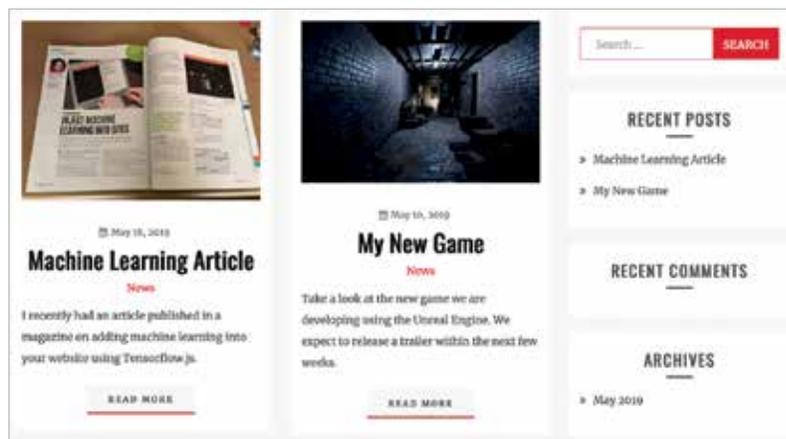
We will be looking at themes in Chapter 3.

WordPress Website

With WordPress you can install themes that will give your website a certain look. With some themes, it will even create pages for you (like an About or Services page) so that you can just enter your own content. A website is likely to have multiple pages and their services or products outlined on the homepage, and also inside the menu.

| WHAT'S NEW | CLOTHING | ACCESSORIES | SHOES | DESIGNERS | VIP | STORES | BLOG |

Business Site Menu

Example Business Website

Most companies or start-ups will have a blog on their website these days. It's a good way of interacting with their customers and providing extra value.

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 build something bigger, 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 $3-20/£2.50-£8 per month to start, depending on the web host. 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, credible 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.