A DESIGNER’S GUIDE TO WORDPRESS

WordCamp Ottawa
James Hipkin, May 3, 2014
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Involved in advertising and marketing for many years

Started in traditional advertising

Moved over to direct marketing

Been involved with digital for over ten years

Currently Owner and Managing Director at Red8 Interactive
OVERVIEW

What you need to know about websites

The WordPress Content Management System (CMS)

Implications for designers

Things to watch out for
WEBSITES

Understanding how websites are built makes building them easier (less expensive) using WordPress or any other technology.
SOME BROAD POINTS

Websites are integrated systems—a small change in one place can have a big impact in other, often unexpected places.

Design for mobile first

Design for 72 dpi

A change is never a “little thing”
STRUCTURE

HTML is the framing. It uses “elements” to tell the browser what should be displayed.
CSS tells the browser how elements will be displayed.
HTML and CSS work together to create both an aesthetic and functional end result.
Web-safe fonts are, well, safe

Fonts treatments are not rendered consistently across browsers
Font services can help add variety—use them for Headers and Subheads

Design so the site won’t break if the desired font isn’t available
OBJECT EFFECTS

You can create designs that have rounded corners and drop shadows. But, be sure the design doesn’t depend on these effects.

- IE browsers won’t render them properly.
MOBILE FIRST

50%+ using smartphone/tablet over desktop users

Mobile devices outnumber PC/Mac sales

Mobile designs should not be an afterthought

Share of U.S. Time Spent on Digital Media by Platform Source: comScore Media Metrix Multi-Platform Total Desktop Audience and Mobile Audience Age 18+ Date: June 2013
MOBILE FIRST

When designing for mobile, keep in mind the core functionality of your site

• what will the user need on each device?

Design for hand position

Use a 12-column grid

Keep it simple
RESPONSIVE OR ADAPTIVE?
Responsive—adjusts the size of elements, it can be fluid, or not, and repositions them based on screen size
ADAPTIVE

Adaptive also adjusts the size and repositions elements, and it changes what content is available based on the device (break points)
CONTENT

WordPress manages content in two ways:

• **static content**—content that isn’t managed using WordPress, is held within the HTML

• **dynamic content**—content that is managed by WordPress is held in a database
THEMES

WordPress uses a theme to create a specific look for the website—you are designing the theme.

Think of WordPress as the operating system, and the theme is the software that determines how the site looks and what content is displayed.
THEMES

A theme is a collection of templates and stylesheets

There are a lot of pre-built themes available

• some are free, and some are premium

• some are good, and some, not so much…

A custom theme gives you the greatest flexibility, will make the site unique, and performs better
TEMPLATES

Templates manage the structure of pages, provide page-level functionality, and present content.
PLUGINS AND WIDGETS

Plugins and widgets extend WordPress’ functionality

• most are free, some are premium

• they can add functionality easily and quickly

• they can also add bloat, affect performance, and impact security
POSTS

Posts are used to add specific, dynamic, or time sensitive content to pages

- custom post types give designers a lot of flexibility and control
PAGES

Pages are a specialized form of post

- prebuilt templates provide functionality and structure to the page
IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGNERS
EXISTING THEME VS. CUSTOM

Consider designing with an existing theme in mind

- quality varies so before you start customizing, have your developer check it out to be sure it’s stable and supported
PREMIUM THEME SOURCES

Select a theme from an established theme vendor—the code is solid and support is available.

Some to consider:

- Studio Press
- iThemes
- Elegant Themes
- Woo Themes
CUSTOM THEMES

If your site is complex, and/or you need a lot of control over how content is displayed a custom theme will be required

Custom themes also tend to be lighter, which improves performance
TEMPLATES

Control the number of templates

• a change in page structure or functionality requires a new template

• build wireframes first
Involve a WordPress developer early and often—they will help you understand:

• when a new template is required

• how to create a variety using Custom Post Types, Hooks, Filters and styles
STYLE

The stylesheet is used to customize a theme

- plan how dynamic content will be styled
- consider all the controls on the visual editor and provide style direction

The Wordpress visual editor
PLUGINS AND WIDGETS

Know your plugins
Design to their capabilities
THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

WHOOPS
ERROR 404
VISIT HOMEPAGE?
WHEN YOU DESIGN

Think about the Navigation

• show us how you want it to work
• custom navigation is possible but expensive
• mobile navigation should push content over or down
WHEN YOU DESIGN

Footers are often forgotten
  • a lot of info of secondary importance can be located in the footer
  • footers need design love too!

Provide a font hierarchy
WHEN YOU DESIGN

Think about how you want links to display

• there are four states: resting, hover, active and visited
  • no hover on mobile, just say’n
• give links and action buttons enough space to be practical on mobile devices
Secondary and error pages need to be considered

• 403 Forbidden, 404 Not Found, Privacy Policy, etc.
WHEN YOU DESIGN

Design the forms

• keep plugin capabilities in mind

• external connections to CRM or email services can dictate form structure
WHEN YOU DESIGN

Design the login screen—give yourself some credit
ASK EARLY, ASK OFTEN

If in doubt, check with an experienced WordPress developer—there is almost always a solution.
THANK YOU!

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