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WordPress As Your Professional Platform

Why WordPress?

This Guide deals with WordPress as a blogging platform. It is important to note that most advice here applies equally to using WordPress as a platform to build a website, with or without a blog.

There are others blogging platforms, including:

- Blogger (owned by Google) = very quick setup, drag and drop editing, easy to use.

- Tumblr – interesting fusion between a blog a Twitter-like feed. Now owned by Yahoo.

WordPress is a popular open source blogging platform (it's actually much more, a full content management system). You can set up a WordPress blog on their own server (there is no charge for this) at WordPress.com. Preferably, and what we

deal with in this Guide, is the wordpress.org site, which you can download and install for free.

Using WordPress to build your blog

"Out of the box" WordPress incorporates SEO features. And in general, whether you use it solely for a blog or build a website using WordPress and then have a "page" that is a blog, it will be naturally search engine friendly. Blogs are content-rich, and that content changes regularly, which get the attention of search engines.

Themes

WordPress gives you a basic structure for your blog – a "Theme" builds on that basic structure, like accessorising a piece of clothing to create a different look. In other words, a Theme is a skin for your blog. However, the basic structure of a WordPress blog is the same for everyone. Happily for us, WordPress is kind

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enough to make the code for that structure freely available, so programmers can create "skins" to overlay it. This is achieved by incorporating style "templates" into the WordPress structure. Some of these Themes are free, some are not, and there are plenty of good examples in both camps. Every designer, free or not, offers a gallery to preview the themes.

Optimised for SEO

You will see it on every description of a theme - "optimised for SEO" or similar. This is often misleading, as though SEO is built-in to the theme and therefore effortless, and anyway this is irrelevant to your primary aim to produce excellent content. You will never achieve a reasonable search engine rank without good content and link-building, but as I emphasise again and again, without decent content there is no point in a technical process to wring the last drop out of SEO. A website for a professional will only be as good as its content. Without that you miss the whole point of blogging, which is, after all, *to publish content*. On the other hand, if two sites have equally compelling and readable content, then SEO will be important to a higher rank. At that point the inbuilt SEO features of a Theme are worth looking at, although most WordPress free themes have good SEO structures.

Remember, content development goes on forever. If you want to be obsessed with SEO (and not just learn a lot of the basics, which you can certainly do), then your best bet is to pay a professional whose obsession is their job. Your job is to write great content.

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This is not a manual

This *MatureMedia Guide* is not a WordPress manual. The best way to understand WordPress is to use it, however, be warned – everyone will tell you that WordPress is simple to use. This is only partly true, depending on what you want to achieve. There are hundreds of books and online tutorials to help you use WordPress (including at www.wordpress.org). As well there are hundreds of forums devoted to WordPress where adherents exchange information (and sometimes insults).

You will need a domain name and web hosting. Again, there are hundreds of services to do this, and I do not cover these issues, but make sure you get an appropriate domain name for your blog and web hosting you will be happy with in the long-term. Obviously if you have chosen to get a consultant to undertake the building of your website, then you can take their advice on these matters.

For what it's worth I use VentraIP [1] for both domain name registration and hosting. I have no business affiliation with them, but my experience with them over four years has been consistently excellent, and they responds to queries efficiently. I like the fact their severs are domestically based, though many well known Australian bloggers swear by overseas providers. Do some research, make up your own mind.

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[1] www.ventraip.com.au

Categories, tags and meta descriptions in WordPress

You should categorise your posts. This makes it easy for readers to navigate your blog, and has an SEO value. Categories only apply to blog posts (the articles you write) not "pages" (e.g. "About Us"). By default, the post will be "uncategorised", but you can change that. This is done behind the scenes in your WordPress Dashboard – again, for information about these basic building-block issues you will have to look elsewhere, but the WordPress site has basic tutorials – go to www.wordpress.org.

Create a category for each Keyword – e.g. if "mortgage" or "family law financial agreements" are keywords, then create a "mortgage" or "family law financial agreements" category. For less important keywords (e.g. "trust accounting" "divorce") you could just use the tags that are available for each post.

"Meta" means "information about". For meta descriptions, WordPress automatically includes the first 55 characters in the Description Meta tags (remember, this is the snippet that will appear below the text you find under the blue result in Google). Some SEO plugins allow you to create your own meta description, because the automatically included snippet is not always what you want to entice a searcher to click through to your blog. It is worth installing one of these plugins (I use Yoast yoast.com/wordpress/seo/ but All In One SEO http://wordpress.org/plugins/all-in-one-seo-pack/ is also very popular and reputed to be easier to grasp).

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RSS

RSS is an acronym for Really Simple Syndication, a way to deliver your blog posts to readers who have chosen to subscribe. To achieve this you need to add an "RSS" icon to your WordPress. There are numerous plugins for this.

Although this seems to be a bonus because it exposes your blog posts to readers in an efficient manner, it does have a drawback. Subscribers read your feed via a reader software, but unless they click through to your site, they can read the post within the Reader. That means they are not exposed to the totality of your site, which can be especially difficult if you rely on advertising revenue. It also means your reader is not exposed to the branding you have developed through the breadth of your blog and its history.

I used Google Reader, an "aggregator" that read RSS. Unfortunately it has now closed down. There are many other feed readers available – check out

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NewsGator or Firefox's Live Bookmark feature. Feedly (www.feedly.com) looks most likely to get my patronage [2].

If you go to your WordPress Dashboard, under **Settings > Reading,** you can designate whether the reader software delivers a "full text" or "summary" feed of the post. A "summary" feed is of course a way to ensure that readers are forced to click through to your site to read the full post. This sounds like a good idea from your point of view, but most bloggers don't do it, and for good reason – they want their readers to get their content with the greatest ease, and then, if the content stands on its own, to delve further into the blog. In fact most of the blogs to which I subscribe provide a full feed, and since I assume they know the ropes, I am happy enough to follow suit.

Use FeedBurner

The most popular choice to send feeds to your subscribers is FeedBurner, which has been purchased by Google. You sign in using the same Google sign-in you use for all your Google services such as gmail. It also collects data about your blog that you can access, including subscriber statistics, is compatible with any Reader, provides further tools to publicise your blog such as email subscriptions, and is easy to set up.

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[2] I'll report back

Add a social bookmarking widget

There are many social bookmarking plugins – many people use "AddThis"[3] – it will place a button with your blog posts so readers can readily share your post with others via Twitter, Facebook, email etc

Change permalinks

"Permalinks" are precisely that – a permanent link i.e. a URL that points to a specific blog post. When it is featured on the front page of your blog, the URL will be the same as the URL of the blog e.g. www.ecansaccountant.com.au, but once the post passes into the archives it's URL becomes unique to that blog post and remains unchanged indefinitely i.e. it is permanent (hence "permalink"). By default WordPress sets a URL structure that looks like this:

> http://ecansaccountant.com.au/?p=25

That means the URL that is shown in the browser above the blog post will not reflect the actual content of the blog post. So, for instance, let's say the title of

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[3] www.addthis.com

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your blog is "10 Ways to Save Water in Your Garden" and the URL of your blog is "Jimsnursery.com". Using the default WordPress setting, the URL for this post may look like this:

http://www.jimsnursery.com./?p=364

Instead, wouldn't it be better if the reader could see the name of the blog post in the URL? So a more useful URL might be:

www.jimsnursery.com/10-ways-to-save-water-in-your-garden.

This is far more user-friendly. There is also an SEO benefit in a URL that features keywords.

WordPress allows you to change the default and "pretty up" the URL, as in the above more descriptive example. Not surprisingly, this is known as a "pretty permalink". You can make this change from your Dashboard. Go to **Settings > Permalinks**. This will take you to "Permalink Settings". You can now choose to have the permanent URL reflect either:

- Date and name of post

- Month and name of post

Or a customised structure. Let's say you want to just have the title of the post. This would be my preference – it is short and uncluttered. If you are setting up a new blog, or you have only a few posts, then choose the "custom structure" and enter:

 /%postname%/

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If you already have an established blog using another structure, you can easily use the Permalink Redirect WordPress plugin to redirect your posts to the new permalink structure. But read the instructions carefully.

Comment spam

We have looked at the SEO importance of obtaining backlinks or inbound links (i.e. a link coming from another website to your own). As we have already learnt, backlinks can aid SEO, especially if they come from quality sites. Therefore there is a temptation to use the comments section of a blog to generate links back to your own site – WordPress has a default setting that stops this by making all links "nofollow".

You should also install the Akismet plugin which will capture any attempt to use your comments section for spam (there is a fee for this, check their website[4]). This comes bundled with WordPress but must be activated with a registration key. It comes free for personal blogs and relatively cheap for smaller non–personal blogging. It's cheap at any price, so think about a donation to its developer if you take the free version.

There are numerous other anti-spam plugins, many of them CAPTCHA-based the user is forced to type in as series of letters. Search the WordPress Plugin Directory [5].

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[4] http://akismet.com

[5] http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins

You can also limit comment spam from within the WordPress Dashboard. Go to **Settings > Discussion** and set "Comment Moderation" to 2 links. At this setting if a reader posts a comment on your site with more than two link, it will not be published until you can look at it.

Pingbacks and Trackbacks

In the WordPress default settings (on the Discussion Settings page of the Dashboard) the "Allow Notifications from Other Blogs" box is ticked. This means that you want to be notified in the comments section of your blog if another site has linked to your blog. This is done via Trackbacks and Pingbacks.

Trackbacks are a type of comment, left by another blog rather than your own readers (as you know, normally, comments are left by visitors to your blog who have something to say that they wish to share with other readers). From your end you mention a link to another blog in your post, and when it is posted, your blog sends a message to that blog you have linked to. The recipient's acknowledgement appears in your comments.

Here's how WordPress explains a trackback:

* Person A writes something on their blog.

* Person B wants to comment on Person A's blog, but wants her own readers to see what she had to say, and be able to comment on her own blog

* Person B posts on her own blog and sends a trackback to Person A's blog

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- Person A's blog receives the trackback, and displays it as a comment to the original post. This comment contains a link to Person B's post

You can send a trackback via the post page on your WordPress dashboard. Enter the URL of the blog you mention in the "Send Trackbacks" box on the Edit Post page. Separate multiple URL's with spaces.

WordPress explains a "pingback" this way:

- Person A posts something on his blog.

- Person B posts on her own blog, linking to Person A's post. This automatically sends a pingback to Person A when both have pingback enabled blogs.

- Person A's blog receives the pingback, then **automatically** goes to Person B's post to confirm that the pingback did, in fact, originate there.

The pingback appears as a link on Person A's blog as a link to Person B's post.

Remember, there is no blogger (especially a newbie) who does not love to get a trackback. However, do not send both at the same time.

So what's the difference between pingbacks and trackbacks? Apart from the way they are sent, the pingback is automatic.

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