

# How often should you release software updates? [closed]

Asked 16 years ago   Modified 12 years, 7 months ago   Viewed 5k times



17



As it currently stands, this question is not a good fit for our Q&A format. We expect answers to be supported by facts, references, or expertise, but this question will likely solicit debate, arguments, polling, or extended discussion. If you feel that this question can be improved and possibly reopened, [visit the help center](#) for guidance.

Closed 12 years ago.

Moments ago [Jeff Atwood said the following on twitter](#):

Look, I love rapid new software releases, but the frequency of WordPress releases is just ridiculous.

Which makes me think, **how often should you release software updates?**

- Daily?
- Weekly?
- Monthly?

- Yearly?

Whats the best release strategy?

release

release-management

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edited May 8, 2012 at 16:14



mmmmmm

32.6k ● 28 ● 90 ● 121

asked Dec 11, 2008 at 16:45



GateKiller

75.8k ● 75 ● 175 ● 204

15 Answers

Sorted by:

Highest score (default)



16

I would say in WordPress' specific case, **they conflate "security updates" and "functionality updates"**. This is bad.



This would be like having to do an in-place reinstall of Windows every time a security bug was found, instead of simply downloading a small patch every week.



WordPress needs to have a security patch mechanism that's simple, fast, and easy for the security updates. A process that is separate from the normal upgrade flow of new versions.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:57

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[Jeff Atwood](#)

63.9k ● 48 ● 151 ● 153

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v2.7 has auto-updating... hopefully it will make this easier.

– [Jon Tackabury](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 17:36

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8



The frequency of Wordpress releases is so frequent because they care about security and release updates that fix known vulnerabilities as quickly as they can.

Functionality updates to Wordpress happen much less frequently, in the range of every 4 to 6 months I think.

I think this is a good model. Keep your customers happy by releasing new features regularly, but if you find security flaws, release fixes immediately.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:50

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[Rob Prouse](#)

22.6k ● 5 ● 71 ● 90

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I disagree. Nobody is complaining that Wordpress is fixing security problems quickly, they're complaining that they went from 2.5 to 2.6 and soon to 2.7, functionality releases that potentially break plug-ins, too quickly. – [Paul Tomblin](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 16:55

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Something is fundamentally broken when it is even possible for your word processor to have security problems.

– [skiphoppy](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 17:27

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2 skiphoppy, "Wordpress" is a blog engine, not a word processor. Any web app can have security problems.



I'll suggest the following:

8



updateTime (in seconds) - the average time it takes for the user to perform the update



releaseDelta (in days) - the minimum time between releases



```
releaseDelta = updateTime / ((1/365) * (60*60*8))
```

This formula is based on my theory that a user should have to spend no more than 8 hours in any given year waiting for updates to an application.

This also allows for frequent updating as long as the updates are done in a transparent manner without disrupting the end user.

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[edited Dec 11, 2008 at 17:06](#)

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:57



[chills42](#)

14.5k ● 4 ● 44 ● 78

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1 approximately releaseDelta = 0.01 \* updateTime – [hexicle](#)  
Jun 16, 2013 at 23:19

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3



I think this highly depends on your particularly situation. That being said, I think a daily release for any serious business application just totally ludicrous. If you are releasing every day then there is probably a serious problem unless you are in some very strange situation where business rules change constantly or something like that.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:49



[BobbyShaftoe](#)

28.5k ● 7 ● 54 ● 74



2



Less frequently than iTunes updates.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:49



[MusiGenesis](#)

75.3k ● 41 ● 197 ● 338

1 I wouldn't mind frequent iTunes updates if they didn't make me reboot afterwards. Why should upgrading your music player require a reboot? – [Paul Tomblin](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 17:02

And that nonsensical updates of the .mac and safari that I don't use is really annoying. – [Artur Carvalho](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 17:09

Ah. I like that answer. +1 when I actually get votes again.

– [George Stocker](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 17:34

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I most hate the fact that iTunes takes years to check for updates when you start it, and they don't even show a little splash screen to let you know that you even clicked it right.

– [MusiGenesis](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 18:10

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@MusiGenesis - you must be on Windows. On the Mac, it's integrated with the OS updating, so once in a while I'll get a popup saying "The following updates have been downloaded, click here to install them". – [Paul Tomblin](#) Dec 11, 2008 at 18:15

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I try to use the following, hopefully simple, two-part guideline:

2



1. If it requires the user to download and/or install something, or change an existing codebase that they maintain, then releases need to provide significant merit. This is a release that adds significant new features, fixed a significant amount of issues, or fixes a smaller number of immediate and pressing issues.
2. If it does not require the user to download and/or install releases will be planned to occur, as dictated by iteration. If there is a releasable product at the end of the iteration, it will be deployed. The iteration will contain technical and business needs as determined prior to the kickoff of the iteration.



So, for us, things like desktop applications or web services would generally fall under the first rule, and

things such as our web site would fall under the second. We run fairly good sized iterations - at about four to six weeks of development time currently, decreasing to two to four next year. This was our "introduction" into a Scrum-hybrid.

Note that a product doesn't always have to be in development (or participating in an iteration). It is quite possible that a product will sit, stale, until changes are needed if the first rule applies.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:55

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Joseph Ferris

12.7k ● 3 ● 48 ● 73



It depends on the customers approach to configuration control.

2



They have a choice, you know. Ultimately they can chose not to use your product.



If the customer will accept you changing stuff every day, and they don't care, and it has no training or configuration management impact; have automatic updates.

Customers with SOE ( Standard operating environments) hate updates.

Realize that some customers are not going to accept software "calling home". They will want to host their own

updates. Their IT people will have to get involved. This is more work for them.

Some customers will want/need to do their own QA; depends on the customer and the kind of software.

If the customer needs to do testing/work to accept/deploy the software, release some multiple of the length of the test/deploy cycle. Unless the customers are okay with interleaved deploy and test. That's where they are always testing a new version, and the roll it out.

For example: 2 weeks to test, release not more than every 8 weeks.

In result critical software, release testing may take a customer months. They are betting their business on the results and are justifiably cautious. So releases are every 6 months or so.

In safety critical software, it may take MANY months. Annual, or about every 18 months is not uncommon. Even less often is quite normal.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 21:50



Tim Williscroft

3,735 ● 25 ● 37



1

There is no right answer, it really depends on the product.

I say monthly at most. Weekly/Daily is just too often, unless of course the application updates are done in a





automated and transparent way, e.g. Firefox's update system



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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:51



revs

671 ● 4 ● 8



1



You can release them as often as you want. The thing that frustrates users is not knowing whether they need your new version or not. This means that you need to be very clear about which new features you've implemented, the bugs that you've fixed, and whether or not you've fixed any security issues. More importantly, your users want to be able to trust that, if they do install a new version, nothing got broken.



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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:51



Roger Lipscombe

91.6k ● 59 ● 252 ● 396



1



I think that if it's possible **you should have your software update automatically** when it needs to, so as to **keep the whole update process as smooth and invisible** to the user as possible.



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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:52



Galwegian

42.2k ● 16 ● 113 ● 158

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2 I have to say, this very very much depends on the software. To give an obvious example, if the server software on a production machine I was admining automatically updated, I would freak out. People need the ability to control their software. – [dave mankoff](#) Dec 12, 2008 at 2:32

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1



For the area I work in, Industrial controls, very seldom. We typically do a major release very 2 years. Minor releases maybe every 3 to 6 months. Bug patch are of course a different story, they are released as needed. Even then few customers will upgrade existing systems. Of course in other domains, upgrades are more accepted.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:55

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[Jim C](#)

4,981 ● 23 ● 25



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Surely when you have new features/bug fixes worth releasing ?? Why have it on a schedule ?

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:54

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Jason Underhill

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Ever had to do something called "resource planning"?

– [Mat Nadrofsky](#) May 26, 2010 at 13:51

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I have no objections to security bugs getting fixed as soon as they're found - although I wish they'd write more robust code in the first place. What I object (at least as far as Wordpress goes) is enhancement releases that could potentially break plug-ins happening too quickly. How long did it take to go from 2.5 to 2.6? And 2.7 is coming out very shortly as well.

An automatic or semi-automatic upgrade would mitigate some of that problem, but only if plugin writers upgrade as well, or if they separated security fixes from functionality changes so I could, say, stick with 2.5 but still be up to date with the security patches until I was sure all the plugins I use work with 2.6 or 2.7 or (by that time) 4.0.

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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 16:58

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[Paul Tomblin](#)

183k ● 59 ● 323 ● 410



0



Whenever they are required. Keep in mind some users feel more secure getting updates regularly, while some just feel annoyed having a pop-up every day "There are 129 new updates to install! click here to wait 20 minutes to download, then another 10 to install them!"... you see my point.



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answered Dec 11, 2008 at 17:23

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user36457



It depends on the nature of the upgrade and the amount of user intervention necessary to accomplish it.

0



If it's a web site, you can upgrade every day, as long as you don't break anything.



If it's a free security update, ASAP is always appreciated.



A free bugfix upgrade, if it has to be installed by the user, shouldn't be more than every couple of months.

Anything that has to be paid for can't be more frequent than once a year, or people will start to feel taken advantage of. Even more for certain classes of software, such as operating systems.

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answered Dec 12, 2008 at 2:25

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[Mark Ransom](#)

308k ● 44 ● 416 ● 647