WORDPRESS SEO GUIDE

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

Content

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84% of consumers expect brands to produce content that entertains, provides solutions and produces experiences. Is your company meeting their expectations?

Your audience demands premium content experiences. **Rock Content helps you deliver.**

More engagement, more traffic
Users will engage and spend more time on your page, attracting backlinks

Get valuable data from your prospects
Interactive content provides you with valuable data so you can make improvements on your SEO On Page

Improve your mobile experience
Improve your mobile experience and you can get valuable points from the search engines

Increase your conversion rate
Interactive content converts 2x more than static content

2000+ brands have already selected Rock Content

VISA   Johnson's   KAYAK   Genentech   The Economist

Linked in   HIRED   THE HUFFINGTON POST   CVS Health   castlight HEALTH

citi   Twitter   verizon   CISCO   salesforce   Ford

McCANN-ERICKSON   NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC   Spotify   ESTĒE LAUDER

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Chapter 1

Don't Launch a WordPress Site Before You Go Through This 17-Step Checklist

Anna Crowe

Assistant Editor,
Search Engine Journal

Raise your hand if you work on your WordPress website every day.🙋‍♀️

Keep it raised if you have an embarrassingly large amount of plugins, unpublished blog content from early 2015, too many broken links to count, spam-filled comments, and multiple ugly URLs. 🙋‍♀️

Don't worry; I'm guilty, too. Between my 9-to-5 gig and helping my freelance clients, ignoring my WordPress site has somehow become the norm.

But it doesn't have to be.

Like doing taxes or crafting the perfect business plan, there are some things every small business owner should know how to do. And those must-have skills should extend to your WordPress website.

You don't need to stress, though – I have you covered. In order to streamline your WordPress site (without ditching the stuff you actually need), I've rounded up **my favorite SEO tips** that pull double or even triple duty – meaning you can do more with less.

From choosing an SEO-friendly theme that'll juice up multiple devices to **one-and-done plugins,** this checklist will have you upgrading your underperforming website for a sleek ROI-boosting website in no time.

Your current level of WordPress prowess doesn't matter. By the time I'm through, you will be a boss at all the things that matter in 2021 and beyond.

And, in case you want to get a quick glimpse, here's a checklist for you to use.

17-STEP CHECKLIST FOR LAUNCHING A WORDPRESS WEBSITE

BEFORE

- WEB HOSTING
- CDN
- SEO FRIENDLY THEME

SET UP

- CACHE PLUGIN
- CATEGORIES
- TAGS
- PERMALINKS
- SPAM COMMENTS

OPTIMIZATION

- META DATA
- XML SITEMAPS
- INTERNAL LINKS
- IMAGE ALT TAGS
- HEADER TAGS
- REL=CANONICAL TAGS
- ROBOTS.TXT

ONGOING

- BROKEN LINKS
- BACKUP YOUR SITE

Created by Anna Crowe

3 Steps Before You Launch WordPress

To put it simply, I find maintaining my WordPress intimidating.

Now, I know it can't be that difficult to do – the site wouldn't have **70 million new posts** each month, after all, if it were so impossible to figure out.

Despite the fact that so many people sing its praises, some things need to come as second nature for WordPress users and their SEO.

Over the last year or so, I started optimizing my client's websites with better plugins, migrating to faster web hosting, and more.

That's when I realized; WordPress is a goldmine for SEO:

- No other platform has all the same capabilities.

- You don't have to code to get started.

But getting into the SEO groove and seeing ROI doesn't just happen overnight. It requires getting started with the foundation of your website to learn how to navigate successfully the deepest, darkest, corners of WordPress.

Here's what I learned (it's a lot!), and consider this your beginner's checklist to jumping (headfirst!) into the WordPress SEO action.

1. Web Hosting

The first key to successfully navigating WordPress is setting up web hosting.

I'm all about handling my virtual private server (VPS) and backing up my data, but there are some cases you just don't have time for – and ones you definitely should make time for.

So, when it comes to time, resources, anyone-can-set-it-up website, I'm all about spending the extra money on a hosting solution.

If I have a slow, unresponsive site, my bounce rate will increase, and users will drop off.

There's a massive difference between a site that takes one second to load versus ten seconds, and if you've got the latter, you're more likely to lose users. The engineers at Google uncovered that a **page load time of 0.4 milliseconds** is long enough for users to search less.

Before you make the leap to a hosting service provider, ask yourself these questions:

- Do they have support for plugins?

- What type of backup support do they offer?

- Is there a staging environment?

- What is the volume of bandwidth?

- Which operating system are they using? Linux? Windows?

- What other sites are in your IP range?

For more information on choosing a web hosting provider, **read this post on SEJ.**

Web hosting provider recommendations:

- **Kinsta.**
- **Flywheel.**
- **SiteGround.**
- **Cloudways.**

SEO benefits:

- Increased website speed.

2. CDN

For anyone who needs a little added boost of speed to its website knows the **power of a CDN (Content Delivery Network).**

A CDN changes the way your site handles static content like images, javascript, and CSS. A CDN caches your static content to create faster page loading, lower response time, and an overall speedier website – which helps you rank higher in the search engines.

Sound cool? It is. I love anything that makes it look like I put more effort into my site getting speedy than I did.

And after extensive road-testing, I've found that having a CDN is legitimately the easiest and fastest way to make your site speed look rad to the search engines.

With CDN
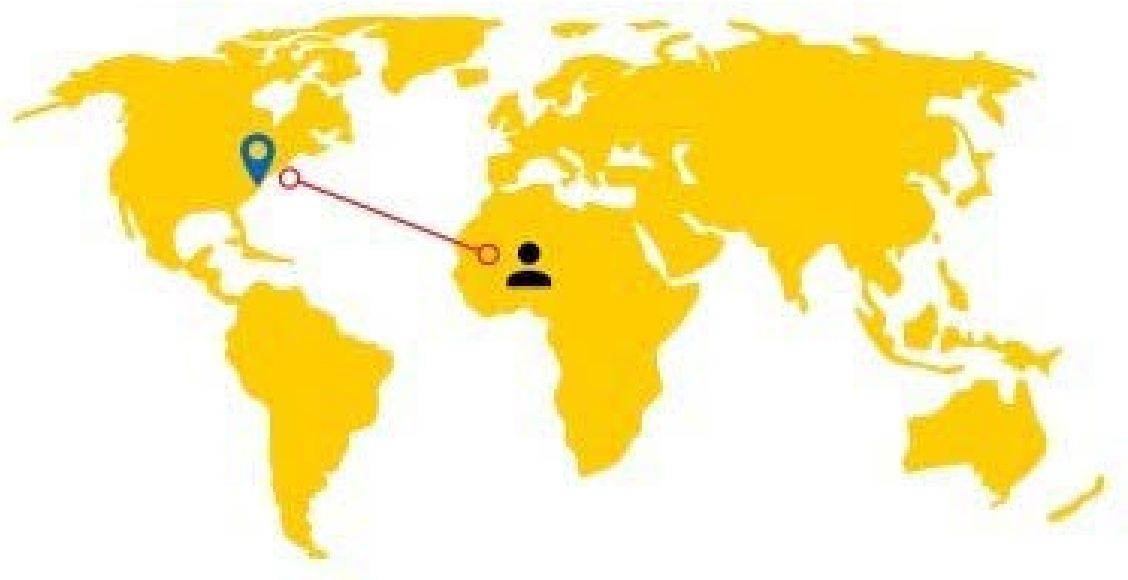
Without CDN

CDN recommendations:

- **Cloudflare.**
- **MaxCDN.**
- **Incapsula.**

SEO benefits:

- Increased website speed.
- Lower response time.

3. SEO Friendly Theme

Let's face it: Most of us aren't typically concerned with finding the most SEO-friendly WordPress theme.

It would be good, but in reality, it's more likely you'll spend your time just trying to figure out what theme looks the prettiest. Major kudos to the business owners who do make the effort to find an SEO-friendly theme. 👏🏻👏🏼👏🏽👏🏾

To help you transition from gawking at lovely designs to downloading perfectly SEO-optimized themes; I've put together an incredible line-up of essential features that will have you clearing out your bookmarked themes in no time.

- **Clean and fast code:** With a clean code structure, you can decrease the load of time on pages and increase the crawlability of your pages.

- **CSS and Javascript files:** With Google, less is more, and having a limited number of CSS and Javascript files will help. Plus, you won't have to worry about minifying them later.

- **Simple layout:** A simple design will make it easy for users to navigate from page to page.

- **Responsive:** As we know Google gives an edge to responsive sites in searches from mobile devices so choosing a WordPress theme that is responsive will give you an overall better user experience.

- **Schema Markups:** Schema Markups tell search engines where the most relevant content is on your theme.

SEO-friendly WordPress recommendations:

- **Divi theme.**
- **Genesis theme.**
- **Astra theme.**
- **GrowthPress theme.**

SEO benefits:

- Increased website speed.
- More pages indexed.

4 Steps When Getting Set-Up on WordPress

Around this time of the process, you'll want to start combing through the basics and digging through **WordPress tutorials** as we embark upon the basic SEO traditions of setting up your WordPress website.

Often you find old content to trash or plugins to deactivate, but sometimes you come across new treasures that are worth using.

Below I'm talking about the steps you just can't overlook when launching a WordPress site.
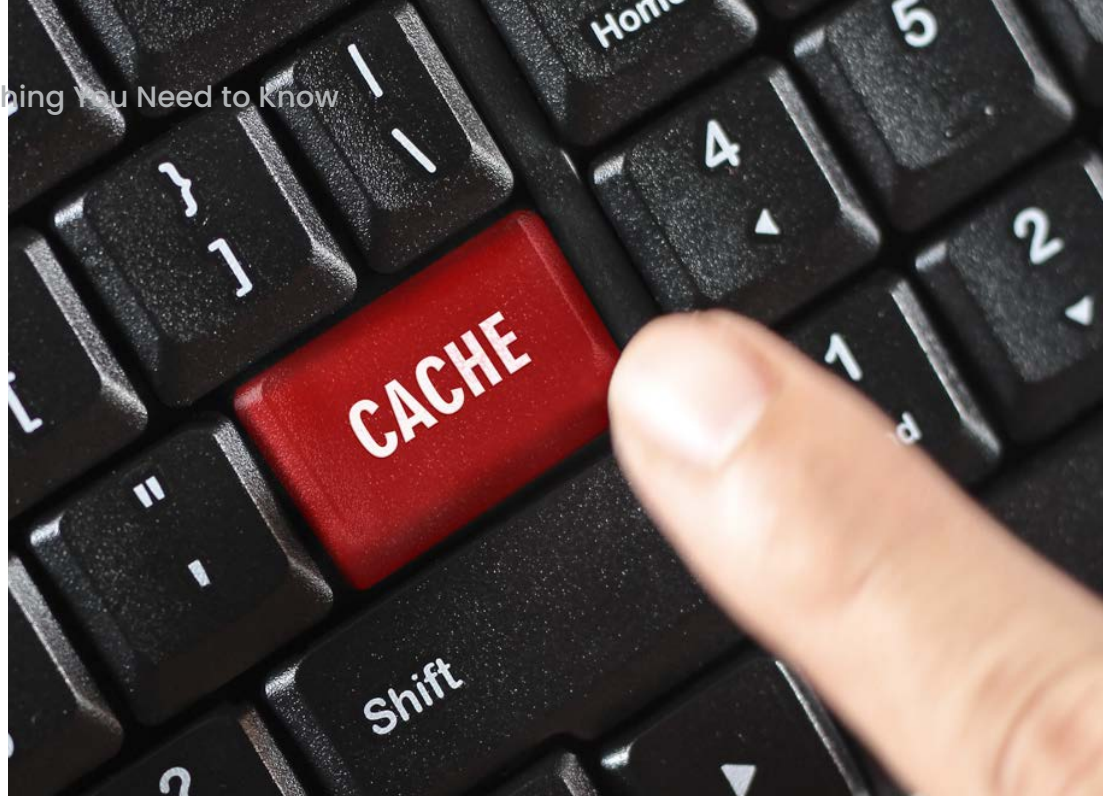
4. Cache Plugin

A caching plugin takes your website (especially on mobile) from "meh" 😑 to "great" 😍 with one simple click.

Unlike most plugins, a caching plugin is rarely considered an unnecessary download.

Instead, this plugin takes page load time to the next level, with amped-up website performance and changes dynamic content to static.

It may sound like a whole lot to embrace (especially if you're a non-plugin type of site), but this is one of those things you need to adapt your style for.

Cache plugin recommendations:

- **WPRocket** (my personal favorite).
- **W3 Total Cache.**
- **Cache Enabler.**
- **WP Fastest Cache.**
- **WP Super Cache.**

SEO benefits:

- Increased website speed.
- Increased site performance.

Remember, once you activate the plugin, head over to the settings to enable your cache for mobile devices.
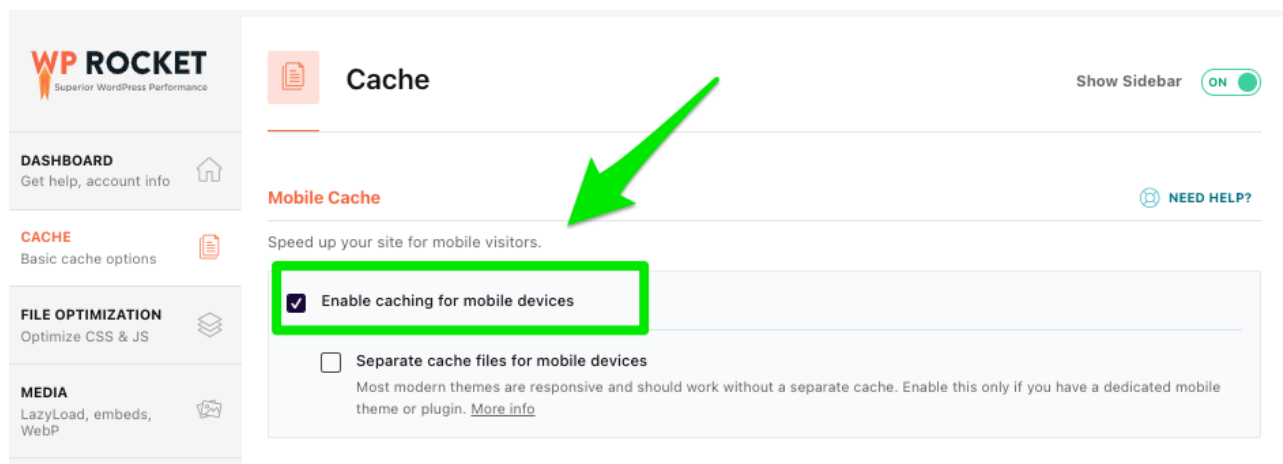
5. Categories

The last time I took over a client's website, they had a category called "Travel" and a tag called "Travel" which created duplicate content and duplicate titles. I ended up noindexing the Tags and started to manually clean the Tags up (this was one big headache).

If your pages are of no use to searchers (e.g., archived pages), then noindex it.

Within WordPress, your categories are broad topics of your blog posts – whether you're writing about food, travel, fashion, whatever.

Think of categories as your table of contents. And, on WordPress, you must categorize your post otherwise, you'll end up in the "uncategorized" section which is of no help to anyone.

Category recommendations:

- Stick to generic topics. Personally, I pick five generic items that will have fresh content monthly.

- Keep each post to 1 to 2 categories max.

- Remember to add content to taxonomy and archive pages.

- All categories should represent a keyword that a user would search for.

SEO benefits:

- Improved user experience.

- Provides easy access to pages to get indexed.

6. Tags

Gone are the days when tagging your content in WordPress meant you were either keyword-obsessed, confused or just enjoyed listing 20+ relevant words.

Whether you're looking to know the basics or fix your current tag status, your WordPress tags need to experience a resurgence that goes way beyond keyword stuffing.

If you're not already on board, keep reading; a client of mine gets 100,000 unique visitors per month. More than 3% of those are referred to by tags listed in the SERPs.

Tag recommendations:

- Limit your tagging to relevant topics you covered in the post.

- Not every post needs to be tagged.

- Keep tags short and sweet; no more than two words.

- Delete overused and underused tags monthly.

SEO benefits:

- Improved user experience.

- Increased engagement.
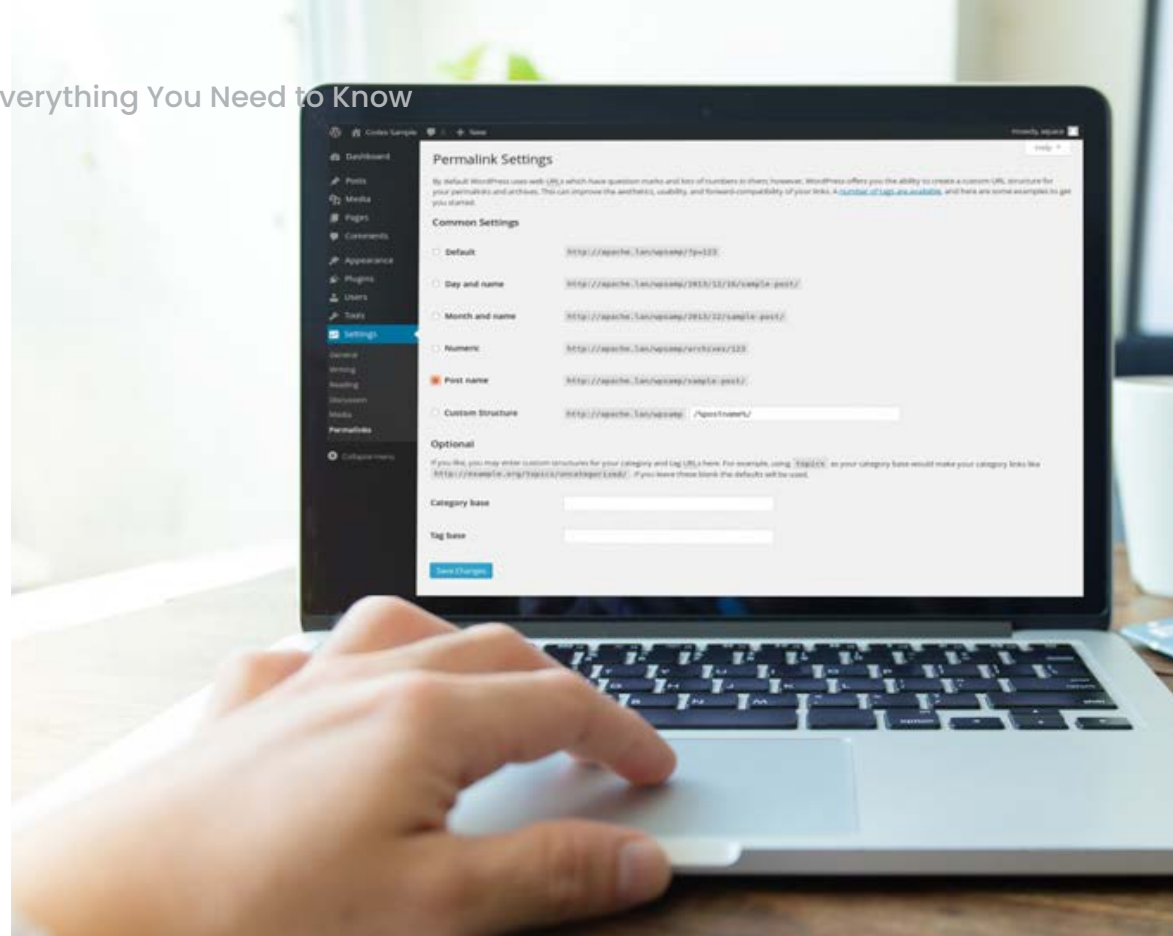
7. Permalinks

Permalinks on WordPress are great for lots of things – structuring your URLs with keywords, creating short links, increasing search rankings, and more.

Whether you just like to ogle SEO-friendly URL structures, are thinking of changing your URLs, or are looking to send a little nudge to your search rankings, there are endless options to update this on WordPress.

Example of an SEO friendly permalink:
www.searchenginejournal.com/how-to-optimize-wordpress/

Example of a not-so-SEO-friendly permalink:
www.searchenginejournal.com/?p=2043

Permalink recommendations:

- The default WordPress plugin is not SEO friendly **according to Google,** so update your settings.

Permalink Settings

WordPress offers you the ability to create a custom URL structure for your permalinks and archives. Custom URL structures can improve the ae available, and here are some examples to get you started.

Common Settings

○ Plain	http://annaleacrowe.com/?p=123	
○ Day and name	http://annaleacrowe.com/2016/03/10/sample-post/	
○ Month and name	http://annaleacrowe.com/2016/03/sample-post/	
○ Numeric	http://annaleacrowe.com/archives/123	
○ Post name	http://annaleacrowe.com/sample-post/	
● Custom Structure	http://annaleacrowe.com	/%category%/%postname%/

- Post name option is a safe choice because this makes URLs short.

- If you're a larger site, you may want to include dates or categories before the post name option.

- Leave out "&," "?," "!" characters in the URL.

- Use hyphens (-) instead of underscores (_).

SEO Benefits:

- Increased crawlability with search engines.
- Better search rankings when keywords are used.

8. Spam Comments

Spammers, your time is almost over. The newer versions of WordPress are nofollowing links posted in comments – viagra, words I didn't know existed, things only seen on Booble, I won't miss you.

A whole slew of **spam comments** packed into one blog post that doesn't offer anything relevant to the topic can damage your site.

At the end of the day, **your website will not perform well with spam comments.**

Spam comment recommendations:

- Disallow anonymous posting.
- Use CAPTCHAs to prevent automated spamming.
- Use the "nofollow" attribute.
- Disallow hyperlinks.
- **Use the Askimet plugin** to monitor spam comments.

SEO benefits:

- Improved site credibility.

Here's a screenshot of what you get with the Askimet plugin:

7 Steps When Optimizing WordPress

It seems as though everything WordPress touches (or rather, creates) turns to gold.

From themes to plugins, the platform knows exactly what connected, business-minded customers want – and how to solve any website problems they may be facing.

And these features below optimize for SEO in every way.

For those who can't seem to find the time to learn SEO from scratch (we've all been there), this section is for you.

9. Meta Titles, Meta Descriptions, & More

Let us start by saying this: I love the Yoast SEO plugin.

I like the meta titles, meta descriptions, the well-organized placement of XML sitemaps, and let's not forget the bulk editor – all of it.

Meta titles and descriptions have proven to increase traffic and engagement, and they deserve a spot in 2021.

Meta titles and descriptions recommendations:

- Download the **Yoast SEO plugin.**
- Optimize your Content Type settings.

SEO benefits:

- Increased click-through in SERPs.

10. XML Sitemaps

As mentioned above, the Yoast SEO plugin offers a sitemap feature, and you need to know how to use it.

Having a sitemap is a necessary evil when it comes to SEO. A sitemap contains all your posts and pages in a list that the search engines can easily read.

XML Sitemap recommendations:

- In the Yoast SEO plugin tab, go to General, then Features.
- Swipe to turn on the XML sitemap.
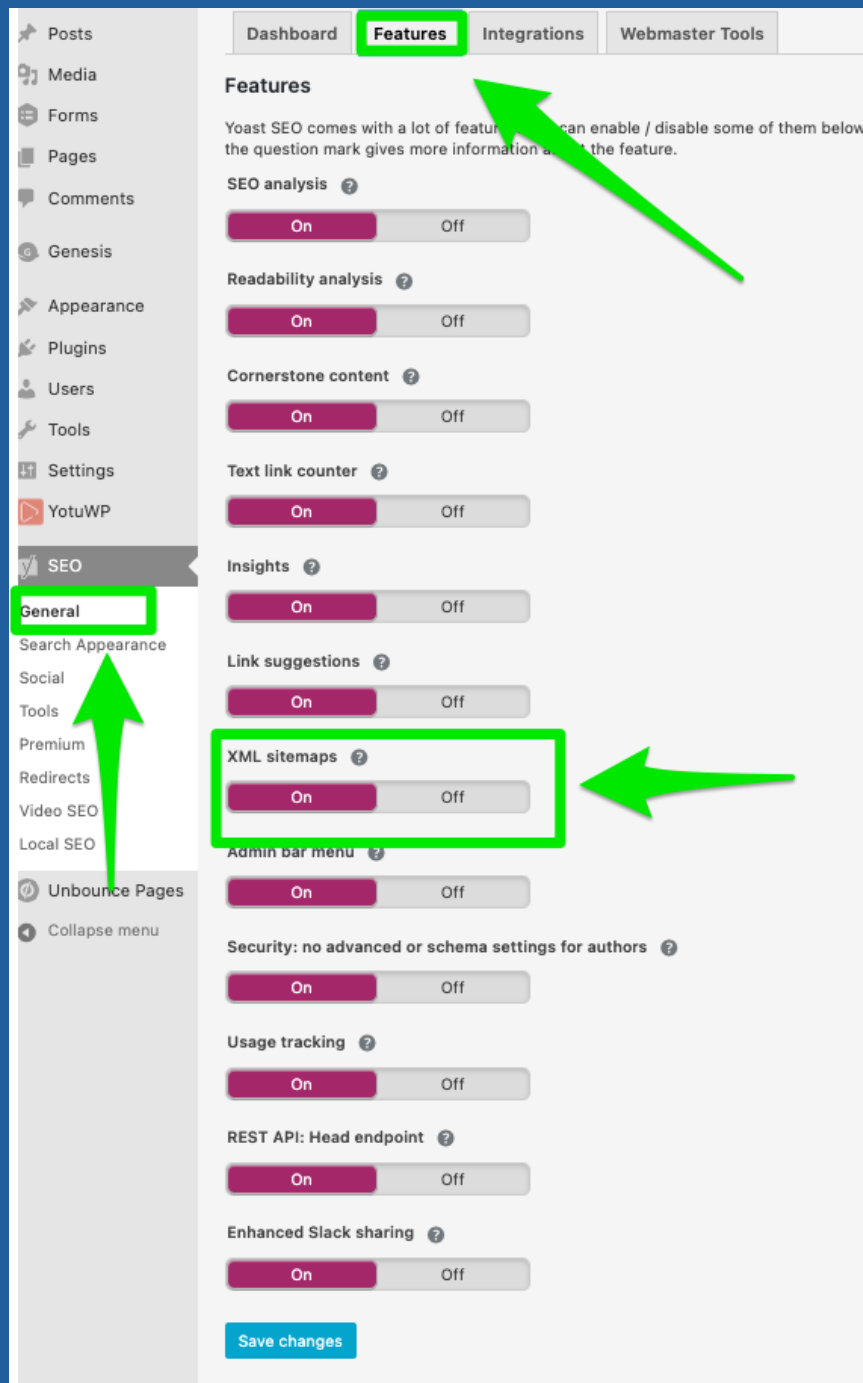
- Head over to **Google Search Console,** under Crawl, then Sitemaps.
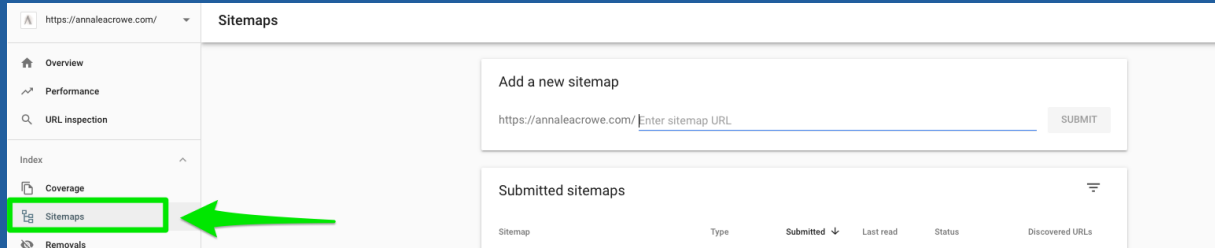
- Click Add Sitemap and submit.

SEO Benefits:

- Faster crawlability.

11. Internal Linking

Between internal, external, and my favorite posts, I never stop to think "Hm, if only I could link to the best content possible on my site."

But, the Yoast SEO plugin will provide examples of how to do just the way to do that. And, I'm loving it.

Rather than randomly linking to posts, this plugin allows me to create a smooth site architecture and send link love to the appropriate pages on my site.

Internal linking recommendations:

- Link to pages deep on your website.

- Link as naturally as possible for the reader.

- Use a reasonable amount of links (i.e., 100 internal links for a 1,000-word blog is not reasonable).

SEO benefits:

- Creates a clean site architecture.

- Distributes page authority throughout the site.
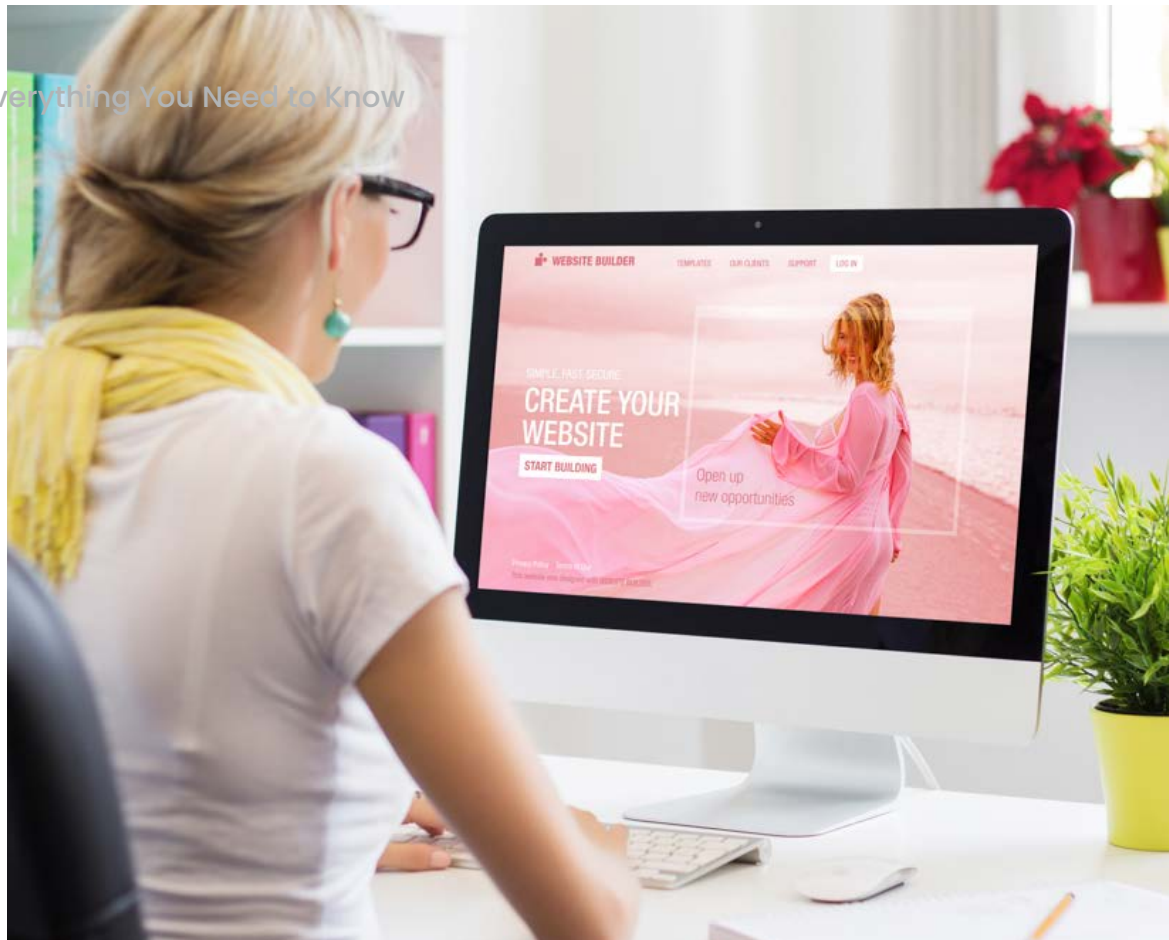
12. Image Alt Tags

The great thing about WordPress is you don't need to understand smancy HTML or Javascript to edit your image alt tags.

Not only can I optimize images with a simple click of a button, but I can do it without adding a plugin.

Image alt tag recommendations:

- Name your image file name a natural keyword-rich phrase. I always include my brand name.

- Write a descriptive image alt tag description.

- Complete the image alt attribution description with your brand name.

SEO benefits:

- Better user experience.

- Higher chances to show up in image search.
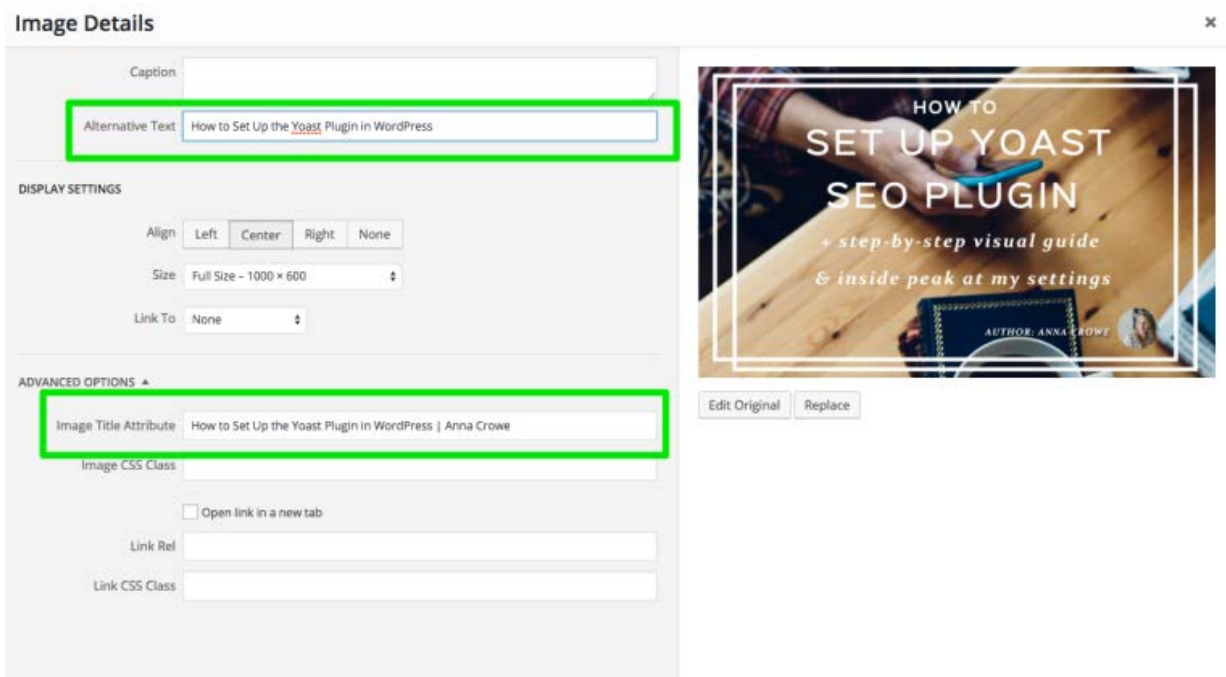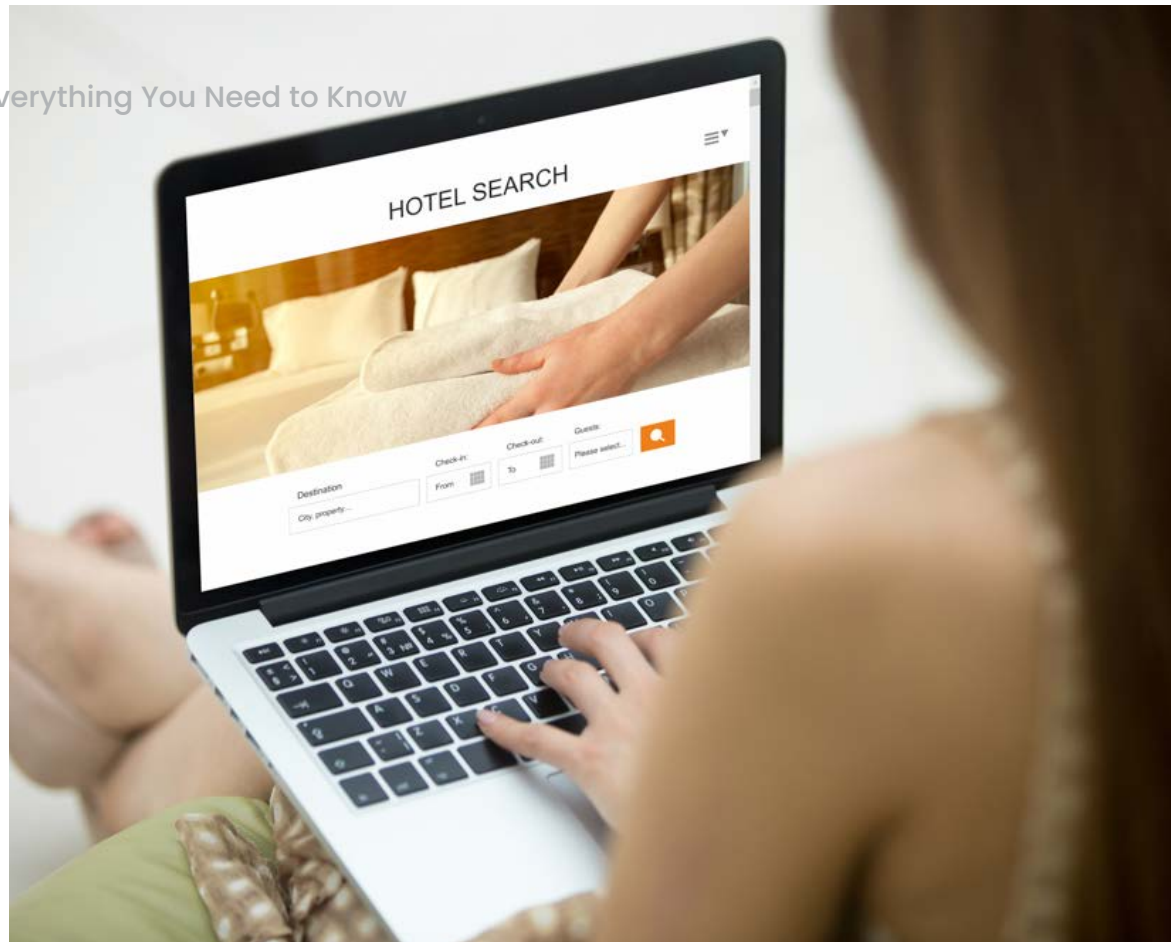
13. Header Tags

Not that I have anything against long-form articles without breaks, but when it comes to my articles, I want things to feel a little more engaging.

Sorry, minimalists, but my philosophy is more is more. I never tire of seeing articles filled with H1, H2, and H3 tags from beginning to end.

Header tag recommendations:

- Name your image file name a natural keyword-rich phrase.

- Write a descriptive image alt tag description.

- Complete the image alt attribution description with your brand name.

SEO benefits:

- More readable, easy-to-digest content for readers.

- Increased user engagement.

14. The rel="canonical" Tag

Nobody likes having their content stolen (or, at least, I sure don't). And, I don't know about you, but I always worry about my content being stolen by one of those scrapers.

To help combat this, I've enabled the rel="canonical" tag for pages on my client's websites. It tells the search engines where the source URLs of content exist on their site. This eliminates duplicate content issues.

rel="canonical" tag recommendations:

- If your content is being published on another website, then use the Yoast SEO plugin to add the rel="canonical" tag.

SEO benefits:

- Eliminate duplicate content issues.

Advanced ^

Allow search engines to show this Post in search results? ⊘

Yes (current default for Posts) ⌄

Should search engines follow links on this Post ⊘
◉ Yes ○ No

Meta robots advanced ⊘

⌄

Breadcrumbs Title ⊘

Canonical URL ⊘
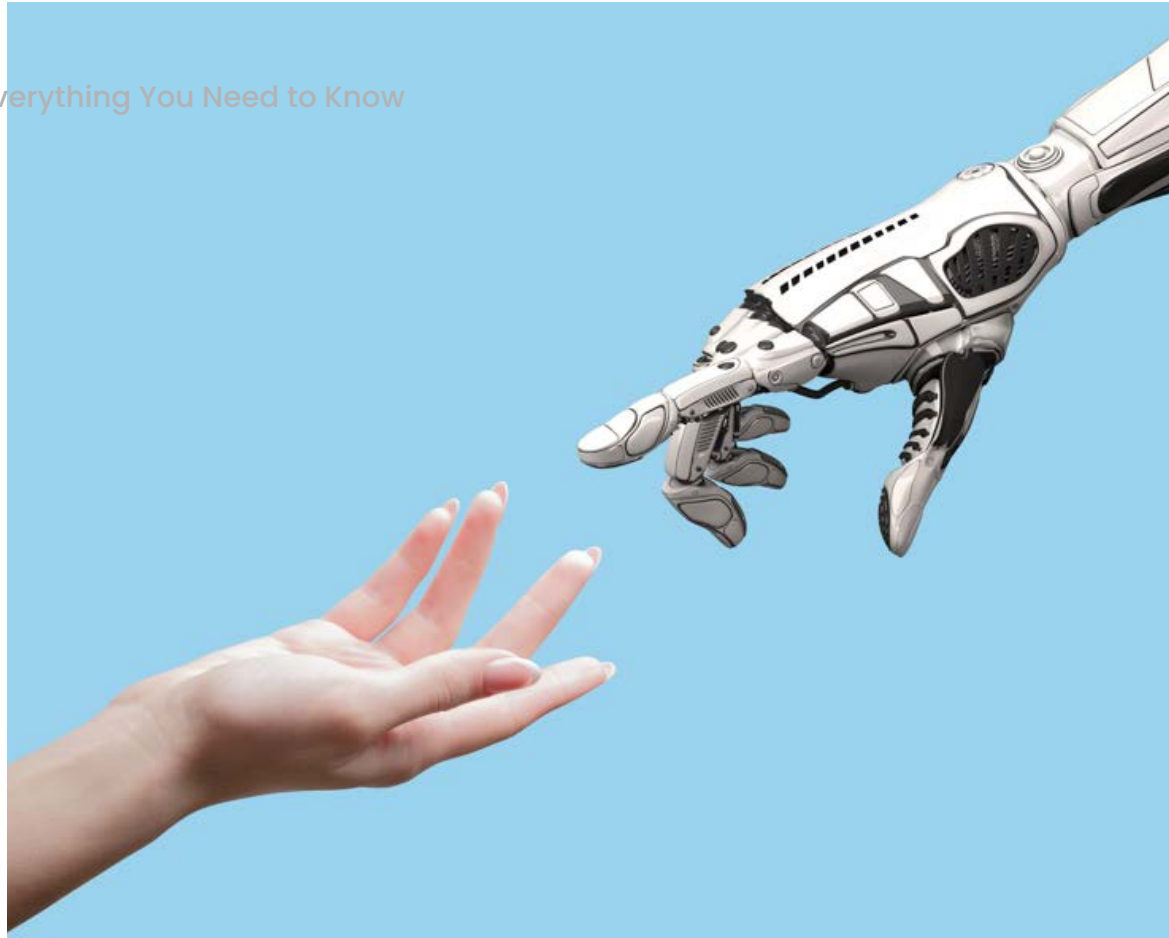
15. Robots.txt

If we had a dollar for all the robots.txt I've had to fix that were blocking the search engines from quality content, I'd be making it rain money right now.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, **robots.txt is** essentially a file that tells the search engines what to look at and what not to look at on your site.

On search engines like Bing and Google, where websites run rampant, this method of guiding the SERPs can save you a lot of time and money.

robots.txt recommendations:

- Disallow wp-admin in your robots.txt file.

- Allow all other quality content to be indexed in the robots.txt file.

- Add your sitemap to the bottom of your robots.txt file.

- Edit your robots.txt file in Yoast SEO plugin > Tools > Editor.

SEO benefits:

- Eliminate duplicate content issues.

---

robots.txt

Edit the content of your robots.txt:

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /wp-admin/
Disallow: /tag/
Sitemap: https://          .com/sitemap_index.xml
```

Save changes to robots.txt

2 Ongoing Steps to Maintaining WordPress

When business owners expand into new WordPress territories, it's typically in the form of content upgrades and lead generation forms. This helps boost higher price tags and content more sophisticated than we're used to seeing.

But, let's not forget the basics that got us here.

Between backing up your website, optimizing your headlines, and cleaning up meta titles and descriptions that would make, maintaining your WordPress site can be draining.

Below discover some of the biggest – and easiest – ways to secure your WordPress site.
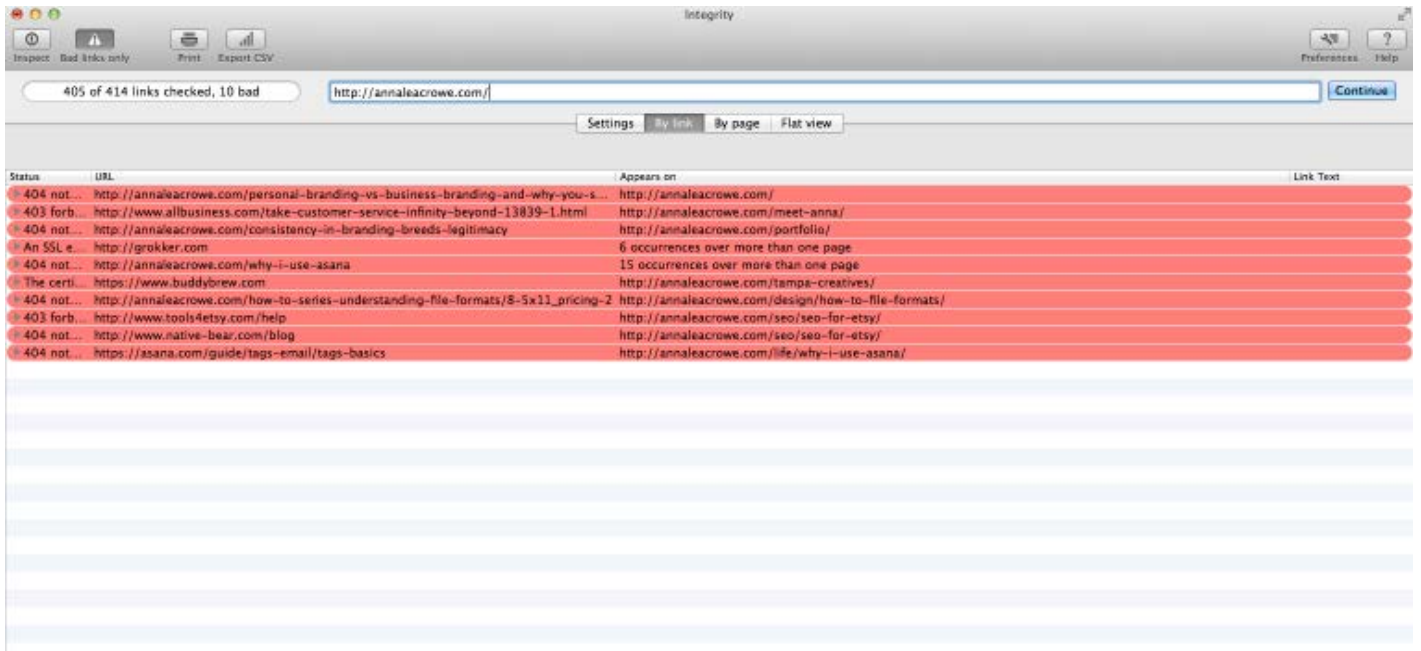
16. Broken Links

No matter how my broken links go down – ending with a shiny server error or the requisite semi-awkward not found – the broken link rite of passage will always live fresh in my mind (and cringe-worthy Integrity report): the 504, the 404, and, most importantly, the soft 404.

So, I got to thinking about what I'd do differently. Nowadays, running a report on **Integrity** (team Mac) or **Xenu** (team PC) will pull all the nostalgic-inducing links you may need to fix.

Broken links recommendations:

- Download Integrity or Xenu and fix whatever external links are popping up.

- Use Yoast SEO's Redirection to fix your 404 errors listed in **Google Search Console's crawl errors.**

SEO benefits:

- Better user experience.

17. Backup Your Site

Being good at backing up your website doesn't necessarily mean you're enhancing your online presence. It means you're saving all your SEO efforts.

When you choose to backup your site – daily, weekly, monthly – everyone wins.

Broken links recommendations:

- Backup your website using the cPanel if you're feeling tech-savvy.

- If the cPanel sounds like something out of Short Circuit, then opt for a plugin like **Backup Buddy.**

SEO benefits:

- Peace of mind.

Keeping up with the pace of WordPress technology is rough. Even those of us that are tuned into the newest plugins and software can find it overwhelming. (Sucuri? Come on; I just figured out Wordfence!)

So it's no wonder that small business owners may stumble a bit as they navigate the increasingly connected WordPress world. Sometimes even the most well-meaning and tech-savvy entrepreneurs can slip up.

From caching your website and comment etiquette to robots.txt, this article has it all.

Chapter 2

How to Build a WordPress Site in 24 Hours

Brian Harnish
Lead SEO, iLoveSEO

WordPress is a fantastic platform for building websites on-the-fly with little to no development time required to get up and running.

In addition, WordPress has fantastic customizability ranging from being able to fully customize your theme, to finding plug-ins that have functionality to do just about anything you want.

The list of what you can do to customize WordPress is endless and is generally limited only to your imagination.

You can install a newsletter plug-in to manage your newsletter subscriptions. You can install analytics plug-ins that seamlessly integrate with WordPress and Google Analytics.

Other **WordPress plugins** allow you to customize your SEO such as your title tags, meta descriptions, and meta keywords. Still, some plug-ins will also let you add noodp and noydir tags, and dive deep enough into their functionality to allow for full control over noindex/nofollow on individual pages.

1. Choose a Good Domain Name

This should go without saying, but **choosing a good domain name** is half the battle toward creating a good website.

A good domain name should generally be:

- Short.
- Catchy.
- Describe your business.
- Be generally keyword-related.
- Be related to your brand.

Short domain names are generally defined as domain names that are three words or less. Ideally two words or less.

These words should communicate and encompass three areas: your brand, your industry, your keywords.

Now, if you're just creating a company site, your domain name should be a branded domain name for posterity reasons.

You wouldn't easily be able to sell your site if you created the domain name to be "JohnsWebsitesRUS.com." So, that consideration should come into play as well.

Now, it's necessary to mention this: the exact match domain name update does tend to work against domain names with exact-match phrases.

Be careful about using exact match keyword phrases as the domain name. You may get away with it for a few months, but the choice will eventually come back to haunt you.

2. Choose a Good Host

Choosing a good web host for WordPress presents several challenges. A web host should be a positive addition to your website's arsenal.

Things like additional websites, bandwidth, or things like no WHM control panel can be (and should be) dealbreakers. Find a host that will suit your needs and let you upgrade your monthly bandwidth as necessary.

As you drive more traffic to your site, you want to make sure that your host has some way for you to upgrade that bandwidth. Almost nothing can be worse than obtaining thousands of visitors a month and find that your website is suddenly down due to lack of bandwidth.

Make sure that your host will give you the security you need as well. This will help you rest easy, knowing that you will not be hacked in a moment's notice.

Find out more about WordPress security through our article: **10 Tips For Keeping Your WordPress Site Secure.**

For this tutorial, we are assuming that you have selected a Linux web host with CPANEL + WHM combination as your hosting stack. There are other implementations and types of hosts, but for the purposes of this article, this is what we are using.

3. Inventory Your Existing Website

Here, you can figure out whether or not you want to start over. If your existing website is so horrible you want to start over, then I totally get it: I would not want to add that site to my portfolio either!

Take a look at your existing website and figure out what you want to keep and what you want to throw away. Depending on what you uncover in this step, it will be necessary to perform a full website migration, which will take longer than 24 hours and is beyond the scope of this article.

4. Download WordPress

Go to WordPress.org and download the install files for WordPress. After downloading, you can unzip the files.

Then, logon to your web host. Upload the files. You can add the files anywhere you want on the website.

If you want to upload them to the root folder and have your entire site based on WordPress, that can be done.

If you'd rather just a section of your site hosted off a subdomain be the WordPress version, then that is possible as well.

5. Create a MySQL Database

Before proceeding with the WordPress installation, it will be necessary to create a MySQL database in cpanel. Without a MySQL database, your WordPress installation will all be for naught.

Follow the documentation here (or follow your hosts' help files if they have them) in order to create a new database with the MySQL Database Wizard.

Be sure to take down your username and password for the SQL database. We will be using them in the next steps.

Need-to-know: When creating your username and password the MySQL database wizard usually creates a username with the database name + user like so: user_databasename.

So, username_db1 would be the full username you use when modifying wp_config.php. Don't worry – we're getting to that in just a little bit.

6. Install WordPress in 15 Minutes

There are some changes you need to make to the WordPress install files before you move forward with installing WordPress.

First of all, it is necessary to make changes to wp_config.php in order to ensure that your installation will work. Without these changes, your installation will have problems.

Please note as well that the items in the wp-config.php file are all in a specific order. This order does matter and if you make changes and you don't know what you're doing, you can introduce problems into your installation. Using your FTP solution, let's navigate to wp-config-sample.php. We have to re-name this file to wp-config. php for the file to work.

Next, we are going to make changes to some items in the file: the database name, the database username, database password, and database host.

Remember that need-to-know item we discussed in the last step? That applies here.

So your database name will be the full name of the database you created.

The Database Username will be "username_db1". Enter your password.

Now, the Database Host is set by your hosting provider. It will be necessary to contact their support and obtain this information for that wp-config.php item.

For further details, **here is** the official documentation for editing wp-config-sample.php.

Now that we have renamed wp-config-sample.php, and we have entered in our database's information, it is time to go to the main install URL, and proceed with the installation.

In a few seconds, you should have a welcome screen that shows, "Congratulations! WordPress is now installed." This entire process should take around 5-10 minutes total.

Some maintenance tips: You will want to change your admin directory on your site, in order to prevent hackers from hacking into your back end. In addition, using strong passwords like "7$192^98asv097!@#E41" is recommended just for the security alone.

Please, don't use the word "password" or other identifiable easy-to-guess information as your WordPress password. It's better to be thorough and a little cautious at the outset than be sorry later.

7. Find a Good Theme

Now that WordPress is installed, it is important to find a good theme for our project.

Finding a good theme means that:

- It will meet our needs.
- It is generally light weight and loads fast.
- It has valid HTML along with valid CSS.
- It includes compatibility with not only the most popular plug-ins, but also most plug-ins that you plan on using.
- It includes high quality support along with thorough documentation.

When you do find a theme you like, you should look at things like its customizability, your requirements, whether or not you will outgrow the theme, as well as integration with your brand's colors.

Now, most every theme will give you the opportunity to change colors after installation, so I wouldn't worry too much about this part at first. While finding a theme remember to be on the lookout for the theme's customizability and compatibility with plug-ins.

8. Install the Theme

When you do find your theme, it's generally a simple matter of downloading the files, extracting the files, and uploading them to your server. You can then go into WordPress themes and change the theme over to the new one so you can test it out.
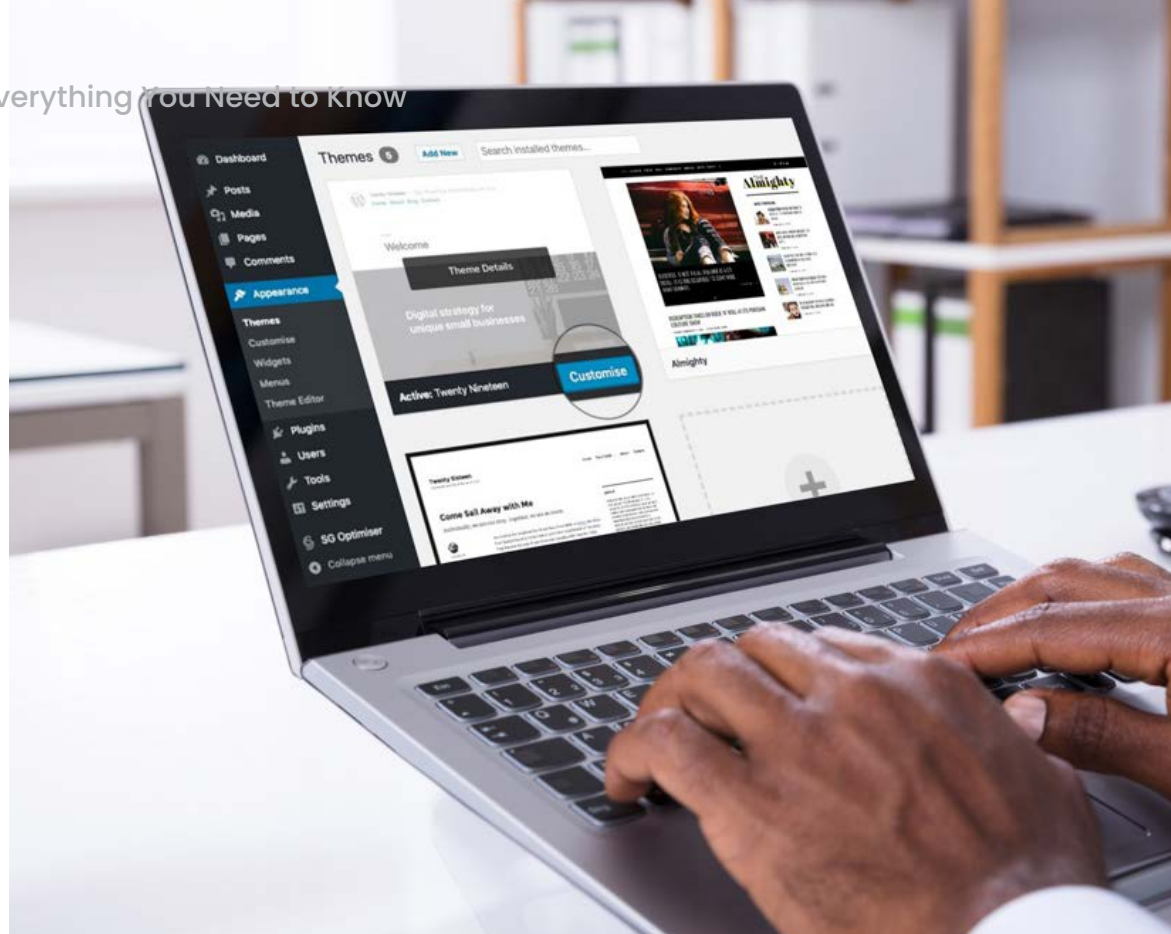
9. Customize Your Theme

Looking at customizations of your theme, it is important that you can customize everything. There are different levels of customization available that can make or break your website efforts.

If you have a theme that doesn't let you customize your content with your own coding, or you have to code in such a way that mimics the coding being used on the theme, then the theme is not coded well and you could run into issues with this later with cross platform and cross display compatibility.

A theme should not limit you in what you can do with your site. Instead, it should help enhance your website efforts and make things easier.

If, for whatever reason, you find that your theme does not allow you to accomplish what you want, it may be time to find another theme. Revisit step 7 and make sure your theme fits the goals of your project before you move forward.

If you find that available themes do not do what you want your website to do, it may be necessary to move on to custom theme development, which can take more than 24 hours.

Here are some good tutorials on how to create custom WordPress themes.

10. Find & Install Good Plug-Ins

Finding good plug-ins is necessary to make sure that you not only have the functionality that you need, but that enhanced functionality runs smoothly.

From SEO plug-ins, to newsletter and analytics plug-ins, make sure your theme is compatible.

Some of my favorite plugins to use include:

- Redirection (for implementing 301 redirects the easy way).

- Yoast's SEO Plugin (for implementing all of the SEO basics easily).

- Tribulant Newsletters (easy creation and management of newsletters along with newsletter subscriptions).

- Google XML Sitemaps (for easy implementation of XML Sitemaps on WordPress sites).

- W3 Total Cache (for minifcation, speed optimization).

- Disqus Comment System (a widely-used comment system across the web).

- Social media sharing plug-ins (if they are not already part of your theme).

- Social media analytics plug-ins (for social analytics).

11. Configuring the SEO Basics

Permalink Structure

In order to implement effective SEO, the first thing that should be changed is the structure of your permalinks. You can find these settings under Settings > Permalinks.

I prefer using the following permalink structure: domainname.com/category/postname/ where category includes the blog post's category (keyword-optimized for the topical focus of your blog), and then a keyword-rich postname.

If you wish to include the category like recommended above, select Custom Structure and use the following: /%category%/%postname%/.

If you have had your site for a while, it is likely that you have links in place. Don't panic!

WordPress will automatically implement the redirects for you so you don't have to set them up manually.

Changing From WWW To Non-WWW

You will find this option under Settings > General. It will be necessary to take a bit of time and think about what you want your site to show up as: WWW or non-WWW.

If you are migrating an existing site over to WordPress, I recommend that you use the existing site URL. Changing from WWW from non-WWW in that instance will only cause more harm than good, and you can introduce serious SEO performance issues as a result.
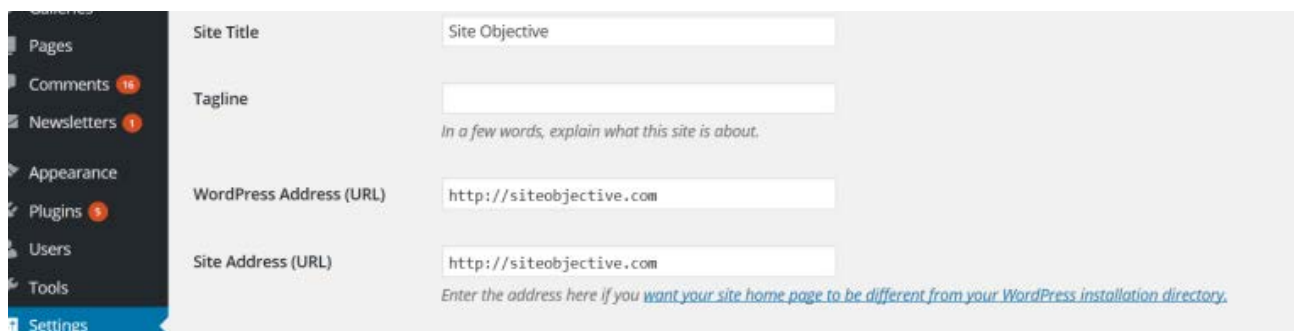
Make Sure You Allow Search Engines to Index Your Site

This is a biggie and can lead to SEO performance issues if you don't configure this. You can find this setting in Settings > Reading > Search Engine Visibility.

Normally, this box is checked. In order to allow full crawling of your site, always make sure that this box is unchecked.
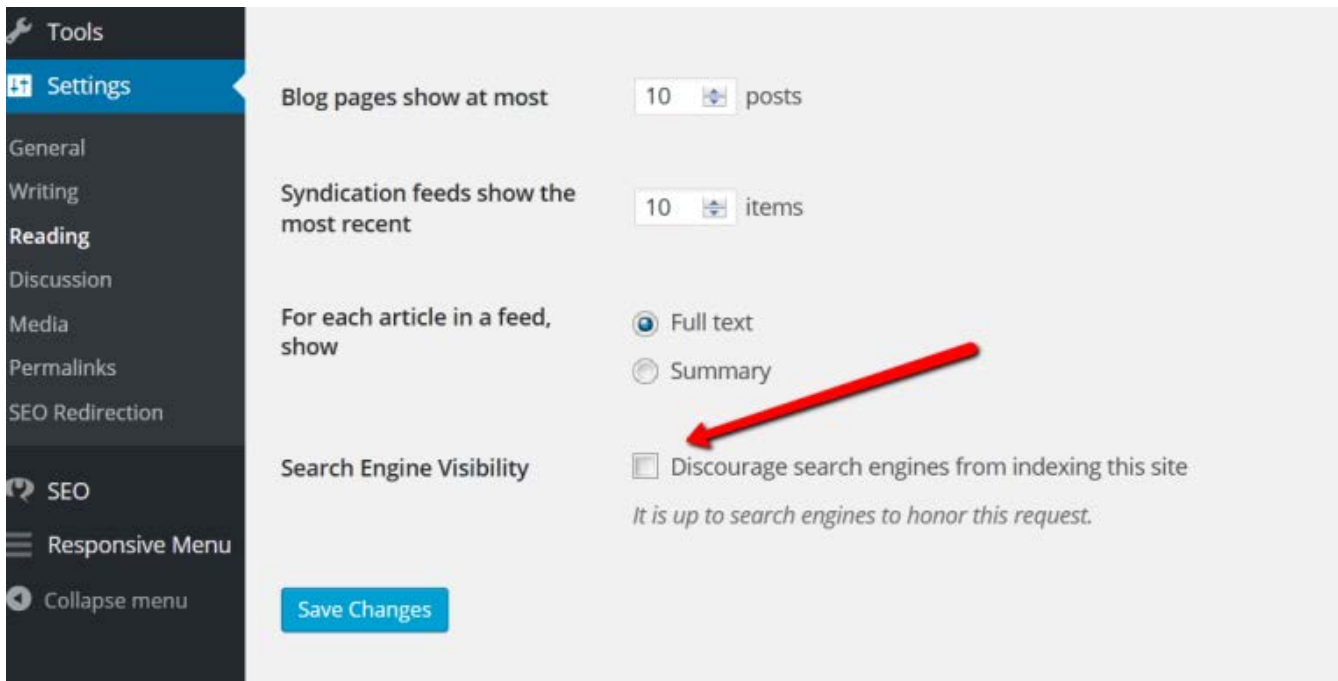
Site Speed

Speed is king, and can make or break your website performance where conversions are concerned.

Look into how you can speed up your theme. It is preferable to eliminate as many calls to the server as possible.

If you have 15 CSS files in your theme, consider condensing them down to 1-3 CSS files. The same thing holds true with JS files.

If you have 15 JS files as part of your theme, either look for another well-optimized theme, or manually condense them down into 1-3 files maximum.

In addition, installing the WP Total Cache plug-in can help make your site faster with its offerings of page caching, database caching, offering minify options, and integration with a range of CDNs (content delivery networks), further increasing your opportunity for speed.

Be Sure to Noindex, Follow Archive Pages and Disable Archives You Don't Need

Archive pages are the king of duplicate content in WordPress. They can make or break a site, especially when the site reaches hundreds of pages.

You don't want to address that headache in the future.

Setting this SEO basic now will help make your optimization efforts easier. You can find this setting in Yoast's SEO plug-in under: Yoast > Titles & Metas > Other. Select the setting that says "Noindex subpages of archives."

In addition, I recommend adding the NOODP and NOYDIR meta robots tags sitewide. These tags will prevent Google and other search engines from automatically using the DMOZ and Yahoo Directory descriptions.

For those who continue integration of meta keywords, I suggest checking "use meta keywords tag" here as well.
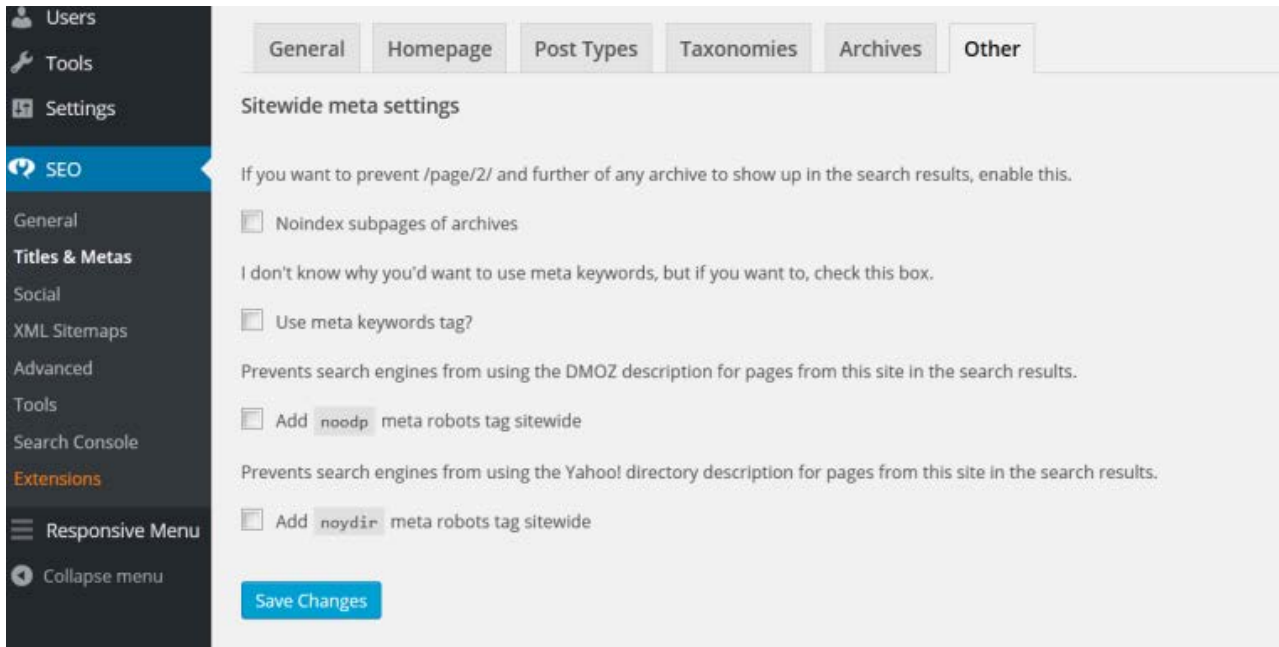
Building a WordPress site is easy. It can take less than 24 hours to build a competent site that looks like a brand you want to do business with.

It will take much longer, however, to build a great online presence that drives traffic on a consistent basis. So play around with it. Enhance your creativity. See what you can come up with. It's by experimentation and testing that we truly find the right path through the SERPs.

Additional Sources:

The Definitive Guide to Higher Rankings for WordPress Sites
How To Create a Custom WordPress Theme

Chapter 3

7 Ways to Improve SEO on Your WordPress Site

Anna Crowe
Assistant Editor,
Search Engine Journal

Chances are that right now, you're reading this while attempting to improve SEO on your WordPress website. Am I right? Are you looking for other ways to improve your WordPress SEO outside of Yoast?

I'm not a psychic. I've just been in the same situation before.

I'd say it's a pretty good bet that there are tons of us WordPress users out there trying to clean up our page speed or choose an SEO-friendly theme.

I mean, WordPress is used by **64%** of all websites whose CMS is known. That's 40.6% of all websites.

If you flip a coin, you have a 40.6% chance of a website being built on WordPress. That's a lot.

Maybe that's why websites like TechCrunch, Star Wars blog, Beyonce, Playstation, Facebook's Newsroom, eBay, etc.
Even Search Engine Journal is built on WordPress. And, we get over 2 million organic visitors per month.
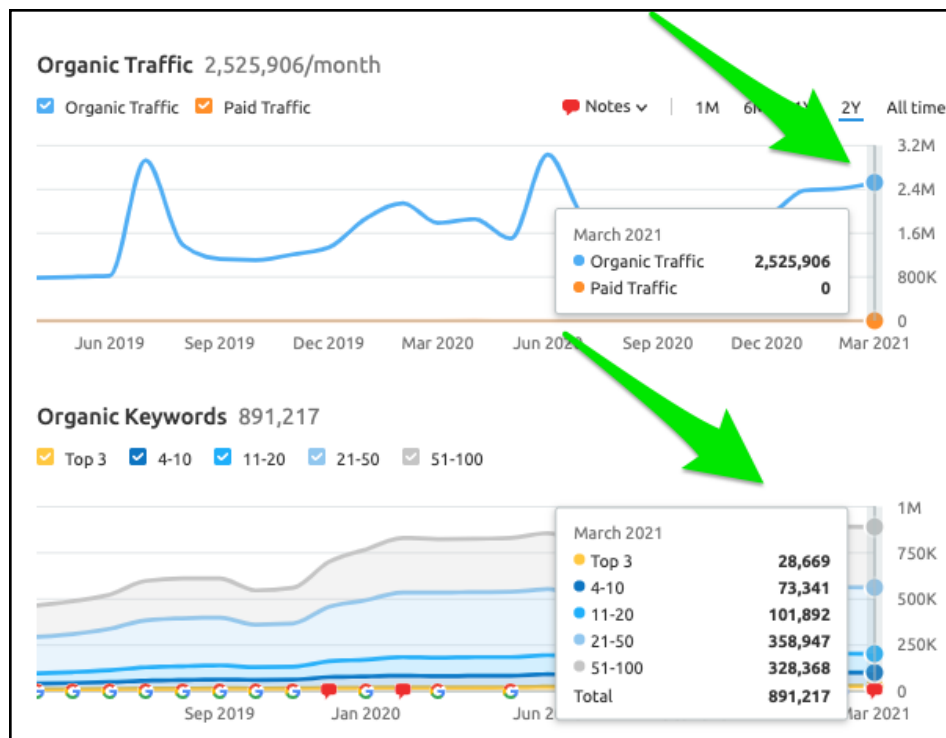
But, when it comes to improving SEO efforts on WordPress, I'm often left scouring blogs for a few hints and tips that all center around the Yoast plugin. So, what about all of the other elements that Yoast does not control?

After 11+ years of working on WordPress sites, I've put together these actionable tips to help other WordPress site owners improve their SEO strategy.

WordPress.org vs. WordPress.com – Which Is Better?

WordPress.org is the clear winner when it comes to **choosing between WordPress.org vs. WordPress. com.**

WordPress.org provides the ability to fully customize your themes, widgets, and plugins. It is open-source, self-hosted, and ideal for improving SEO. It's the same platform used for the websites mentioned above.

WordPress.com has limited storage, no FTP access, and not ideal for SEO.

1. Choose a WordPress Theme Best for SEO

Let's be real. When you're choosing your WordPress theme, SEO is usually at the bottom. I get it – the visual designs and interactions are much more exciting to think about when designing your website.

But while choosing an SEO-friendly theme for WordPress may be easy to overlook, having an SEO friendly theme is vital for the success of your website.

When it comes to choosing a WordPress theme best for SEO, these are my favorites.

- **Astra.**
- **Genesis.**
- **Divi.**
- **GeneratePress.**
- **OceanWP.**

2. Determine Your Preferred Domain

When choosing your preferred domain, you're choosing between two things:

www vs. non www

Let's set this record straight, there is no SEO benefit to having www or non www when setting your preferred domain.

I don't use www on my personal website (https://annaleacrowe.com).

In the past, www came standard when creating your website.

If you're a larger company with a lot of site traffic, you may want to opt for the www version of your preferred domain. With a www version, you can have a CNAME record to help redirect traffic for failovers.

3. Change Your Permalink in WordPress

Pop quiz! Which of the two URLs below is more readable?

https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-101/what-people-search-for/
https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-101/?p=12345

The first option is a more readable and the preferred canonical URL.

These are the types of URLs that visitors want to see.

Also, **keeping a clean and SEO-friendly URL structure** may have a slight impact on your content.

Google's John Mueller said on Twitter, "The SEO effect of keywords in the URL is minimal once the content is indexed."

While you may see a teeny tiny impact, it's worth it to the user experience.

To change your default permalink settings in WordPress, go to Settings > Permalinks.
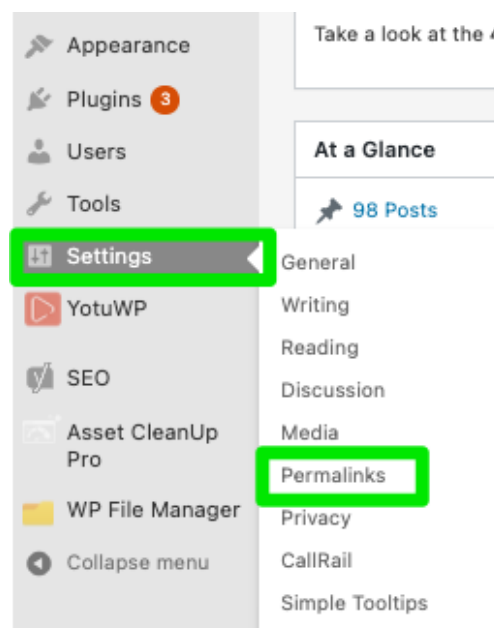
Then, select Post Name as the option. Post Name typically works for most sites. However, you can implement a custom structure depending on your preferences.
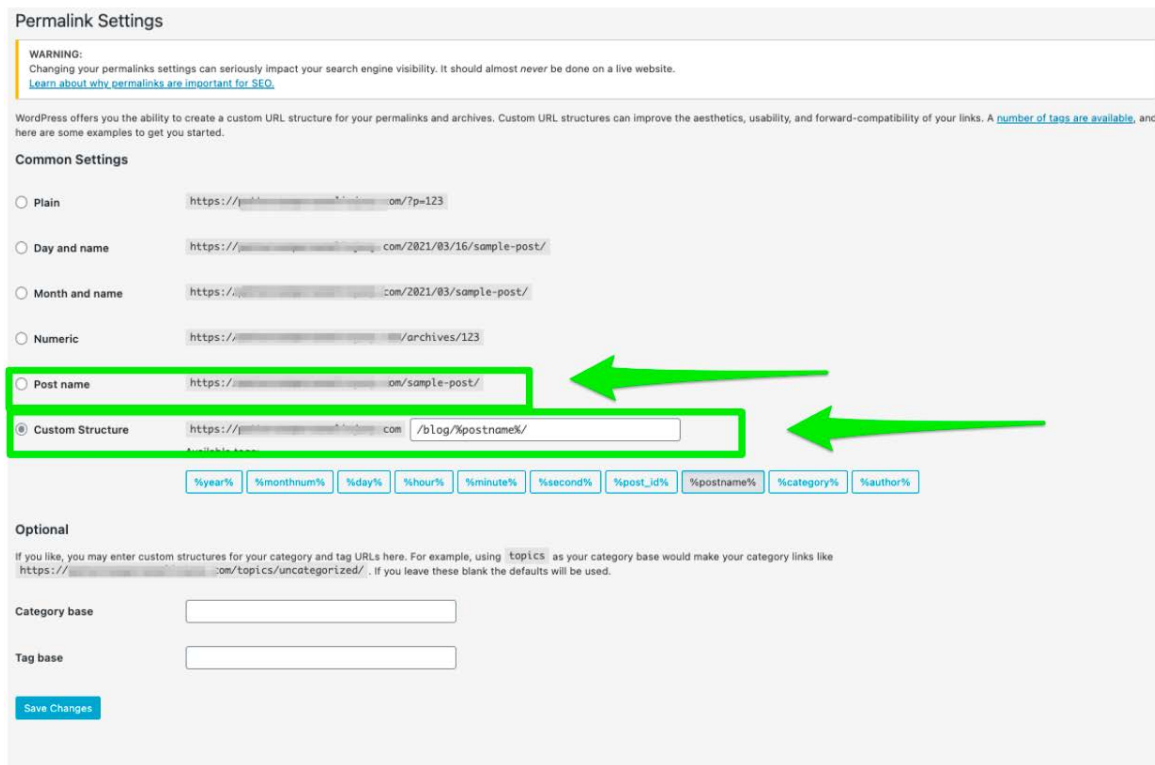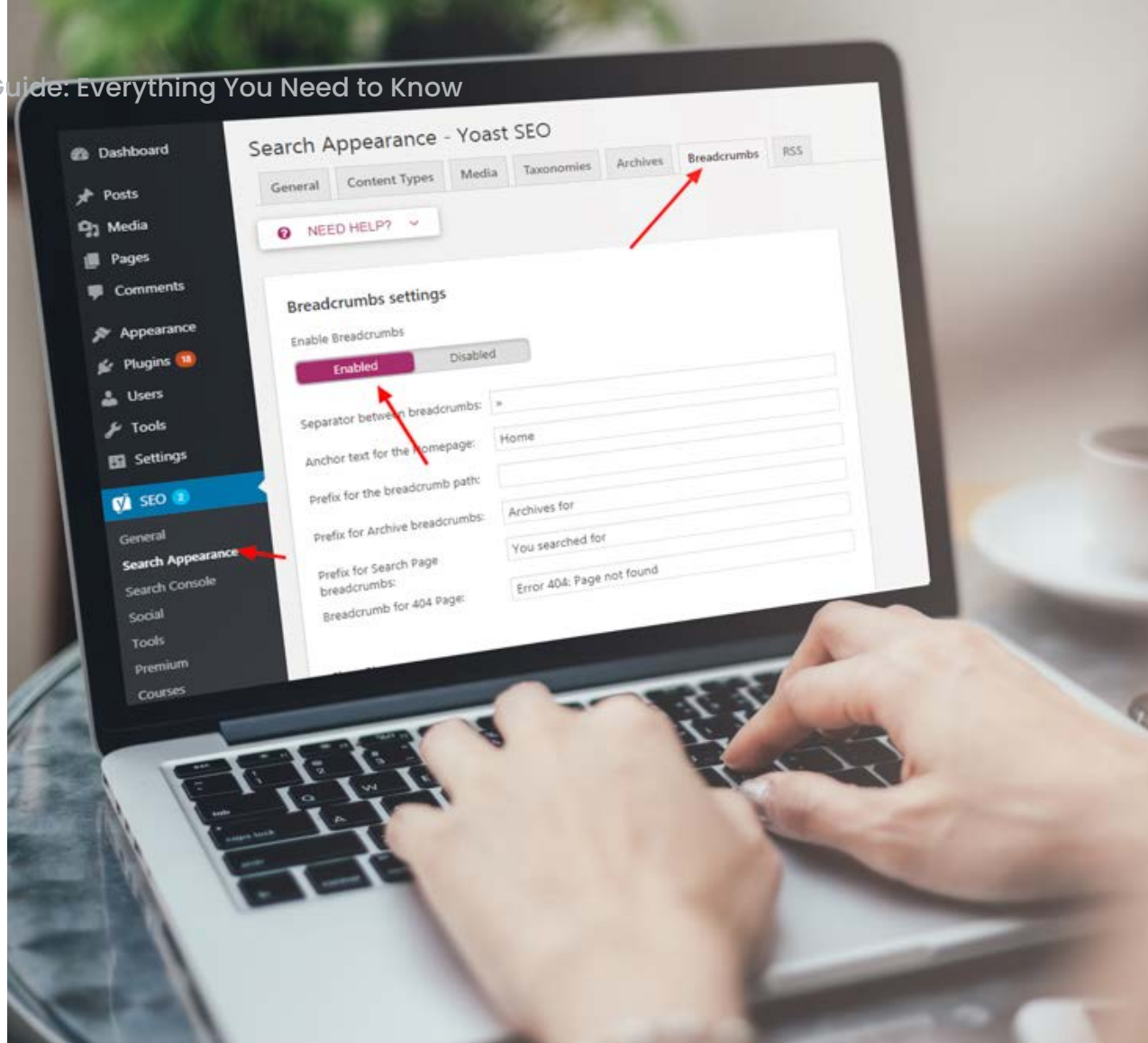
4. Turn on Breadcrumbs

SEO amateurs and pros alike know that breadcrumbs are often as forgotten as printing those Mapquest directions back in the early 2000s.

It's important to understand that I'm not talking about the breadcrumbs you use on chicken parm. I'm talking about the **type of breadcrumbs** you find at the top of a website or under the navigation bar.

Like this.

If you've got the Yoast SEO plugin installed, implementing breadcrumbs can be done in less than 5 minutes.

Simply go to Yoast SEO > Search Appearance > Breadcrumbs > Enabled.
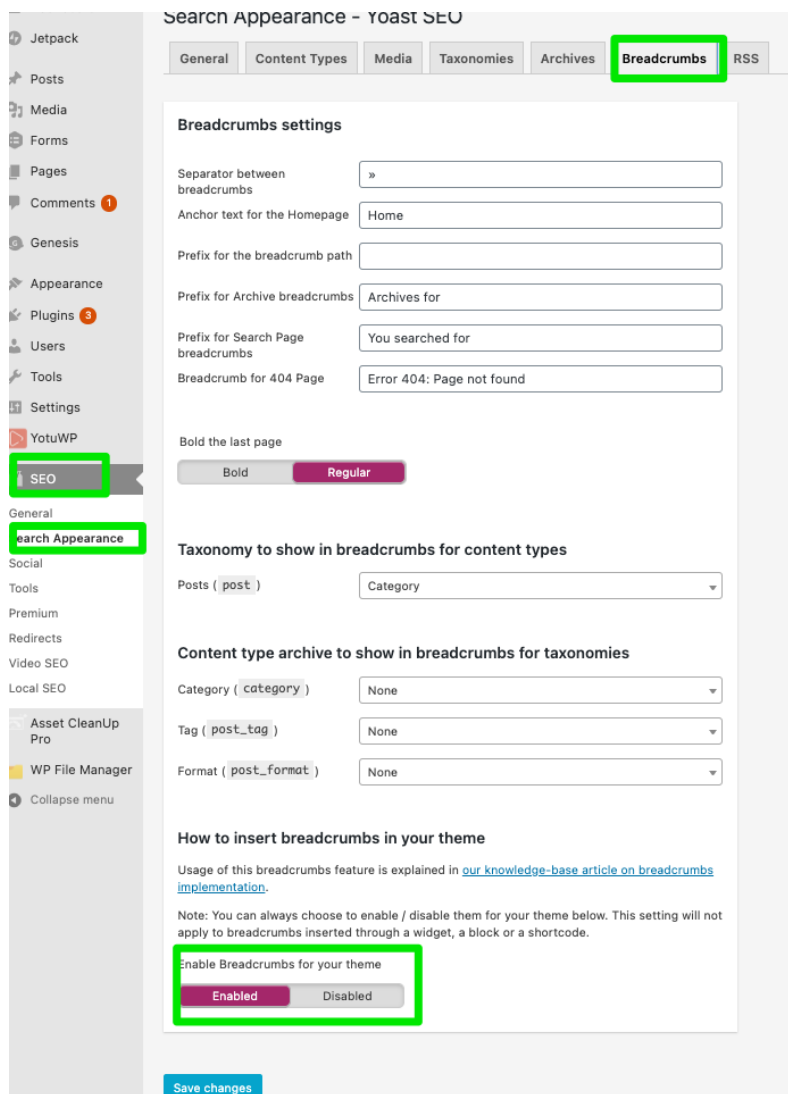
5. Decide to Enable or Disable Comments in WordPress

Do you enable or disable comments in WordPress? This is a tough decision and depends on the current state of your WordPress website.
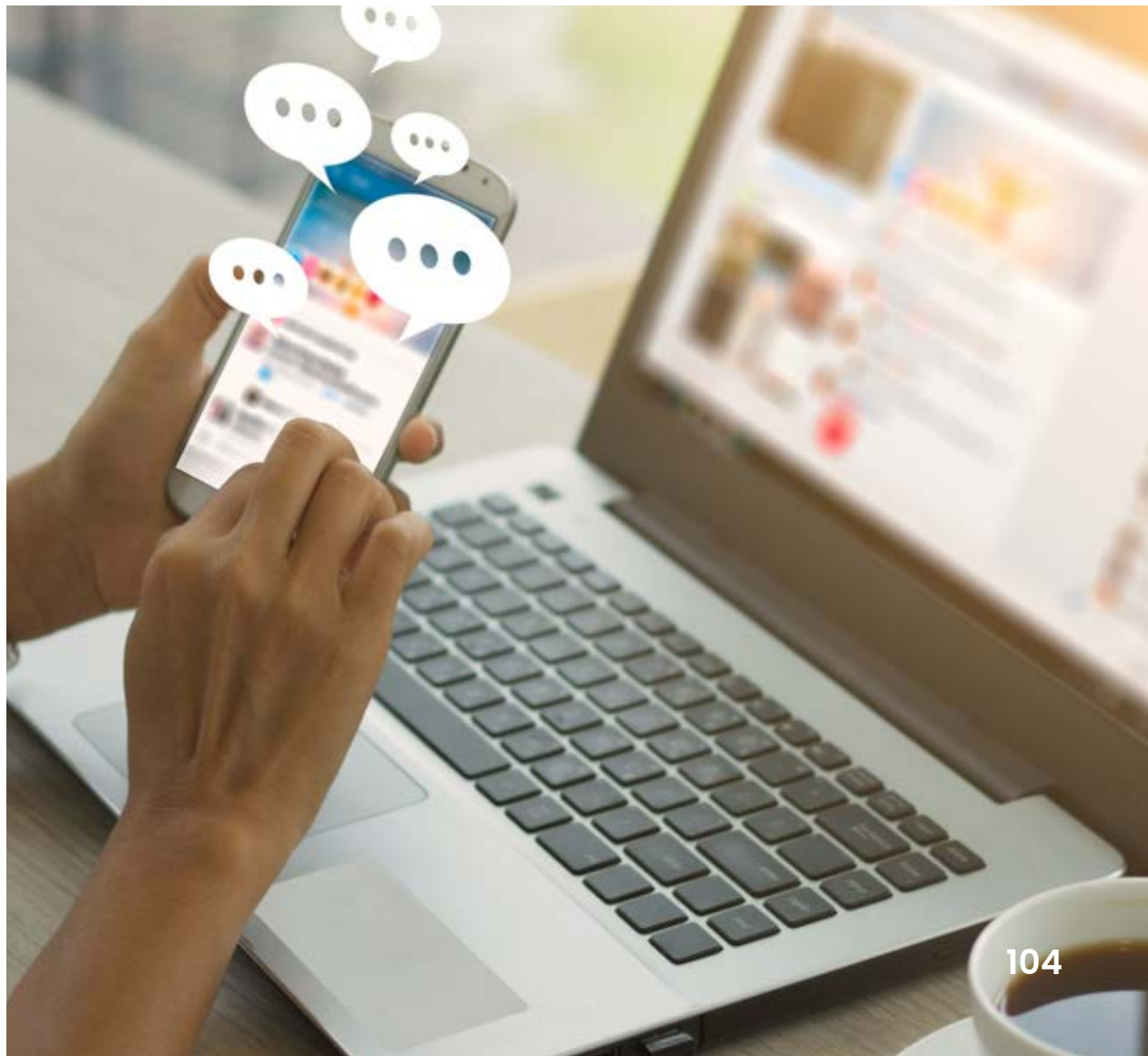
If you've already got comments on your site, Google's John Mueller says **removing comments does impact rankings.** So, you may want to keep them depending on how spammy the comments are.

If you don't have comments enabled, you may want to keep it that way. Google's Matt Cutts shared that comments with **bad spelling and grammar can affect rankings.**

In short, it's up to you to decide whether your site vision is coupled with comments.

To enable or disable comments in WordPress, head over to Settings > Discussion.

Discussion Settings

Default post settings	☐ Attempt to notify any blogs linked to from the post
	☐ Allow link notifications from other blogs (pingbacks and trackbacks) on new posts
	☑ Allow people to submit comments on new posts
	(These settings may be overridden for individual posts.)
Other comment settings	☑ Comment author must fill out name and email
	☐ Users must be registered and logged in to comment
	☐ Automatically close comments on posts older than 14 days
	☐ Show comments cookies opt-in checkbox, allowing comment author cookies to be set
	☑ Enable threaded (nested) comments 5 ∨ levels deep
	☐ Break comments into pages with 50 top level comments per page and the last ∨ page displayed by default
	Comments should be displayed with the older ∨ comments at the top of each page
Email me whenever	☑ Anyone posts a comment
	☑ A comment is held for moderation
	☐ Someone follows my blog
Before a comment appears	☐ Comment must be manually approved
	☑ Comment author must have a previously approved comment

6. Choose SEO-Friendly Plugins

For those of you who get plugin happy and start installing plugin after plugin, please stop.

This is almost as bad as watching people apply too much self-tanner (almost).

When you start overloading your WordPress website with plugins, you bring all their baggage with them. Too many plugins can cause unnecessary code bloat, heavy markup, and non-semantic code that can cause a drop in page speed.

So, when it comes to choosing SEO-friendly plugins for WordPress, keep it simple.

- **Yoast SEO.**
- **Rank Math.**
- **Broken Link Checker.**
- **WP Super Cache.**
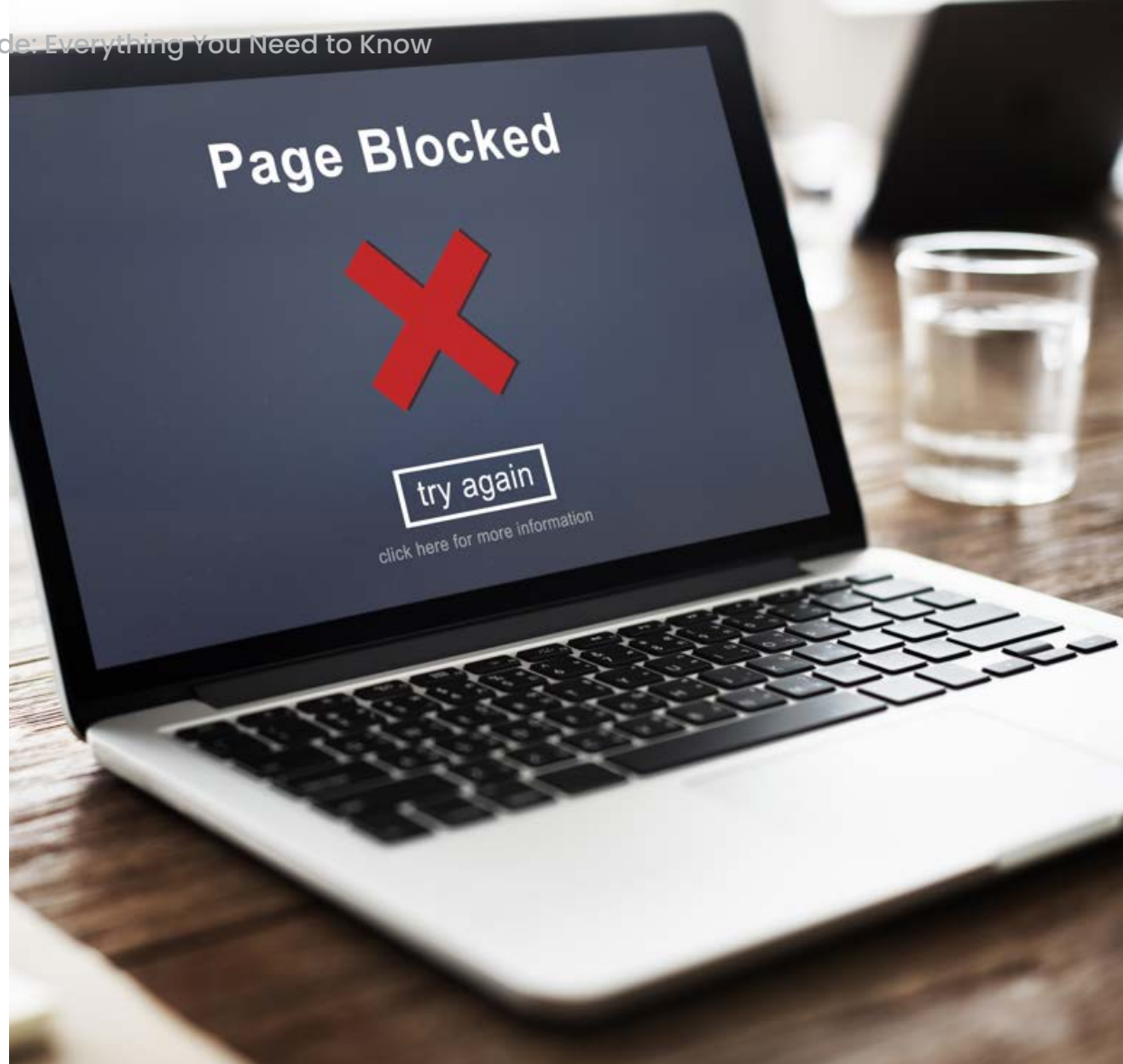
7. Block Pages Using Your Robots.txt File

When it comes to playing around with your **robots.txt file,** there is a line. And any SEO marketer knows that crossing that line feels like an 11-hour trip on a tequila train – a hot mess.

I can't tell you how many clients have reached out to me to run a technical audit on their site because it's not ranking, but the only issue is a messed up robots.txt file.

The key to editing your robots.txt file is understanding the basics.

If your robots.txt looks like this and you want your site indexed by search engines, stop everything you're doing right now to fix your robots.txt.

If your robots.txt file looks like this, no one will find you in the search results.

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /|
```

There are a few pages that you'll most likely want to add to the disallow sections in your robots.txt file.

Here are the pages I'd recommend reviewing:

- Archive.

- Tags.

- Admin-level pages (ex: login pages).

- Thank you pages.

- Categories (unless you have unique copy on each category page).

Pro tip: Avoid using robots.txt file to choose **how Googlebot crawls your site,** according to Google's Matt Cutts.

Improving Your WordPress SEO Just Got Easier

It's no secret that in the past, attempting to improve my SEO on WordPress was trying in every possible way: Emotionally, physically, and financially.

111

Now that I've started digging into WordPress myself and implementing the changes, I can smell the victory baking in my metrics.

I've used multiple platforms in the past, from Shopify and Bigcommerce to Joomla, Drupal, Wix, and Squarespace, but WordPress has been one of the most SEO-friendly platforms.

WordPress is not the next best thing. It is the best thing.

Sponsored

The 4 Most Important SEO Strategies for Large-Scale WordPress Websites

Stormy Scott

Content Marketing Team Lead,
InMotion Hosting
(SEJ Partner)

You have a large-scale WordPress website and life is great.

You're publishing content regularly and your site is packed with useful information.

But is your website content strategy optimized for the unique needs of a large website?

Though you may know the basics of search engine optimization, making sure your growing WordPress website is organized and maintained per best practices for large sites will keep you ahead of the competition.

This includes re-evaluating your information architecture, managing content and comments, writing for E-A-T, leveraging internal linking, and improving website performance and security.

Continue reading to learn more about:

- Planning Your Information Architecture
- Managing Content and Comments for SEO
- Internal Linking
- Large Website Logistics

Planning Your Information Architecture

For positive end user experience and good SEO, **planning your information architecture,** or the structure of your website content is a must for all websites, especially large-scale WordPress sites.

Clean information architecture will allow end users and bots to easily navigate and find your site content – which can boost your end user retention and will positively affect your SEO.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

For positive end user experience and good SEO, planning your information architecture, or the structure of your website content, is a must for all websites, especially large scale WordPress sites. Clean information architecture will allow end users and bots to easily navigate and find your site content – which can boost your user retention and positively lift your SEO.

YOUR WEBSITE

ABOUT — **SERVICES** — **MEDIA**

OUR TEAM — **MARKETING** — **NEWS**

CAREERS — **DESIGN** — **PRESS KIT**

Pillar Pages

Pillar pages are the main content pages that introduce, summarize, and/or outline a main topic. Within WordPress, these pages are usually category pages built out to explain the category subject.

For example, if you run a site about using WordPress and one main category is SEO, then a pillar page would be yourwebsite.com/seo or yourwebsite. com/wordpress-seo.

Instead of leaving your category page as a running blog roll that shows the most recent posts for that category, build out the page to guide the end user journey and search engines.

Add relevant content, related SEO phrases and sub-topics, and contextual links to relevant pages or posts that will help show users and bots alike the content that you feel is most important for that topic.

WHAT ARE PILLAR PAGES?

Pillar pages are the main content pages that introduce, summarize, and/or outline a main topic. Within WordPress, these pages are usually category pages built out to explain the category subject. These pages then link to relevant articles nested within that category.

WordPress Plugins

WooCommerce

Pillar Page: WordPress

WordPress Themes

WP-CLI

WordPress News

As your site grows into a large-scale WordPress website, pillar pages for categories and subcategories will build authority and expertise, which is critical for competitive and higher volume phrases.

They will increase SERP visibility for your chosen topics, increasing your website traffic and potential for a higher ranking on search engines.

Structured URLs

When planning your URL structure, think about the best way to organize your content without having too many 'folders,' content levels, or hoops to jump through.

Instead of creating one category with two, three, and even four subcategory levels, break the category down into multiple main categories with only one or two subcategory levels.

For example, if an article URL is example.com/maincategory1/subcat1/subcat2/subcat3/subcat4, think about how you can restructure your content to make the article URL simply /maincategory2/subcat.

The more folders a piece of content lives in, the less important it becomes and the harder it will be for search engines to crawl and end users to navigate.

Managing Content & Comments for SEO

Managing content and comments for SEO on a large-scale WordPress site is very important for the success and growth of your website.

Posting then never touching your content again will lead to SEO issues as Google consistently updates its algorithm.

Issues can include outdated or irrelevant content, spam comments with untrustworthy links, broken images and links, and old links within your content that may no longer be relevant.

Create an Editorial Calendar

There are many free resources and platforms available for **creating an editorial calendar** and for good reason – it works.

An effective editorial calendar will not only help you keep track of content ideas, content created, and content creators, but you can also use it to track content keyword topics and updates.

Source: Airtable

Once you find an editorial calendar template or platform you like, make sure you add the following columns:

- Primary Keyword or Topic (and volume if you wish)
- Secondary and Related Keywords
- Publish Date
- Last Update

The keyword columns will help you focus your content for the post and ensure you keep track of the keywords you're targeting so you don't cannibalize or duplicate your content – which can be a challenge for large sites.

The date columns assist with content update planning. If you notice that an article was published or last updated six months ago, consider reviewing it for small updates or tweaks.

Most importantly, constant updates ensure you're keeping your pages as **relevant to search intent** and queries as possible.

You can review topic relevance by Googling related keywords to see which topics are produced in the results, or using Google Search Console to identify trends and impact.

Content updates also help protect your SEO efforts from Google algorithm updates that could negatively impact your progress if gone unchecked.

E-A-T

When creating your content, make sure you and your team are following **E-A-T guidelines.** E-A-T, which stands for expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness, comes from Google's Search Quality Rater document that outlines how Google's human quality raters assess the quality of the content that appears within Google's search results.

Overall, Google wants to ensure the information at the top of their search results come from expert, authoritative, and trustworthy sources.

The guidelines make sure, for example, medical advice is answered with articles from reputable sources – hopefully keeping the inquirer from potentially harmful information.

To follow E-A-T for authoritative content, make sure you:

- Write as an expert.
- Build an authoritative reputation.
- Foster trust with your end users.

Once the above is implemented, even though there isn't an easy way to directly measure your E-A-T efforts, you can review related data points to make sure you're effectively using E-A-T to boost your SEO and SERP rankings.

Reviewing elements like the time end users spend on your page or site, CTA interactions, SERP rank, and page authority can show you how E-A-T is affecting your expertise.

Unique domain backlinks, **backlinks with high domain authority,** your own **domain authority,** social shares, and Wikipedia articles will give you a pulse on your authority. Ratings and reviews, **schema enhancements,** and HTTPS can show your trust.

In addition, large sites can improve their E-A-T efforts by avoiding duplicate and thin content – neither of which shows expertise, builds authority, or gains trust.

However, how would you start the process of evaluating thousands of URLs, then consolidating and updating the content to build E-A-T?

To get the process started, you can complete a **content audit,** review and organize articles and topics that can be merged, then add those article topic merges to your editorial calendar. This will also allow you to track the target and/or ranking keywords for those topics.

Comment Management

It's easy to overlook comments when managing your content, but it's an important part of your website since it's still crawled and used as an SEO factor by bots.

An active comments area shows user engagement and encourages more time on page, which can help your SEO. It also cultivates trust and goodwill with your end users, allowing them to see you interact with your audience – helping you gain the 'T' of E-A-T.

To effectively **manage your comment section,** create a schedule similar to the content update schedule mentioned above. In fact, it can be built into your overall content update schedule. When reviewing pages and posts, review the comment section as well.

In addition, come up with a standard for interacting, monitoring, and managing comments.

- What comments will be approved?
- How will you interact with approved comments?
- Will you automatically remove all links posted by an end user or keep relevant links with a high domain authority?
- Etc.

Of course, also review your comment template to ensure the code is free from SEO issues.

Internal Linking

Strong internal linking can boost your SEO by helping Google determine which of your pages are most important. It also helps your end user experience by linking to contextual content that sends them to relevant articles for additional information.

Internal links are links within your content or navigation that link to another page or post on your website.

Though you can use any internal links throughout your content, the best practice is to use main or pillar page links to boost their importance to Google. Of note, navigation links have more weight than links within your content.

Here are some more internal linking best practices:

- Wrap your main navigation and footer navigation in the SiteNavigationElement schema. This helps Google identify and use your navigational menus as a map for your site. This is a very important step.

- Use the native WordPress menu functionality to easily update links globally. Instead of a custom navigation, using the native functionality to quickly edit your menus when needed.

- Add sub-navigation or sidebar navigation to help Google and end users navigate between main and subcategories.

- Within your content, add a Call to Action, or CTA – which suggests a next step for the end user – with a link you deem important, like a pillar page, sign up form, additional content, etc.

- When updating or rewriting old content, use the opportunity to link to newer pages as well as update all broken or old links.

- In addition to linking internal pages and posts within your content, make sure you're using a table of contents with anchor links to section headers within the content as well. Google can also pick up on your table of contents and anchor links and use that information toward boosting your overall ranking.

- In relation, links at the top of the page are deemed more important to Google than links at the bottom of the page.

Large Website Logistics

Of course, technical SEO isn't the only important maintenance task for maintaining a large-scale WordPress website. You also need to make sure your website is available whenever an end user requests it.

This means the website needs to load quickly, lest lose end users who aren't going to wait for your website to load.

In addition, you need to make sure you have a plan in case your website does experience downtime, as well as ensure your security and performance tasks are meeting industry best practices and the needs of your website.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when planning the logistics of your large scale website:

Website Performance

Reviewing and maintaining your website performance means ensuring your website is always quickly available when needed.

Using site performance tools like **Google PageSpeed Insights,** you can receive information on how well your website performs as well as suggestions on how to improve the performance.
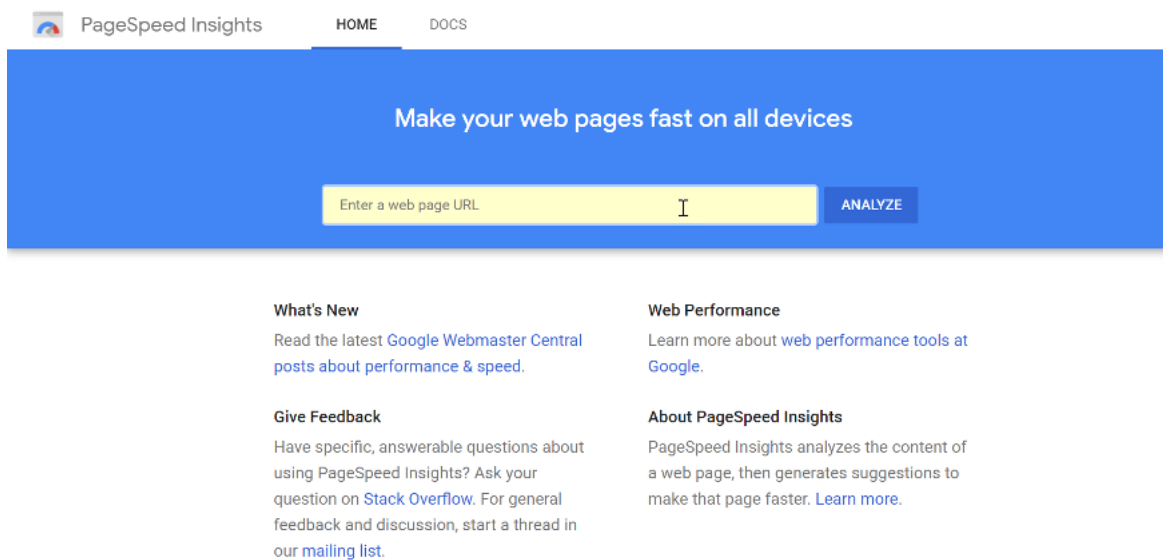
Also, because of the open source nature of WordPress, there are **many caching plugins available** that assist with improving and maintaining your website performance. Of note, a popular site performance plugin is **W3 Total Cache.**

W3 Total Cache is packed with features but overall, it improves both your SEO and end user experience by using a content delivery network (or CDN) to reduce your website's load times. This encourages end users to not only engage with your site, but return as well.

Website Security

There are many layers to website security but you want to make sure you're employing both proactive and reactive security measures. This means having processes in place that actively protect your website and can provide support in case of a disaster.

In addition to enabling an SSL certificate and other server-side security measures, **adding a security plugin** to your large-scale WordPress website will help you easily manage your website security proactively. To protect against events that bring your website down, like a hack, installing a WordPress backup plugin will help you restore your website quickly without much fuss.

UpdraftPlus, for example, allows you to schedule (and forget) website backups that include site files and the database. Giving you the ability to bring your website back online with a single click.

UpdraftPlus WordPress Backup Plugin
By UpdraftPlus.Com, DavidAnderson

Download

To Sum Up

Creating and maintaining SEO for your large-scale WordPress website is essential to ensure the health and growth of your business.

By integrating the above into your SEO strategy, you can easily streamline your workflow and master SEO for your large website.

Chapter 4

5 Common WordPress Duplicate Content Issues & How to Fix Them

Adam Riemer
President, Adam Riemer Marketing

WordPress makes life easy for small businesses, bloggers, and large news sites. You have best practices automatically applied in many cases like canonical links and there are **plugins** for practically everything else you need.

With the ease of publishing content and designs, you also have a new issue:

Duplicate Content.
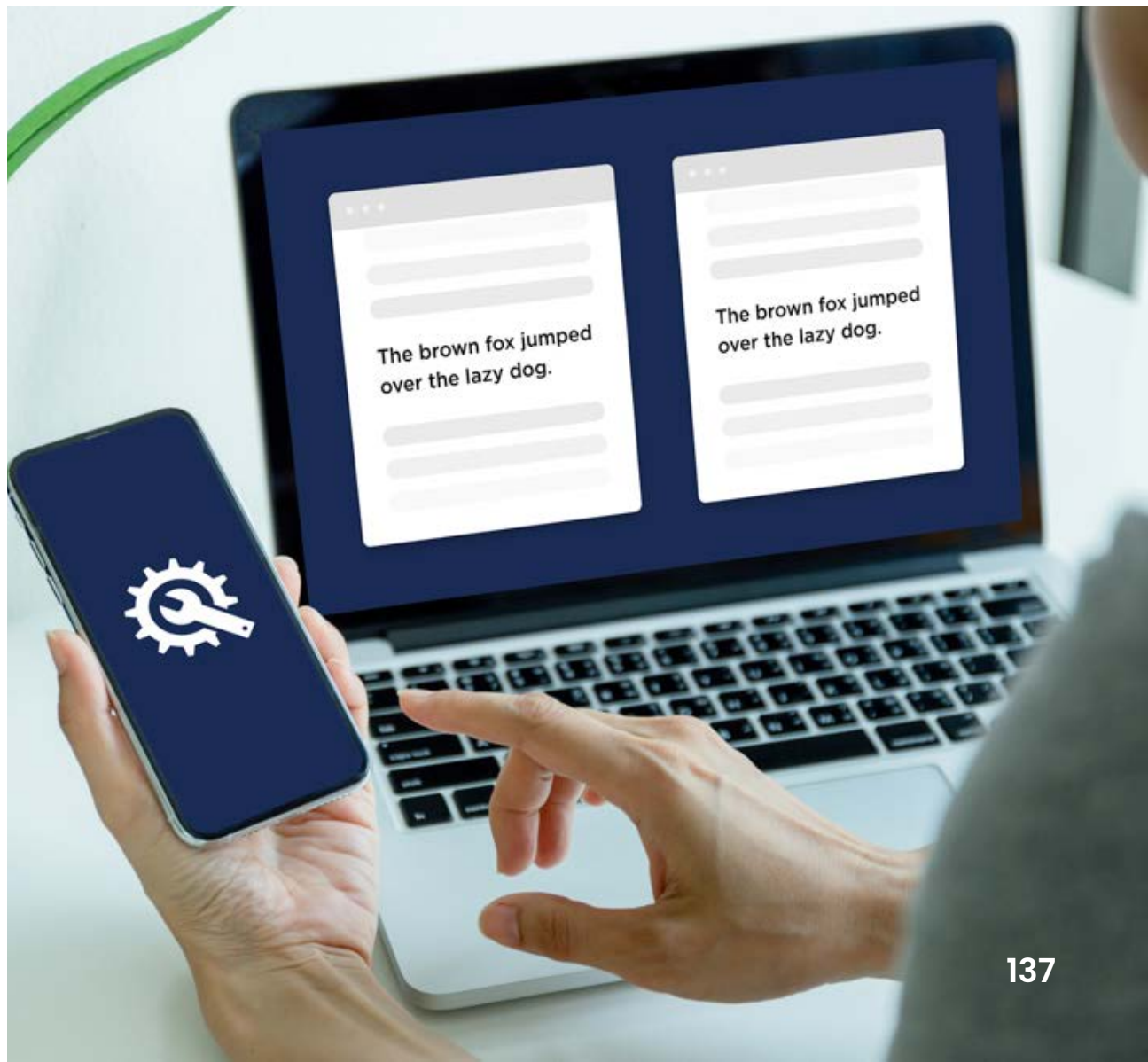
Content duplication is a common reason why a WordPress website won't rank. Although it's different from what we traditionally know in SEO as duplicate content (an exact replication of content from wording to code), it is very similar and needs to be addressed.

Here are the five most common types of duplicate content issues in WordPress and how to fix them.

1. Tags

Tags are a huge problem for many WordPress websites. When you tag an article it creates a unique page that is full of other content you feel is relevant.

The page will feature snippets from articles or full articles. If the tag is the same as a category or main page on your core website (assuming it's not a blog), then you've now created a competitor to that page on your own site.

Tags are also usually modified versions of themselves, which creates incredibly similar content that will compete with itself. When this happens, none of the pages will rank and it can potentially devalue the site.

Good news! This is an easy fix.

You can either get rid of the tags altogether, or you can add a meta robots noindex dofollow.

The noindex dofollow tag will tell search engines this is a thin page but follow the links and continue to crawl and index my site.

Now search engines will know that the page isn't as useful as others and you've shown them how to discover your good content – the individual posts and pages.

2. Categories

Category pages tend to feature numerous posts and articles like a tag.

They'll have H1 tags that are the same as the articles, they don't always answer a question or provide a good solution since they are article snippets and they may not be good to show for people looking for answers. That is why they're usually considered thin content.

There is an exception, though.
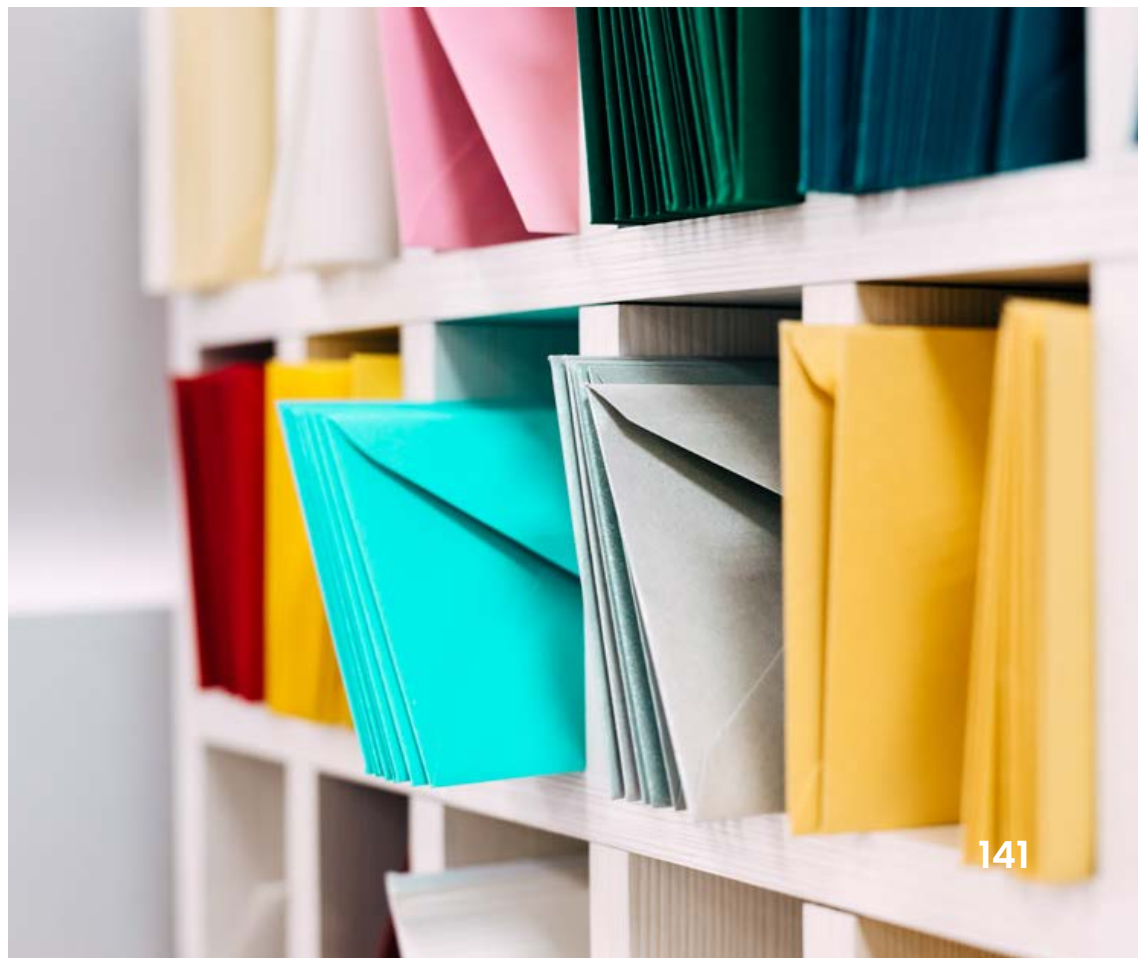
Search Engine Journal, for example, is a WordPress website where the categories are dedicated to channels and niches within a channel. A user searching for information on a channel, in general, may find a category very useful. Because of this, you want to approach it differently than you would a tag.

In this case, you add a meta robot index and dofollow tags, but also create unique titles and copy for the category to introduce it – and, if **schema** is relevant, add that in as well.

Now you've helped to define the types of queries and people to show the page to. You may be rewarded by the search engines for it. Just make sure they aren't competitive with your core website pages if you're a business.

3. Competing Topics

The next thing that I see when auditing WordPress sites is a lack of unique content.

Let's think about food bloggers. Yes, recipe schema and other things will help to differentiate the recipes, but what if you aren't using that or didn't know in the beginning?

If you have 20 recipes for chocolate chip cookies, chances are many of them are using similar wording and ingredients, which is what could be creating competition. Each recipe is unique and can serve a different purpose, but if you don't put in the extra work, they may not be able to show up because they're competing with each other. In this case, you may want to do a category or subcategory for the cookies. If you can't, revisit them and add modifiers (e.g., spicy, savory, chewy, for parties, for large groups).

Next, begin adding copy (not necessarily to the top, because you want to deliver the actual recipe quickly to the user) about the finished product. Make sure the copy stays relevant to the topic and shows why, how, and where it is unique from the others.

Need other examples?

Have you done a themed gift guide or holiday post?

Has anything changed aside from the year? Mother's Day craft ideas? Romantic Valentine's Gifts for XYZ?

These are not unique enough. If you have multiple posts, they could all compete.

If you add a year to your title (e.g., 2016, 2017), people may pass you by in the search engines for not being relevant this year. That's where the strategies above can help.

4. Search Box URLs

I haven't come across this one as often, but search boxes on WordPress sites may generate URLs.

If someone externally links to one of these URLs, or if search engines can crawl and find them, they might be indexable.

Although you could try to automatically add a meta robots noindex dofollow like in the tags, that probably doesn't have you covered.

To address this one you need to find the unique identifier that the search box URLs have in common. It's usually a "?" after the main URL.

Now go into your robots.txt and add a disallow to this parameter. In theory, and if done correctly, this will help to reduce the thin or duplicate content issues from these.

5. Other

With systems that automate a lot of work and make life easy, other issues can arise that create duplicate or thin content issues.

Look at your site and see if you may have other ones.

They could include creating PDF versions of content for printing that are also indexable, or alternate versions in quotes which can be bad for short posts.

You may have an RSS feed that posts content pages instead of snippets and only feeding titles or descriptions (I think I've only found this once, so it isn't something a huge issue to worry about).

Summary

Overall, most of these WordPress issues are easy to detect and solve using the strategies above. By eliminating your duplicate content you should get the organic search rankings you want.

Chapter 5

7 Local SEO Best Practices for WordPress Websites

Aleh Barysevich

Founder and Chief Marketing Officer, Link-Assistant.Com

WordPress is one of the most flexible open source Content Management Systems (CMS) in the world.

Its rich functionality, low barrier to entry, and unbeatable price tag (it doesn't get better than free, does it?) have all led to its meteoric rise as the web's most popular CMS.

So it's no surprise that WordPress has been downloaded more than **32.6 million** times or that it powers **40%** of all websites.

WordPress is also SEO-friendly, to the point where even non-techies can easily implement some simple optimization techniques. This is great news for small local businesses which may not have the budget for sweeping SEO improvements, but still want to rank better in **local search.**

In this article, I'll show you seven simple SEO improvements you can make to boost the local search ranking of your WordPress site.

1. Optimize Your Content

Your content offerings are the most important assets on your website. Having a great site structure, lightning-fast load times, and tons of security measures won't help you if your content isn't up to par.

So, before you can think about optimizing your content, you need to start with something your audience finds valuable.

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To do this, you'll need to understand your audience's pain points and know how your products solve their problems. Once you understand this, you can turn your solutions into all sorts of **compelling content,** from videos to blog posts to infographics, which keep them coming back for more.

Once you have great content, the next step can seem a little daunting: **on-page optimization.** Fortunately, we can enlist the help of some basic tools like the Yoast SEO plugin.

While normally you'd need to consider up to 20 different SEO factors for each landing page, Yoast SEO simplifies your job by giving each page a color-coded score that will help you track your on-page optimization and pointing out areas for improvement.

Yoast SEO also points out some important on-page factors such as word count and keyword occurrences.

2. Review Your Link Profile

We know from **recent studies** that links are still the #1 most important ranking signal when it comes to localized organic rankings.

The number of domains linking to your site, the quality of your backlinks, and the optimization of your link anchor text are all strongly correlated to your local ranking.

Good organic link building takes time to cultivate, but here are a few simple steps you can start with:

Focus on Quality Over Quantity

The number of domains, IPs, and C-blocks linking to your site are important, but one high-quality backlink from an industry leader in your niche is worth far more than dozens of irrelevant, low-quality links. Use link tracking software to find and eliminate low-quality links.
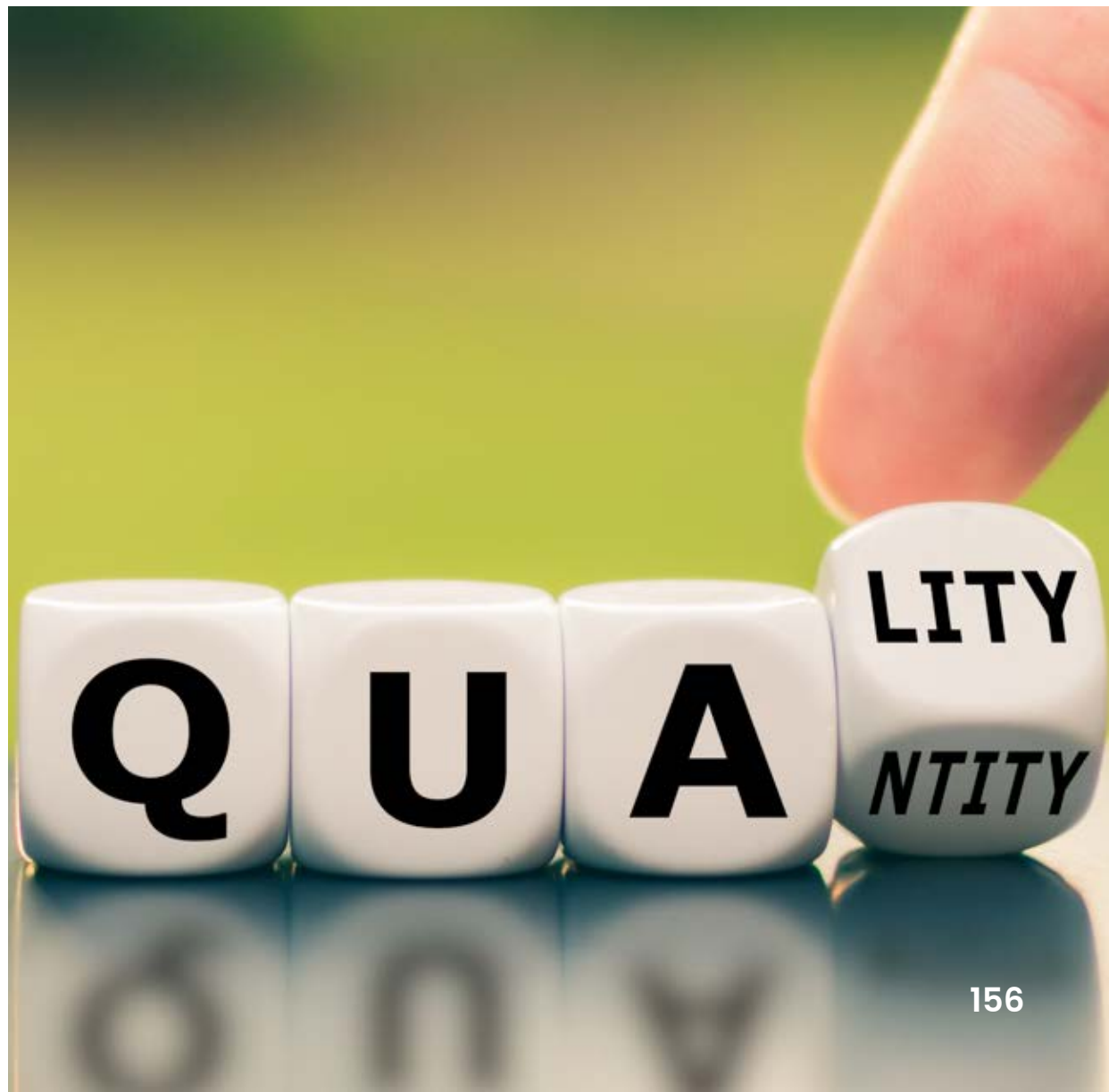
Find & Fix Broken Links

Use a plugin such as Broken Link Checker to identify and correct broken links. This plugin checks posts, pages, and even comments for broken links.

Optimize Anchor Text

Optimize some of your **anchor text** for local search by including your city's name. Just be careful not to **over-optimize** (e.g., changing all of your anchor text, too many exact matches, etc.).

There's no ideal percentage for location-optimized anchors, so conduct some competitor analysis to figure out what's generally accepted in your niche.

Identify Potential Link Building Opportunities

Use a competitive analysis tool to find potential **link building opportunities,** such as relevant sites in your industry that link to your competitors but not you.

3. Speed up Your Website

The tortoise may beat the hare in children's tales, but you can't say the same in the SEO world.

Site speed remains one of Google's most important "technical" ranking factors, and if you want to beat out your competitors in local search, then you'll need to make sure that your site is as fast as possible.

Possible techniques include:

Compressing Large Images

Large image files are the biggest offender when it comes to slow websites. Use a plugin like **WP Smush** to compress and optimize your images.

Clean up Your WordPress Theme

Get rid of outdated page elements (e.g., unnecessary database calls, functions, JavaScript, etc.). And make sure you delete old themes – hackers may use these to infiltrate your site.

Reduce Server Load With a Caching Plugin

Caching plugins create state HTML versions of dynamic pages which significantly reduce server load times. There are a number of options for you to consider, including free options such as WP Super Cache and W3 Total Cache, and paid options such as WP Rocket.

Don't Go Too Plugin Crazy

You can find a plugin for practically any function, but try to stick to essential plugins that provide real value to your site. Too many plugins will slow your site down.

Alternatively, you could make your life easier by investing in website auditing software. Quality products will analyze your on-page speed factors for you and suggest ways to speed your site up.

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4. Optimize for Mobile

A lot of your potential customers are looking for local businesses via mobile. This, coupled with the fact that **Google indexes mobile sites** preferentially to their desktop counterparts, means that mobile optimization is more important than ever.

The best thing you can do to improve your mobile site is to focus on page speed and image compression, but here are a few other tips and tricks:

Use a Responsive Theme

At the very least, you should make sure your WordPress theme is responsive and fits your content to all mobile devices.

Design Specifically for Mobile Visitors

Use the built-in **wp_is_mobile()** function to detect different devices on the server level and create custom experiences for your mobile visitors.
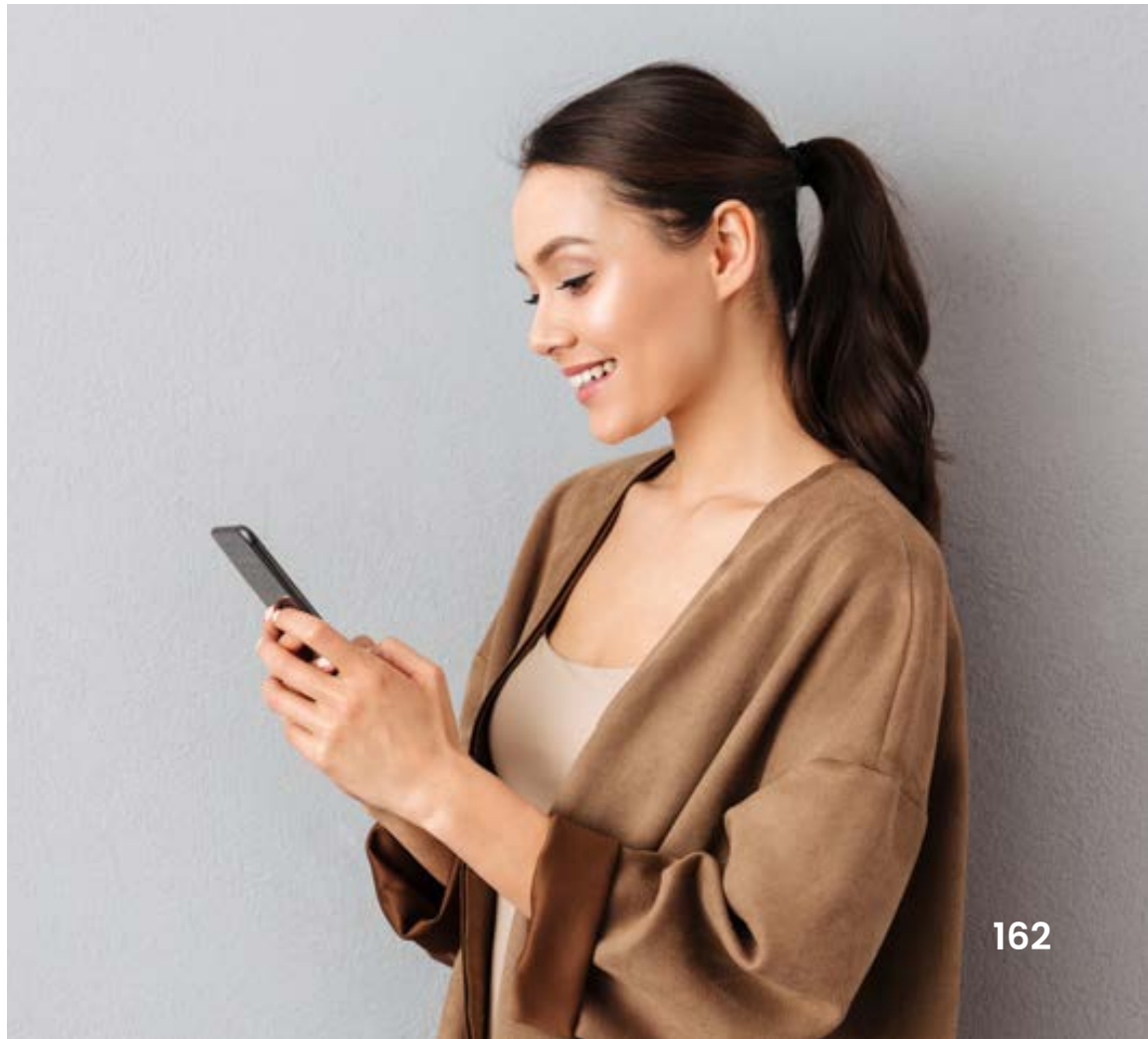
Launch a Mobile App

According to an eMarketer study, **88%** of mobile media time is spent on apps. Mobile users like apps that give them a comprehensive way to engage with their favorite brands.

Create Accelerated Mobile Pages

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) are incredibly fast pages designed specifically for mobile. WordPress comes with a default **AMP plugin** you can use to create AMP pages that are listed at the top of SERPs when users search from mobile devices.

5. Integrate Google My Business Into Your WordPress Site

Google My Business bundles together a number of key factors related to local rankings. Signals such as physical proximity, user reviews, and business descriptions and categories will all impact your position in SERPs.

Once you've claimed your GMB page, make sure you add your WordPress site to your profile, plus other key information, such as hours of operation and a description of your business. Then look for plugins and widgets that will let you transfer key ranking signals such as photos, a business map, and customer reviews from your GMB page to your website.

You should also install a plugin that lets you add your GMB review to your WordPress site, such as the Google Places Reviews plugin. These will help increase consumer trust in your business!

You may also want to consider putting an intractable business map on your website via a plugin or widget. Google Maps Builder is one example that will help your customers find you.

6. Add Structured Data to Your Pages

Ever wonder why some local business listings seem so rich – including reviews, star ratings, and robust descriptions – while others fall flat?

The difference is structured data.

Using plugins like **Schema,** you can feed Google additional information about your business. This will give your customers more detail when they find you in SERPs, including useful tidbits such as hours of operation, price range, and physical location.

Note that while descriptions don't inherently improve your web ranking, including more information does encourage higher click-through rates – and CTR can impact ranking on Google and other search engines.

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7. Include Location Keywords in Your URLs

Generally speaking, **URL structure** plays a minor role in your page's ability to rank.

When it comes to local search, however, including location keywords in your URL can help improve the user experience. This is especially true if you have multiple landing pages targeting different locations and you want to assure your customers that they're in the right place.

Previous versions of WordPress didn't give you a lot of flexibility when it came to your URLs. They were all "ugly permalinks," which looked something like this:

 http://mydomain.com/?p=1354.

However, the latest versions of WordPress default to "pretty permalinks," which include the date and name of your posts. They might look like this:

http://mydomain.com/2016/02/28/sample-post/.

You can adjust your URL settings in your WordPress Admin panel by going to Settings > Permalinks. From there, you can click Custom Structure to add a location to your landing page URLs.

Conclusion

Want to take your SEO game even further?
You can make even more improvements to your WordPress site beyond what I've suggested here by manually creating robots.txt files, generating XML sitemaps, optimizing your site structure, and more.

Chapter 6

How to Choose WordPress Plugins

Roger Montti
Owner, Martinibuster.com

WordPress plugins are helpful. But they can also slow a site down, invite hackers and even cause a Google penalty. These are my top five considerations when choosing a WordPress plugin.

Five WordPress Plugin Considerations

1. Plugin is vetted by WordPress.

2. It is popular.

3. Changelog indicates plugin is not abandoned.

4. Support participation and feedback indicates a healthy plugin.

5. Doesn't overlap with a currently installed plugin.

Plugin Is Vetted by WordPress

Many paid plugins don't have a free version. But many of the most respected plugins have a paid premium version and a free version that is vetted and included in the official WordPress plugin repository.

The fact that a free version has been vetted by WordPress provides assurance (to me) that there is some kind of quality control.

A free plugin should ideally be vetted by WordPress. WordPress provides an **official plugin repository** where trusted free plugins can be downloaded.

If a serious issue is discovered with a free plugin, WordPress will remove the download from its repository. Typical issues can be coding that results in a vulnerability or a state of abandonment. There are many other reasons why a plugin may be removed, as outlined in the **WordPress Plugin Guidelines.**

It's not a perfect system for being assured that the plugin is safe to install. But it's generally safer than downloading a plugin that is not available through the official WordPress depository.

There are premium plugins available and those plugins may undergo their own private testing. They are generally safe to purchase and download. However, it may be useful to research the testing and vetting practices before purchasing.

Plugin is Popular

I'm not totally convinced of the wisdom of crowds. However, I do feel a sense of safety in knowing that a WordPress plugin is popular and well vouched for by many users.

Popularity by itself does not guarantee that a plugin is without issues. A few of the most popular plugins have been the sources of near-catastrophic issues or larding up web pages with needless code.

Nevertheless, popularity along with other factors can contribute to an assurance that the plugin is likely safe and works reasonably well.

Changelog Indicates Regular Updates

Some plugins may be abandoned. Every plugin's WordPress page notes when the plugin was last updated.

A plugin might not be updated because the function it performs is relatively simple. But in general, this is a sign that a plugin has been abandoned.

Abandoned plugins should in most cases be avoided.

WordPress is constantly evolving. Installing a plugin that hasn't been updated could cause conflicts with the current version of WordPress or the version of PHP that your website runs in.

Support Feedback

Every plugin page in the WordPress Plugin Repository has a support page. The support page may provide evidence of a plugin that has ongoing issues.

Typical issues might be that the code conflicts with other plugins. Sometimes the WordPress template may need changes in order for the plugin to function.

The support page will reveal any potential issues you may face before discovering them the hard way.

Plugin Doesn't Overlap With an Installed Plugin

A common issue I see is when two or more plugins designed to do similar things overlap. This generally happens with structured data and speed optimization plugins.

The usual result is that you have more plugins than you need.

It's important to use as few plugins as necessary. Overloading your site with plugins can slow down the server.

Even a plugin designed to speed up your site may slow down your site if you are using too many of them at the same time.

Before you install a plugin, think hard about how this plugin will solve your problems. If it doesn't solve all of them, will installing a second or third plugin cause duplication in functions?

How to Choose a WordPress Plugin

These five considerations are not a complete list of considerations. There are other factors that can be added, like user reviews, the reputation of the company behind the plugin, if the plugin is over-engineered and slows down the site, and so on.

Downloading plugins can seem like the shell game, where a pea is placed under a cup and then shuffled around.

Are you making an educated guess or just guessing?

These are what I consider important factors for judging if a WordPress plugin is trustworthy and will help take some of the guesswork out of choosing a trustworthy WordPress plugin.

Sponsored

Local SEO For WordPress Blogs: What Every Marketer Needs to Know
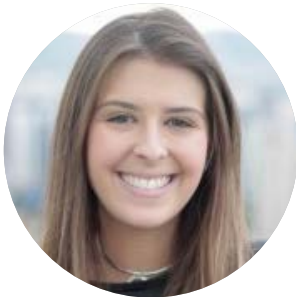
Laura Bernardes

Content Editor, Rock Content
(SEJ Partner)

When it comes to growing your business online there are many possibilities to generate awareness, but it can also be difficult to stand out. Standing out from the crowd is not an easy task and requires being up-to-date with vital **SEO strategies.** In practice, what is one of the most effective strategies is local SEO.

Surveys show that **46%** of Google searches are for local information. A further study reveals that **88%** of mobile searches for local businesses lead to a call or visit within 24 hours.

Focusing on local business can bring real results to your company. As with building online authority through any organic traffic strategy, it is necessary to consider the parameters that Google uses.

Having a high-quality site with a good user experience is an important step. You've almost certainly heard of WordPress before and most likely employ it for your site.

After all, WordPress is responsible for **40%** of all sites on the internet.

With that in mind, if you want to learn how to take advantage of local SEO for your WordPress site, keep reading. Here you will see:

- What is local SEO?

- How to optimize for local SEO on WordPress?

- What are the best WordPress plugins for local SEO?

What Is Local SEO?

Google uses a series of **ranking factors** to choose which content shows up in the top positions on the SERP.

When you search online, by adding terms like "close to me" and "near me," Google will select businesses' results within a limited distance from the user searching.

This way, it's possible for you to establish your business as an authority in the region, leading to increased business opportunities.

Also, you can grow your audience by having a presence on the digital channels where your audience is.

A Think With Google survey shows that **28%** of people who search online for nearby businesses complete their purchase and become customers of the brand. However, to fully take advantage of all these benefits, you need to make some local SEO optimizations within WordPress. Find out how below!

How to Optimize for Local SEO on WordPress?

There are some local SEO techniques that you can set up to optimize your WordPress site.

We have selected the key ones for you here to test right away!

Use Local Keywords

The first step is to find out which keywords people are using to discover your business.

For example, if you have a barbershop, people may find your business by looking for "barbershops in Boca Raton." You can optimize your ranking for similar keywords, such as "male salon in Boca Raton" or "best barbers in Boca Raton."

You can use keyword search tools, such as SEMrush, Google Keyword Planner, and Ahrefs, to visualize the search volume for each of your strategy's chosen terms.

Also, keep in mind how your audience is searching locally. For example, they may use a range of geographical names, such as "Boca Raton," "West Boca Raton," or "Palm Beach County."

Encourage Consumer Reviews

93% of consumers read reviews before buying online. Also, customers spend **31%** more when the company has positive reviews.

Assessments are essential to building your online authority. You can use a plugin on WordPress that shows Google My Business ratings right on your site.

You can also create a page with testimonials from your customers, promoting transparent and informative content to your audience.

So always ask your audience to leave a review after their purchase. You can even encourage this by using discount coupons for future purchases.

Optimize Your Site for Mobile

Mobile devices have become the **main way to access the internet** over recent years.

Studies show that in 2021, smartphones will influence **$1.4 trillion** in local sales. Moreover, **79%** of smartphone users have made online purchases on their devices in the past six months.

This data alone should be enough to understand how important it is to optimize your site for mobile devices. But even more important is to know that since 2019, one of the ranking factors Google considers is the **Mobile-First Index,** meaning that mobile-friendly sites are prioritized in SERP ranking.

This means that if your site doesn't have a fast-loading responsive design, you miss out on business opportunities.

Companies like Walmart saw a **2%** increase in conversions by reducing the page load time by 4 seconds.

How can you optimize your website for mobile?

Using WordPress is already a significant first step. It is a robust CMS that allows you to install different plugins to compress images and code.

Also, it's important to have an SSL certificate to guarantee the security of your page. Finally, don't forget to run a **PageSpeed Insights** audit to find improvement points in the page load time.

Integrate Google My Business with your WordPress

To get started, you need to have a **Google My Business** account. If you don't have one yet, don't waste any more time and create one now.

List all your business information, confirm your location and add your WordPress site.

Then, add plugins and widgets that allow you to upload the ratings, business map, and photos to your website. Below, in our plugin recommendations, we have two options that can help you with this.

By doing so, your audience will have access to all the information about your business, plus finding opinions from your customers.

What Are the Best WordPress Plugins for Local SEO?

One of the most practical ways to achieve good results is with useful tools. So we have selected some of the best WordPress plugins for local SEO.

1. Yoast SEO

The Yoast SEO plugin is one of the best known on the market. The **Yoast Local SEO** version, focused on local businesses, will help you insert your business into local searches, Google Maps, and the Knowledge Panel.

The tool tells Google the name of your company, type of business, address, and business hours. It also handles the technical aspects, including Schema. org and routes to Google Maps.

2. Google Places Reviews

Online assessments are essential to achieving higher rankings in local searches. A practical way to get these reviews is through the **Google Places Reviews** plugin.

This tool allows you to display your site comments left by customers on your Google My Business page.

If your business is present at different addresses, it will even allow you to choose additional reviews for each lesson.

3. WP Google Maps

With **WP Google Maps,** you can place a map from Google Maps on your website and choose which pages it should appear.

It's even possible to create customizable maps in the pro version. If you have several business locations, you can bookmark them all and include a Google Streetview option.

And why is it essential to have a Google Maps page embedded on your site? Google itself counts these accesses, understanding it as a user's interest in your business. The more clicks you have, the more likely you are to appear on the search page.

4. WP SEO Structured Data Schema

Structured data and schema are the foundation of a website's technical strategy.

And it's often difficult to get this strategy to work without proper knowledge in the area. This is where the **WP SEO Structured Data Schema** plugin becomes essential.

The schema aims to classify for Google the business's focus and the type of content published. Using this structured data, the search engine is more likely to show information from your site directly on the search page.

Applying this to local SEO, you can use the "Organizations" and "Local Business" schemas. As you can see, local SEO is essential to boost your sales. Using the best WordPress plugins and optimizing your SEO strategies, the top positions on Google will be yours!

rockcontent

Chapter 7

WordPress SEO Without an SEO Plugin
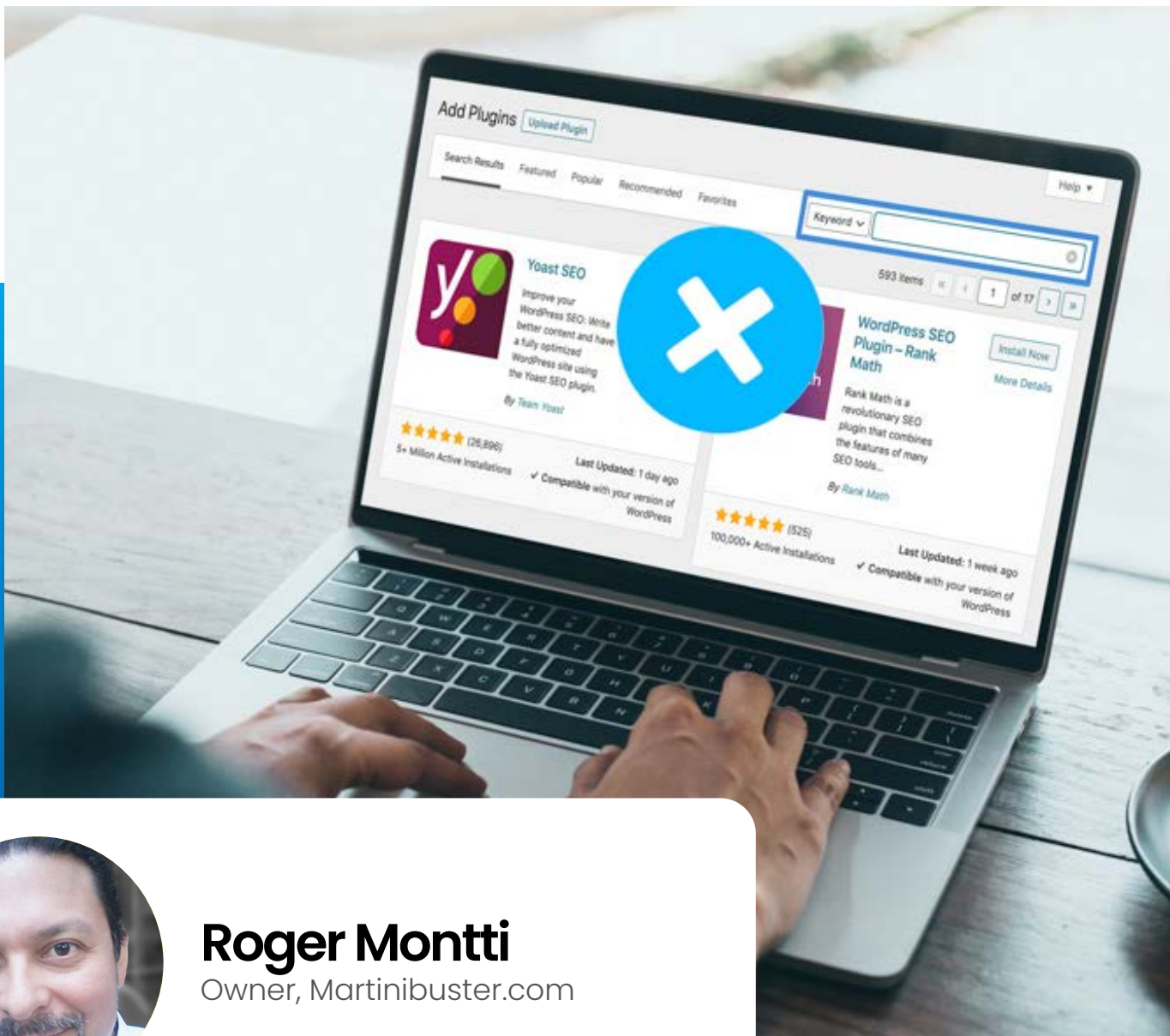
Roger Montti
Owner, Martinibuster.com

I optimize some of my WordPress sites without an SEO plugin. The reason is because SEO Plugins have more features than I need for certain projects. This is how to do **WordPress SEO** without an SEO Plugin.

This article is not intended to persuade you to not use an SEO plugin. It's purpose is to show you how to take full control of your SEO without a plugin.

SEO Plugins Are Useful

SEO plugins are recommended solutions for publishers who cannot code PHP, who are lost with HTACCESS files and for whom robots.txt files are a mystery. The technical side of SEO has a relatively high bar in terms of coding. SEO plugins democratize web publishing.

A major complaint about SEO plugins is how bloated with unnecessary features they are. But this isn't the case across the board.

There are SEO Plugins that are lean and fast as well as modular, so you can choose which SEO features you need.

An example of this kind of SEO plugin is **The SEO Framework.** It's an excellent choice for those who want more control over their SEO but prefer to pick and choose the features they need.

SEO plugins are the safe choice for publishers who are risk averse and don't want to experiment with alternatives. A lot is at stake so the best choice is often the most trusted solution.

WordPress SEO Without an SEO Plugin

This article is not intended as an encouragement to dump SEO plugins. It's quite the opposite.

I encourage publishers to stick with their SEO plugin of choice if that is what makes them comfortable.

This is for publishers interested in exploring how to do SEO without an SEO plugin.

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Why I Don't Use SEO Plugins

This year, because of the headaches caused by an **SEO plugin bug,** I launched a site without any SEO plugins. I was happy with my results and transitioned other sites away from SEO plugins.

The reason I moved away from a single SEO plugin is because after reviewing existing solutions I concluded that, for me, I could control a website's SEO better. I had made a round trip journey back to where I originally started with WordPress: I returned to optimizing WordPress without a dedicated SEO plugin.

Reasons I Do Not Use an SEO Plugin

There are four reasons why I don't use an SEO plugin

- Features that duplicate what's already in WordPress or in a theme.

- Unnecessary features that solve presumed problems.

- Complexity of SEO Plugins introduce numerous bugs and conflicts with other plugins.

- Greater control over SEO.

Reasons why I prefer standalone solutions

- Easier to code a solution that handles one problem.

- Some SEO features don't need a plugin.

- Standalone solutions are easier to maintain.

- Leaner WordPress installation without unnecessary features.

SEO Features You Need for WordPress

WordPress has a fairly robust core nowadays. Things like canonicals are done automatically.

Many WordPress themes contain SEO features like schema markup, breadcrumb navigation, Open Graph meta data and so on.

The following are the SEO features you will need. Your exact needs will vary according to the template you use.

Necessary WordPress SEO Features

- Breadcrumbs with Schema.org Structured Data.
- Meta descriptions.
- Open Graph meta data.
- Removal of category base.
- Schema metadata.
- A way to easily add nofollow attribute to selected links.

WordPress Plugins for SEO

- **Breadcrumb NavXT.**
- **Easy WP Meta Description.**
- **Open Graph for Facebook, Google+ and Twitter Card Tags.**
- **Remove Category from URL.**
- **Schema WordPress Plugin.**
- **Ultimate Nofollow WordPress Plugin.**

Optional WordPress SEO Features

- **Attachment Pages Redirect.**
- **Redirection WordPress Redirect Plugin** – Over 1 million installations.
- **XML Site Map** Over 2 million installations.
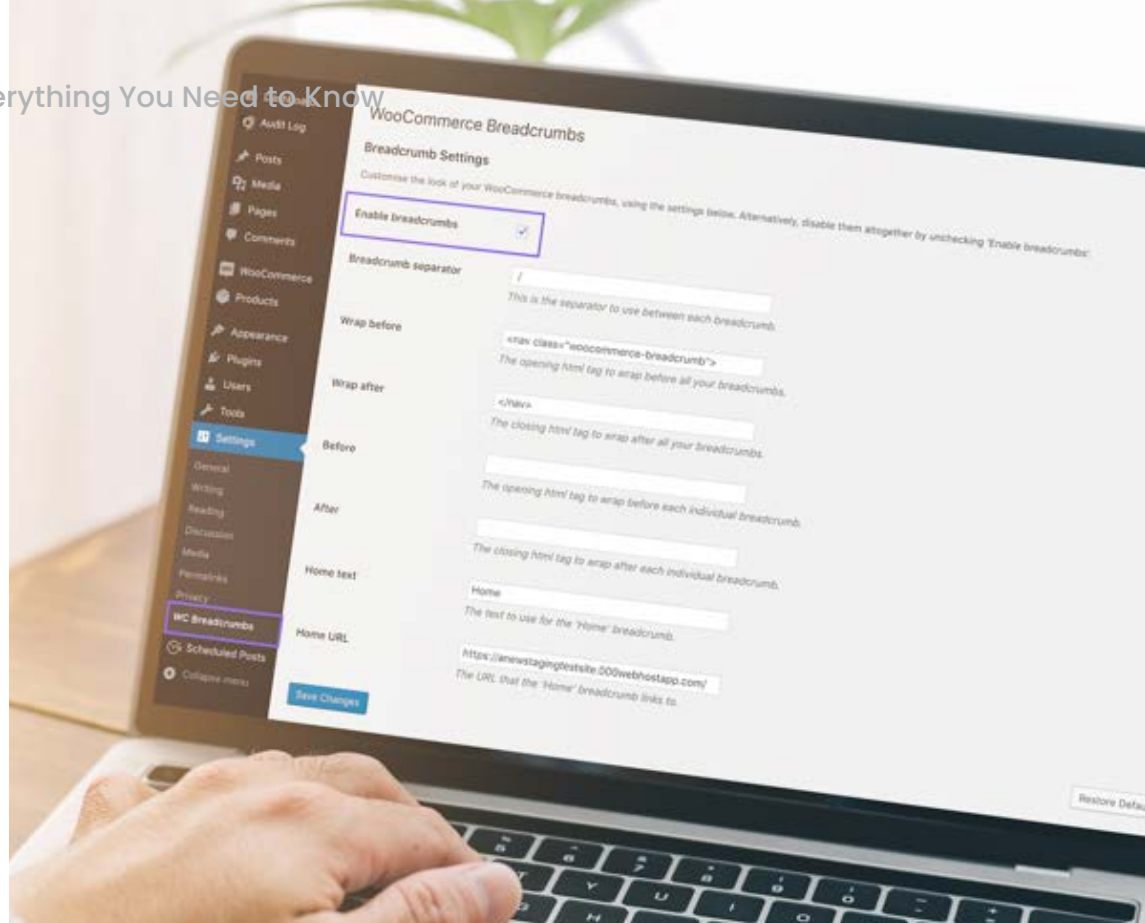
Breadcrumbs

Breadcrumbs is a useful feature.

Adding Schema structured data to it will get you enhanced listings if you rank in the SERPs. And the enhanced listings may help the click through rate.

It's possible to code a breadcrumb navigation without a plugin. The code is supposed to go into your website's "child" functions.php file.

Most tutorials say to add it to your theme's function. php file but you'll lose your breadcrumbs if the theme is updated and the functions.php file is part of that update.

Getting the breadcrumbs right can also become complicated because you still need to associate schema markup to the breadcrumbs. So that's even more coding. It can be done but at this point, in my opinion, it might be easier to offload the responsibility of making sure it works to a plugin.

I have found that using **BreadCrumbs NavXT WordPress Plugin** is an adequate solution. It handles the breadcrumbs and the schema data.

The NavXT plugin was the subject of a medium level vulnerability but it was quickly patched. This was unusual for this plugin and unlike more serious events associated with dedicated SEO plugins, this issue did not cause problems for its users.

Meta Description

I have found **Easy WP Meta Description** to be an adequate solution for meta descriptions. Meta descriptions aren't a ranking factor. But they do show in the SERPs if you rank.

Google will rewrite your meta description if a phrase from your web page is a better match.
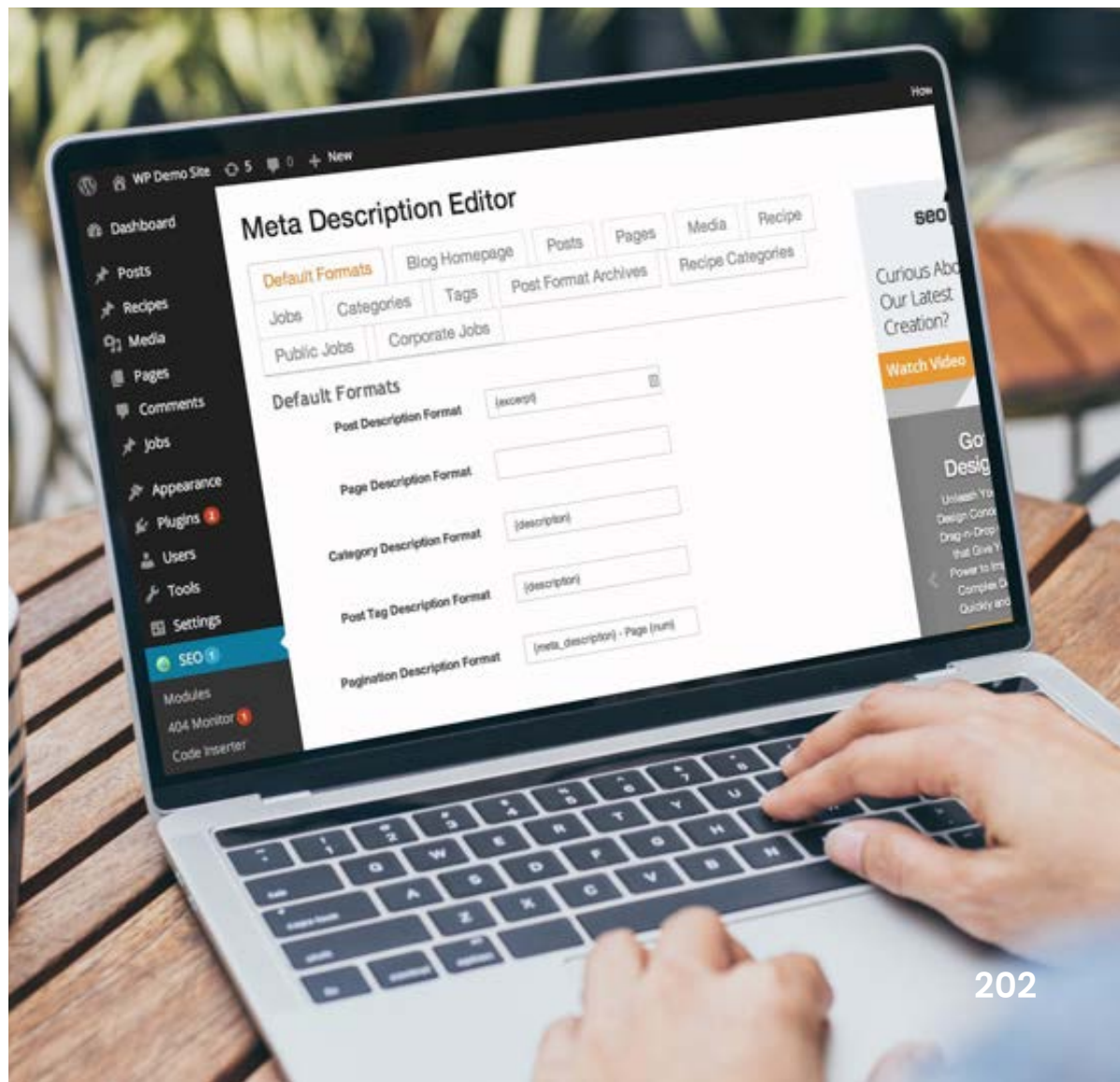
That said, Google does a fine job (in my opinion) of providing a relevant snippet from your page.

So it's up to you. You can add your own meta description or let Google tell the user why your site is relevant to the query.

Title Tag

I craft an article title that is adequate to use as a title tag. If it's good enough to serve as the title of the article, it should be good enough as the title of the web page. There are workarounds for coding this into the theme as well as plugins. But I think those are superfluous.

Open Graph Meta Data

Strictly speaking, this isn't an SEO feature. It is a feature that could influence how much traffic goes to your site. It allows you to specify an image and wording to show when your URL is shared on Facebook and Twitter.

Open Graph Meta Data plugin helps you present a professional appearance that will appeal to potential site visitors.

Remove Category Base from WordPress

The word "category" isn't necessary in your URL structure. Shortening your URL to the domain name, the actual name of the category, and the page name is a best practice.

A shorter URL is easier to remember, less likely to be mistyped, and can tell users and search engines what the page is about using the least amount of words. Read more about the **Remove Category Base plugin here.**

WordPress Plugin for Schema Structured Data

The **Schema WordPress plugin** will integrate most Schema structured data that you'll need, including reviews, article schema, and so on.

Schema markup can be coded by hand as well. For example, you can take the JSON-LD script for reviews and paste it into the bottom of your review directly into the WordPress editor while in Text Mode. Then manually adjust the descriptive

fields for rating, product name, etc.

JSON-LD review template with author

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
"@context": "http://schema.org/",
"@type": "Review",
"itemReviewed": {
"@type": "Thing",
"name": "NAME OF PRODUCT"
},
"author": {
"@type": "Person",
"name": "NAME OF REVIEWER"
},
"reviewRating": {
"@type": "Rating",
"ratingValue": "ENTER THE RATING
EXPRESSED AS A NUMBER",
"bestRating": "ENTER A NUMBER THAT
```

```
REPRESENTS WHAT THE TOP SCORE IS, LIKE 5
OR 10"
},
"publisher": {
"@type": "Organization",
"name": "NAME OF YOUR PUBLICATION"
}
}
</script>
```

Pretty much every element of structured data can be hand crafted and manually or even automatically inserted on a post by post basis or by editing your template directly.

You don't have to use a plugin, but the plugin is clearly the best way to scale this process and have it up to date no matter how often WordPress updates.

Ultimate Nofollow Plugin

The **Ultimate Nofollow plugin** adds the option to make a specific URL nofollow at the moment you are creating that URL. There are additional options for sitewide nofollows, should you need those. But I don't use them.
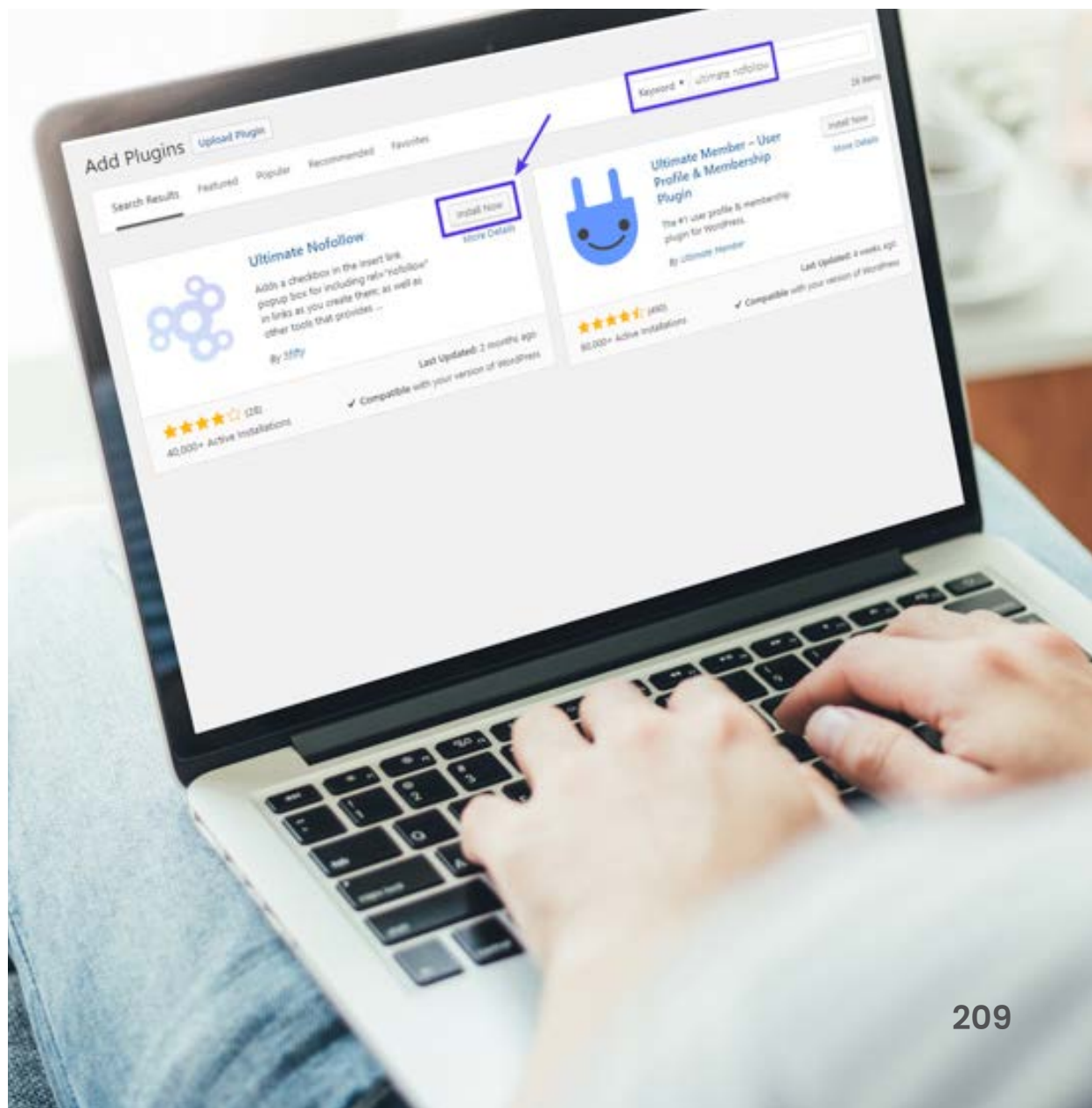
Optional SEO Features for WordPress

Attachment Pages Redirect

If you have inadvertently created web pages for every image attachment in your WordPress site, this plugin will easily solve your problem.

The **Attachment Pages Redirect plugin** will restore your individual attachments to their correct behavior. Just install and activate it and that's it, your problem is solved.

The Attachment Pages Redirect plugin needs no setting up. Just activate it and forget it. Fixing rogue attachment pages couldn't be easier.

Just make sure that in the future, when uploading media, to use the correct setting for redirecting attachments to the post.

Redirect manager

This is a useful plugin if you feel uncomfortable editing htaccess files to create redirects. Use this if you have a legitimate reason to redirect an old page to a new page.

404 Responses Are Not Unhealthy

Don't use a redirect manager to redirect a deleted page to the home page.

Some SEO plugins try to scare you into believing that 404 error codes affect the "health" of your site. But that is incorrect.

404 response codes are not inherently harmful to the "health" of your site.

- Some 404 responses are due to spammers linking to your site with a partial URL. That's normal and nothing to worry about. The 404 response is the perfect response.

- Some 404 responses are due to an internal linking error by the publisher. That's your error (you mistyped the URL). That's something to fix by updating the URL to the correct URL.

The truth about 404 response codes is that they are perfectly natural and do not make your website less healthy.

Google's John Mueller states that **404 response codes are not something that needs fixing.**

He also states that 404 response codes are natural:

"There's no need to "fix" crawl errors on your website. Finding 404's is normal and expected of a healthy, well-configured website.

If you have an equivalent new URL, then redirecting to it is a good practice. Otherwise, you should not create fake content, you should not redirect to your homepage, you shouldn't robots.txt disallow those URLs -- all of these things make it harder for us to recognize your site's structure and process it properly. We call these "soft 404" errors."

John Mueller ▸ Public   Jan 11, 2013 ⋮

HELP! MY SITE HAS 939 CRAWL ERRORS!!1

I see this kind of question several times a week; you're not alone - many websites have crawl errors.

1) **404 errors on invalid URLs do *not* harm your site's indexing or ranking** in any way. It doesn't matter if there are 100 or 10 million, they won't harm your site's ranking. http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.ch/2011/05/do-404s-hurt-my-site.html

2) In some cases, crawl errors may come from a legitimate structural issue within your website or CMS. How you tell? Double-check the origin of the crawl error. If there's a broken link on your site, in your page's static HTML, then that's always worth fixing. (thanks +Martino Mosna)

Google's John Mueller explains that 404 response codes will not harm your sites rankings.

Here is **more information from Google** about 404 response codes.

XML Site Map

Google uses site feeds to crawl a website. So if you add a page, Google can find your feed and discover it in that manner.

That's why I list XML site map as an optional solution. Here's what **Google's developer page says:**

"Use **Pubsubhubbub** if you use Atom/RSS for your sitemap and want to broadcast your changes to other search engines in addition to Google."

Google can also discover the web page through the normal process of crawling from link to link.

Another option is that you can choose to submit the URL individually or through a site map, **complete instructions from Google here.**

If your site is not updated often, you can crawl your site with an app like Xenu Link Sleuth and choose the option to create an XML site map. Then you just upload it to your server, no web hosting resources are needed to generate the map other than allowing Link Sleuth to crawl your website.

Or you can use a plugin like the **Google XML Sitemap Generator plugin.**

Redundant SEO Plugin Features

There are features included in SEO plugins that in my opinion are redundant or not necessary.

Canonical URLs

Canonical URLs are built into WordPress. You don't need an SEO plugin to handle this.

Robots.txt and htaccess File Editors

If you have a text editor or an HTML editor, then you have all you need for editing a robots.txt file or updating an htaccess file. Additionally, you should only mess with those files if you know what you're doing.

If you are skilled enough to edit these, then you don't need a WordPress plugin to handle this. Just open your text file and an FTP app like a normal person, right?

404 Status Code Redirection

SEO plugins provide this under the mistaken belief that 404 status codes are harmful. As noted above by Google's John Mueller, 404 response codes are fine. Just fix the ones that are due to actual errors, like a typo in the URL.
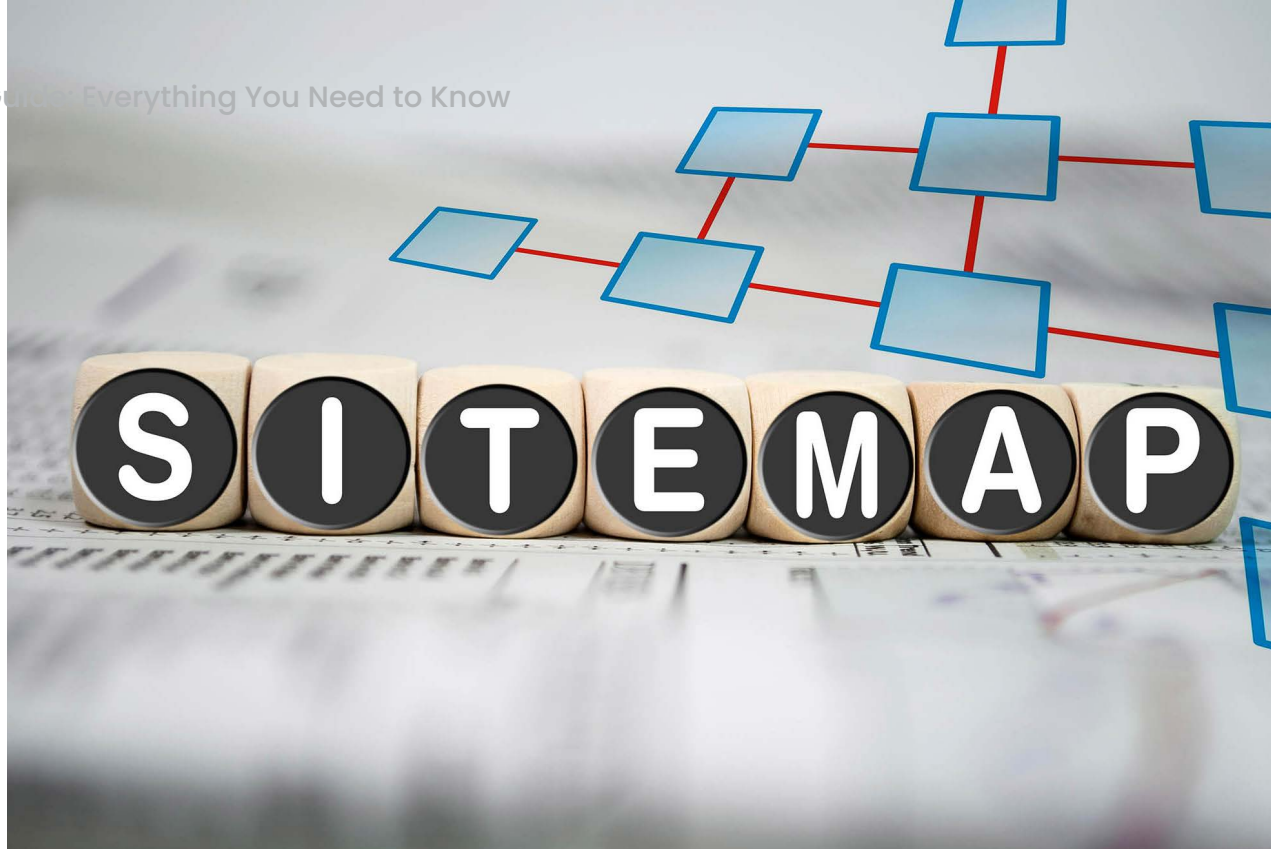
Sitemap Generators

As noted above, a site map is not strictly necessary because Google crawls URLs via RSS feeds and links.

However, a site map is useful if you have made major changes and want Google to discover them as fast as possible. In this case a manually generated site map is useful, as you don't have to install a plugin to generate it.

You can still install a site map generator plugin and that makes far more sense to do than installing a huge SEO plugin to do this one single task.

Keyword Research and Word Processing

WordPress and your server resources might not be the best platform for conducting keyword and word processing functions. If you want a real world app for checking your content, use a real software program like the Hemingway App. If you want to do web page analysis use a real app that generates a word cloud.

All of these kinds of functions are limited on an SEO plugin anyway. A standalone app will do a better job, in my opinion.
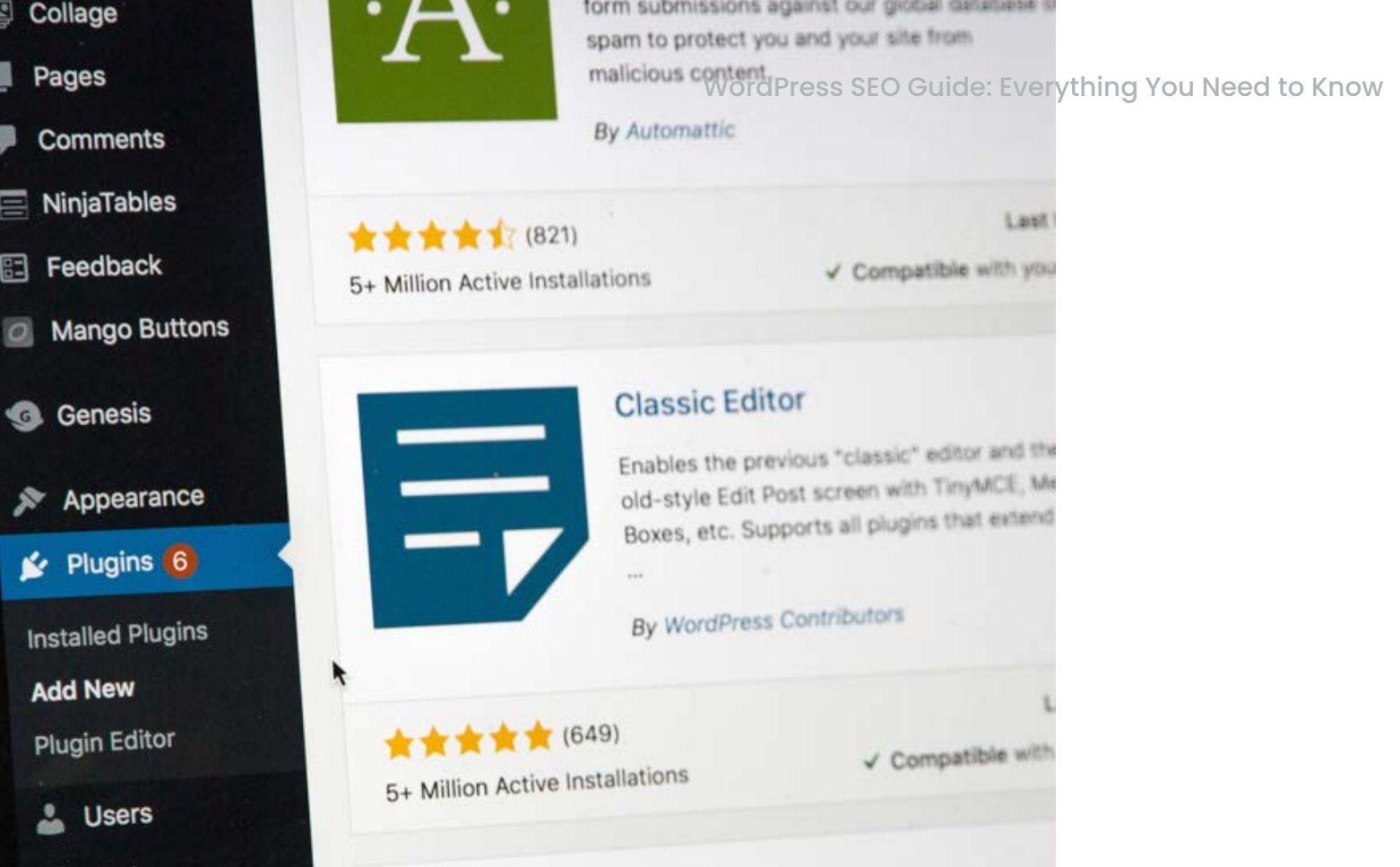
Why Use Six Plugins Instead of One?

An all in one SEO plugin might be just a single plugin, but it's still behaving as if it's ten or more plugins. Count the features on your SEO plugin and count each one as a single plugin. You'll be surprised that you could be larding up your WordPress site with the features of twelve plugins – features that you may not need.

So the question shouldn't be about whether you need six plugins versus one. The question should be how many features do you need?

For me, the clear answer is a lot less features that are offered by all in one WordPress SEO plugin solutions.

There are plugins that take a modular approach, such as **The SEO Framework** WordPress SEO plugin. You can pick and choose which components you want.
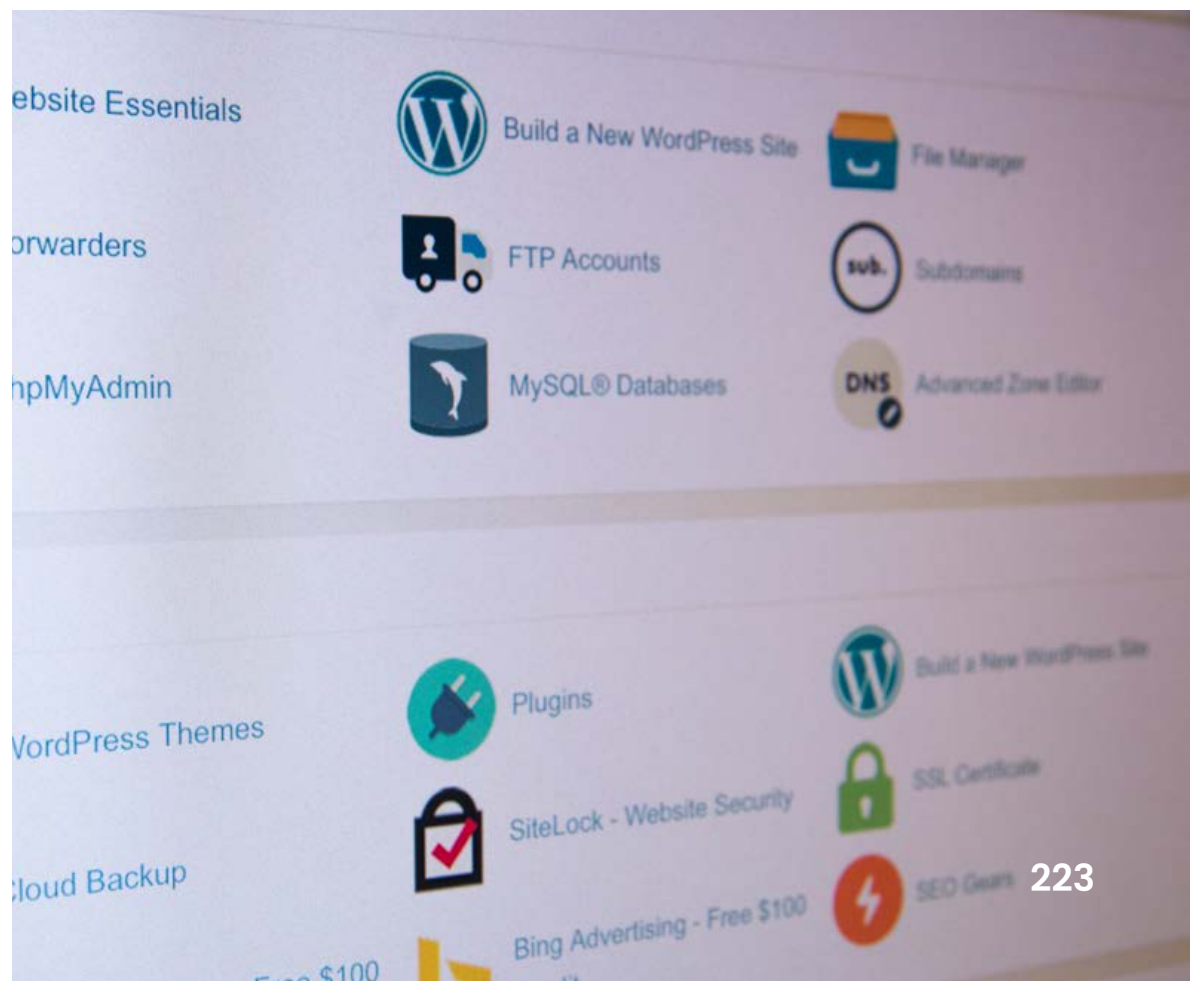
All in One is Not the Same as All You Need

As you can see, SEO plugins are useful for users who have little to no skill with coding or WordPress. SEO plugins accomplish an important task for users who don't have the skills to choose what solutions they need.

A dedicated SEO plugin is a good choice for a large organization that wants to play it safe and not have to deal with individual plugins or hand crafted solutions.

However, for those with more skill or aren't constrained by bureaucratic constraints, SEO plugins can be overkill.

A certain amount of laziness has crept into the industry where people are installing SEO plugins without thinking about what they need for SEO. People are installing SEO plugins by default, essentially sleepwalking through their WordPress SEO.

This article shows that you don't need everything a dedicated SEO plugin offers. There are alternatives to installing an SEO plugin with features you don't really need. An all in one solution may not be what you need.

Chapter 8

13 Best WordPress SEO Plugins

Jon Clark
Managing Partner, Moving Traffic Media, LLC

In 2021, optimizing your web presence is no longer just a "nice to have" option. It's a necessity.

With millions of active users interacting across the Internet at the same time, getting lost in all the noise is inevitable unless you take steps to stay relevant. And that's where Search Engine Optimization (SEO) comes into play.

SEO refers to the steps you take to ensure that your site or page are the first things to show up when a user enters a certain keyword. The benefits of this are tremendous. You'll see a significant boost in engagement, generate more leads, make more sales, and improve your bottom line.

However, competition for the top spots in organic search results is fierce. Because of the low barrier to entry, literally anyone can create a site and optimize it to rank better on Google or Bing.

What separates the best from everyone else is smart implementation of certain strategies, as well as using tools to help make optimization much more efficient.

In this article, you'll learn the best ways to optimize your WordPress site for SEO, including the tools that will make that journey substantially easier.

Pre-Requisites

Before diving into the wild and wonderful world of WordPress SEO tools, it's important to get the basics right first.

SEO plugins are features you add to an already well thought out and presented package. These plugins aren't magic, and they certainly won't create sensational results if the base they have to stand on isn't strong.

WordPress is widely regarded as a great site for SEO optimization as it has Content Management Systems (CMS) that make the entire process super easy and intuitive. Take advantage of this user-friendliness and ensure that the content you post on your site is high quality and value-added.

Just keep in mind that no plug-in can help you if your page doesn't offer great information – even if you get people to your site, they probably won't stay there for very long. It's also important for you to use themes/templates that have clean code as that also helps with SEO.

Another important thing to mention is that you absolutely don't need every single plugin from this list. These are just to give you an idea of the different options and what they have to offer.

Choosing just one from each of the categories is more than good enough, especially if you're new to optimization.

Don't get caught up in all the technology, since you could potentially reach the point of overwhelm, and experience analysis paralysis (a.k.a., you become so caught up with things that you never make any headway on what you're trying to achieve).

At the end of the day, always keep the basics in mind, regardless of whatever stage you're at right now.

1. Yoast SEO
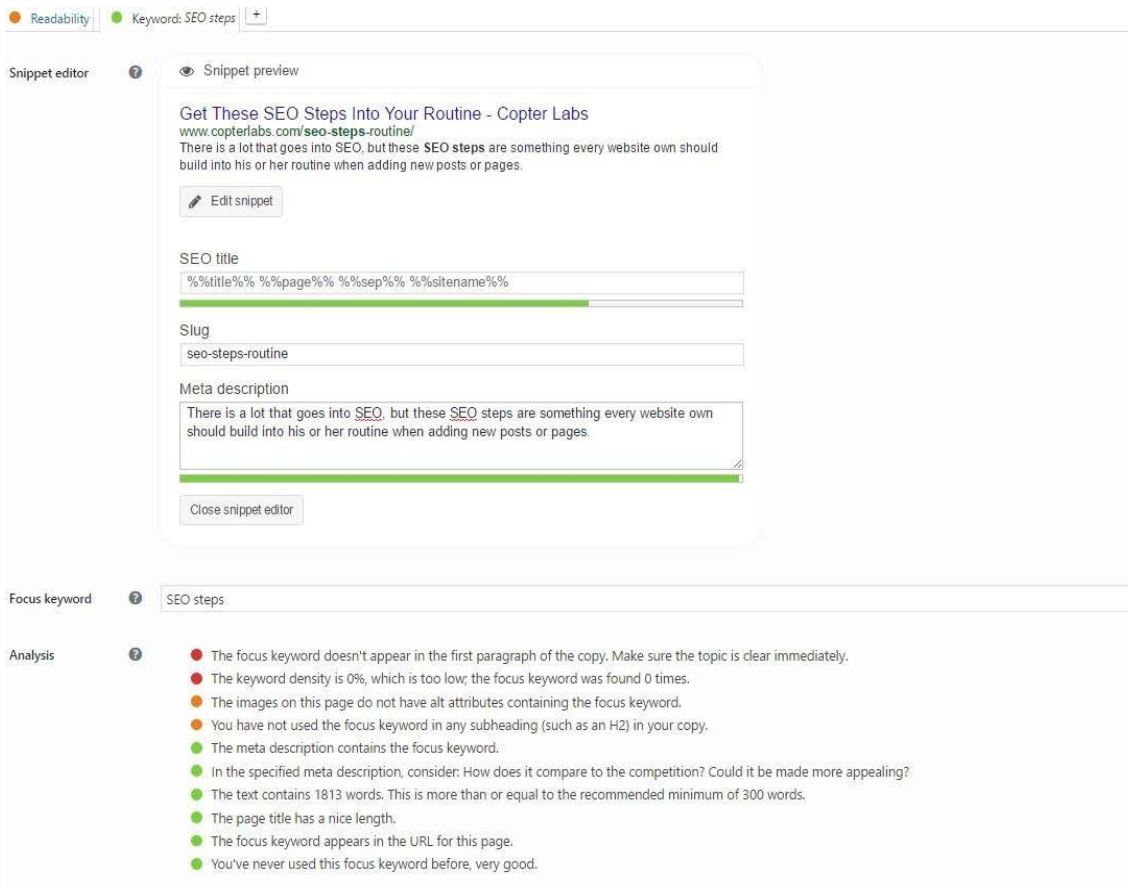
Yoast SEO is an industry favorite with thousands of glowing reviews. It's a premium plugin that offers an incredible number of powerful features while still being easy to use and understand.

Some of these features include:

- Internal link suggestions.
- Focused keyword reports.
- A page and content analysis tool.
- Built-in Redirect manager (for error 404 URLs).
- XML Sitemaps.

The page analysis tool that Yoast offers is very useful as it provides an all-inclusive snapshot of how your page is doing. The readability, the length of the content, alt attributes, keyword density, title tags, and meta description among others, are all analyzed to ensure you're on the right track.

2. All in One SEO Pack
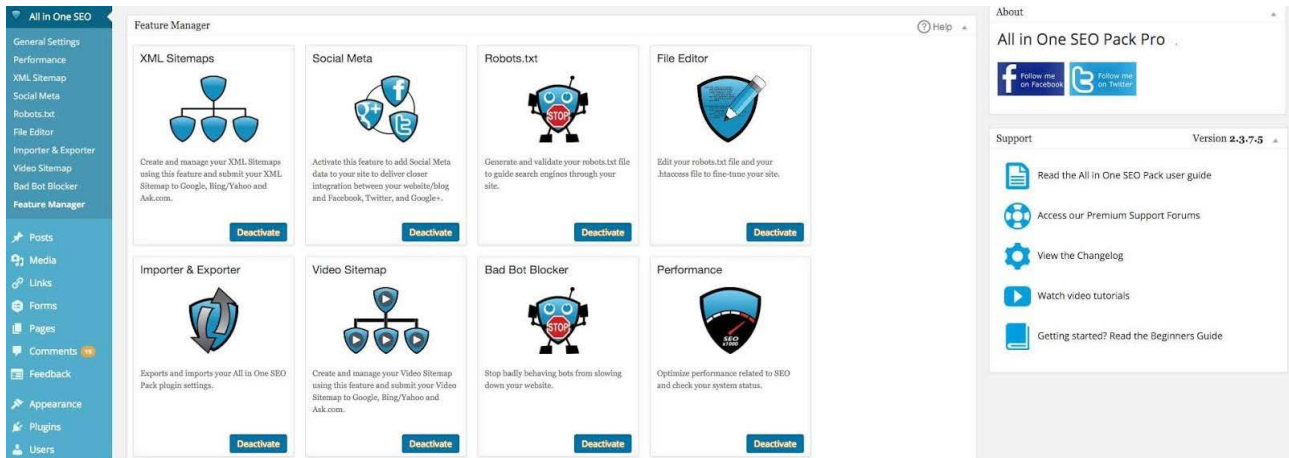
As of the time of this writing, All in One SEO Pack has been downloaded more than 74 million times, and has cemented itself as a super feature-rich WordPress plugin that's perfect for beginners and experts alike.

The plugin offers:

- Google Accelerated Mobile Pages support.
- XML Sitemap support.
- Google Analytics support.
- A built-in API.
- A redirect manager.
- Integration with ecommerce sites like Shopify.
- Automatic blog title optimization.
- Automatic meta tags.

More seasoned users can also create custom headlines, tags, meta descriptions, and keywords depending on their needs.

3. Premium SEO Pack

Premium SEO Pack offers several super useful modules for you to take advantage of in both the free and paid versions.

For the regular license, a fairly reasonable $44 gets you:

- Focus Keyword Analysis.
- Custom permalinks.
- Page SEO reports as well as scores.
- Page Analysis and recommendations.
- Keyword suggestions.
- 404 monitoring.
- A W3C validator.
- Mass optimization.
- Local SEO.
- A video sitemap.

The price tag might be higher than other services on this list, but the features and customizability Premium SEO Pack offers more than justify it. It's a great choice for seasoned SEO professionals looking to take their WordPress site to the next level.

4. SEOPressor Connect
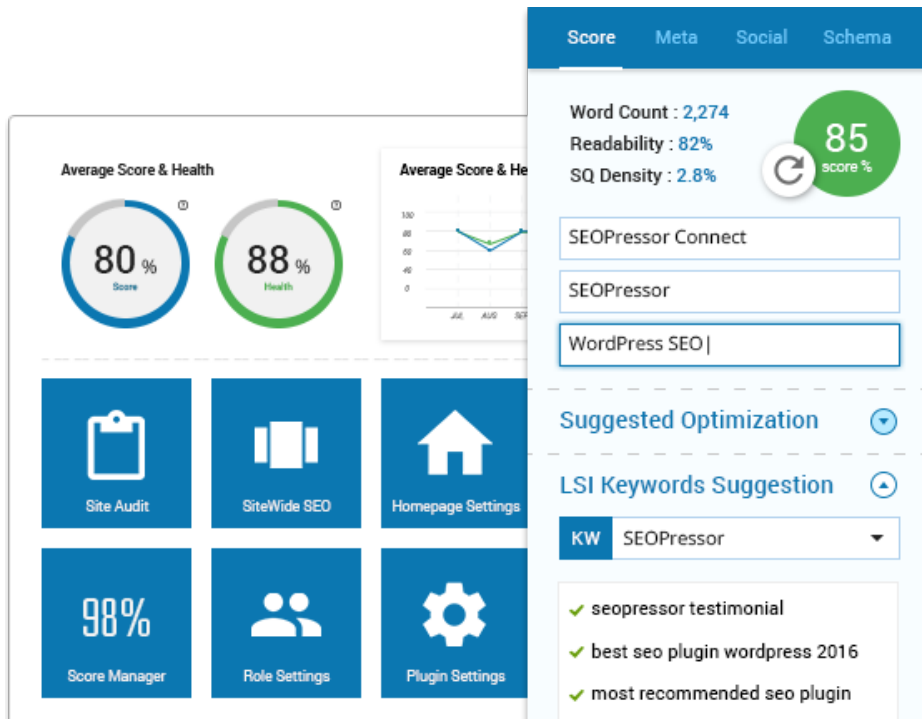
This plugin takes your most essential SEO data and lays it out in one intuitive dashboard. The dashboard gives you a glance at insights into your site's search engine visibility amongst other things. The main selling point of SEOPressor however is their emphasis on contextual content instead of keywords.

A $9 monthly subscription gets you:

- Automatic internal linking.
- Readability scoring.
- Over-optimization checking
- (irrelevant keywords, overstuffing, etc.).
- XML sitemap generator.
- Dynamic spider control.

The learning curve is steep, but this professional tool is a mainstay in advanced SEO processes.

5. Semrush
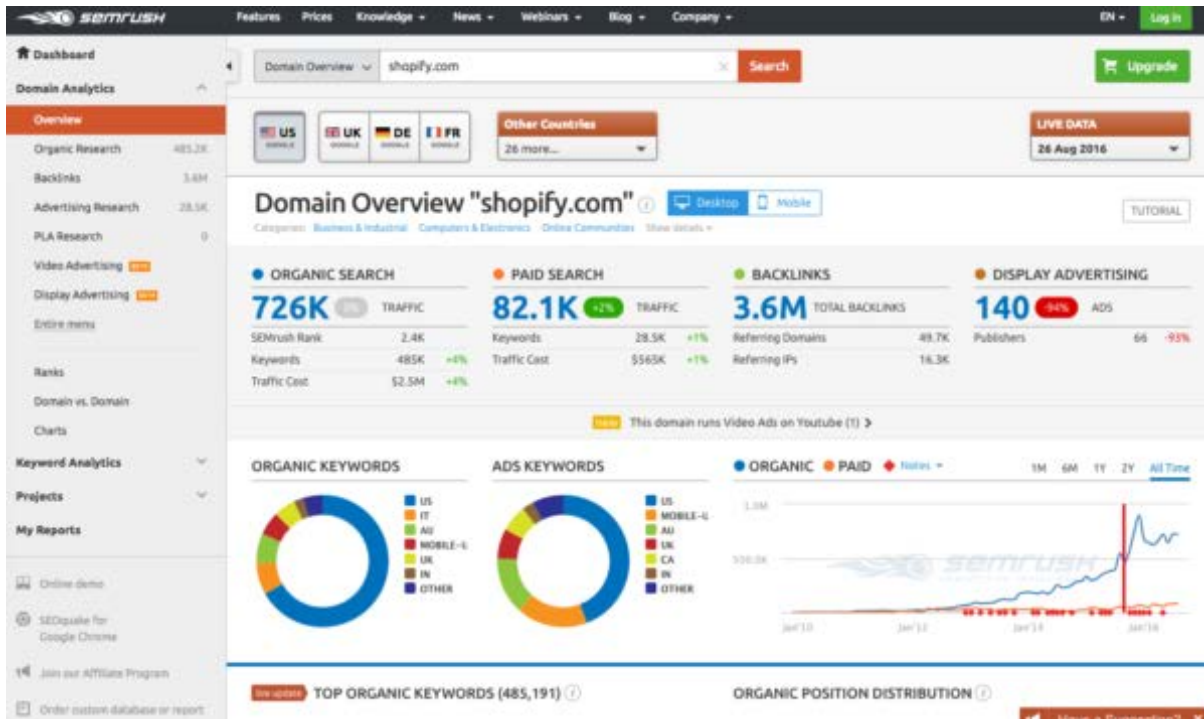
Semrush is an incredibly popular WordPress plugin that is adored by SEO experts, marketers, bloggers, and businesses of every size.

You can use Semrush to find organic keywords and terms to rank for and the plugin's competitive research functionality lets you compare your competitor's rankings and find new terms to gain a leg up on them.

Semrush's SEO Writing Assistant tool also improves your overall website content by helping you write more search-friendly content. It does this through tight integration with WordPress.

6. Squirrly SEO

Squirrly SEO has over 3 million installs and consistently good reviews. It's not hard to see why. The WordPress plugin has over 200 features to help you optimize your content with updates keeping things fresh constantly.

Instead of listing down all the things the program offers, here's an **incredibly detailed video** that runs through everything from the developers themselves:

The app has subscription tiers starting from $20 for your first month and it goes up from there depending on your use case and requirements.

WordPress Site Speed Plugins

You've painstakingly optimized your site for keywords and search trends and now you have a steady stream of visitors flocking to your WordPress site. But your work is far from over. Nothing will put off new readers more than slow load times and unoptimized content.

Research shows that 53% of mobile users leave if the website takes more than 3 seconds to load while 87%

of online shopping carts are abandoned if the load time exceeds 2 seconds.

This data proves that the speed of your site is an incredibly important part of the efficiency puzzle and not paying attention to it could leave a bad taste in your customer's mouths.

Thankfully though, the following WordPress plugins will help you keep your site snappy and well optimized for years to come.

1. W3 Super Cache
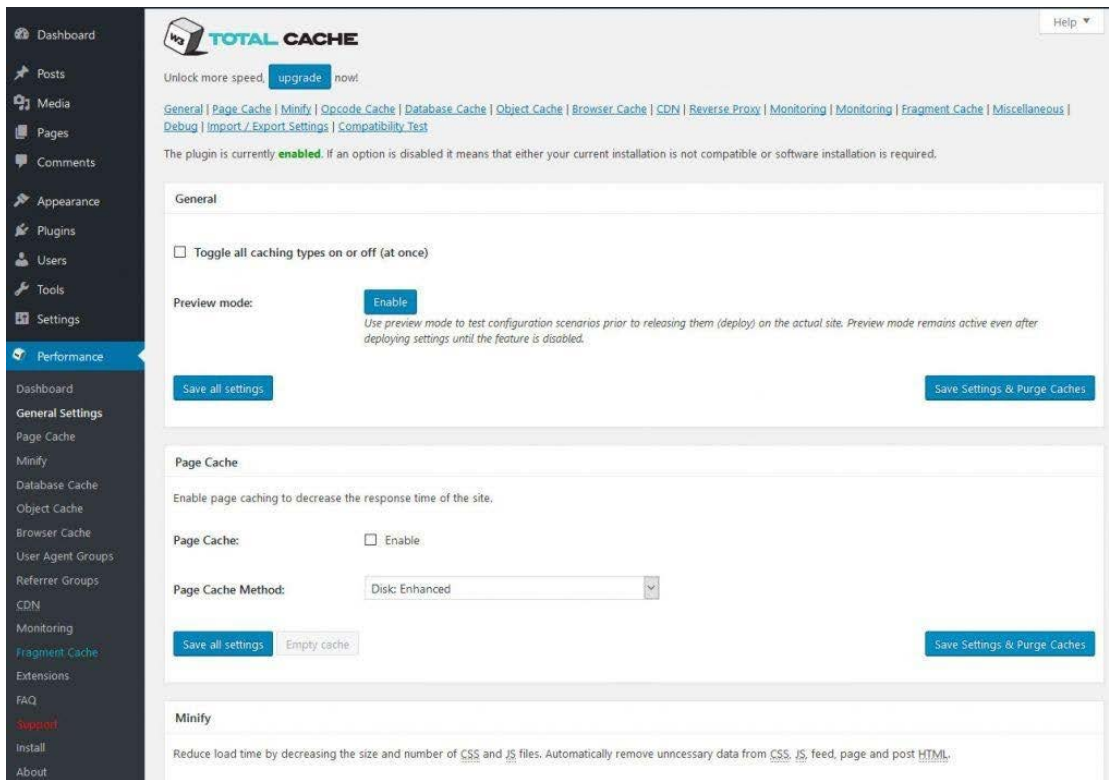
W3 Super Cache is a fantastic tool to help speed up your WordPress site. It's made by the company responsible for WordPress itself, so you know the quality is going to be exceptional.

The plugin manages your site's cache files to ensure that performance isn't affected. This improves site speed and allows the end-user to have a better experience. Google also uses site speed and cache metrics in its ranking algorithm so this could be the difference between you ranking higher or lower.

Oh right, and this plugin is completely free to use.

2. Media File Renamer
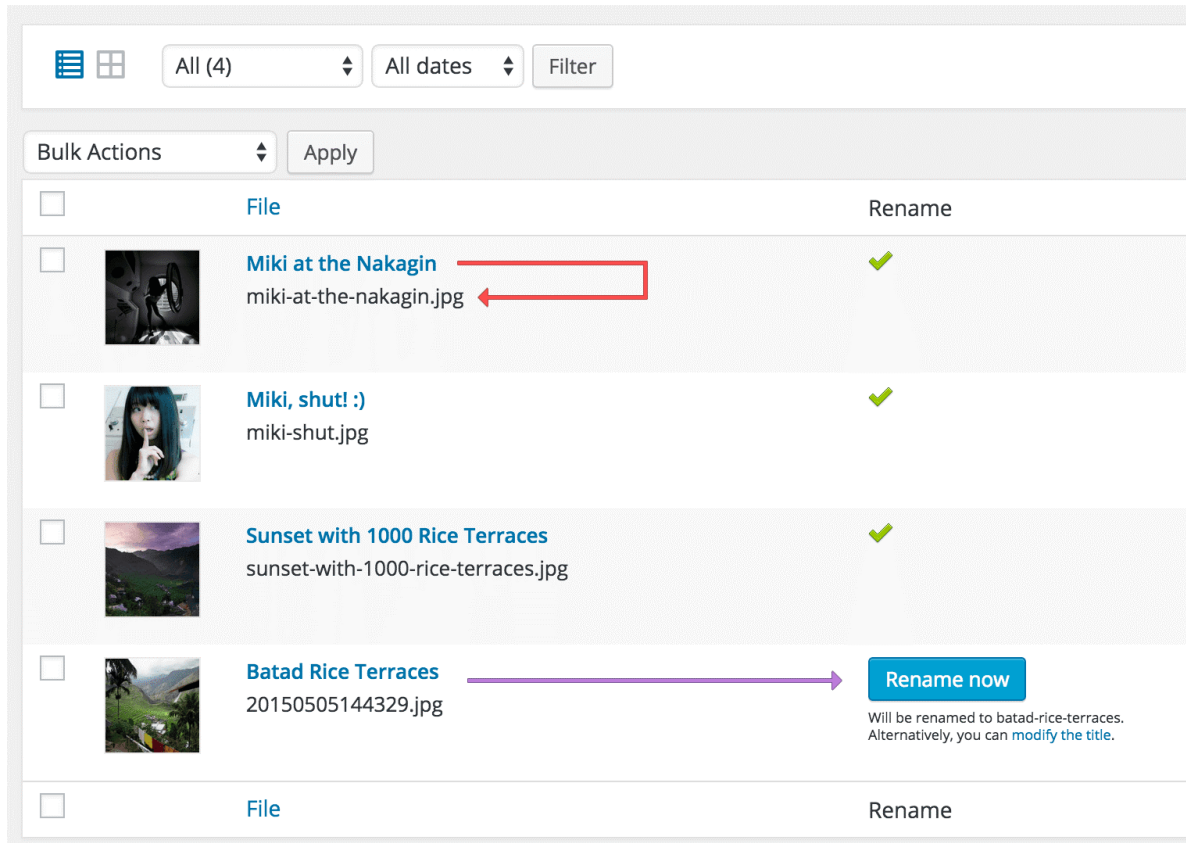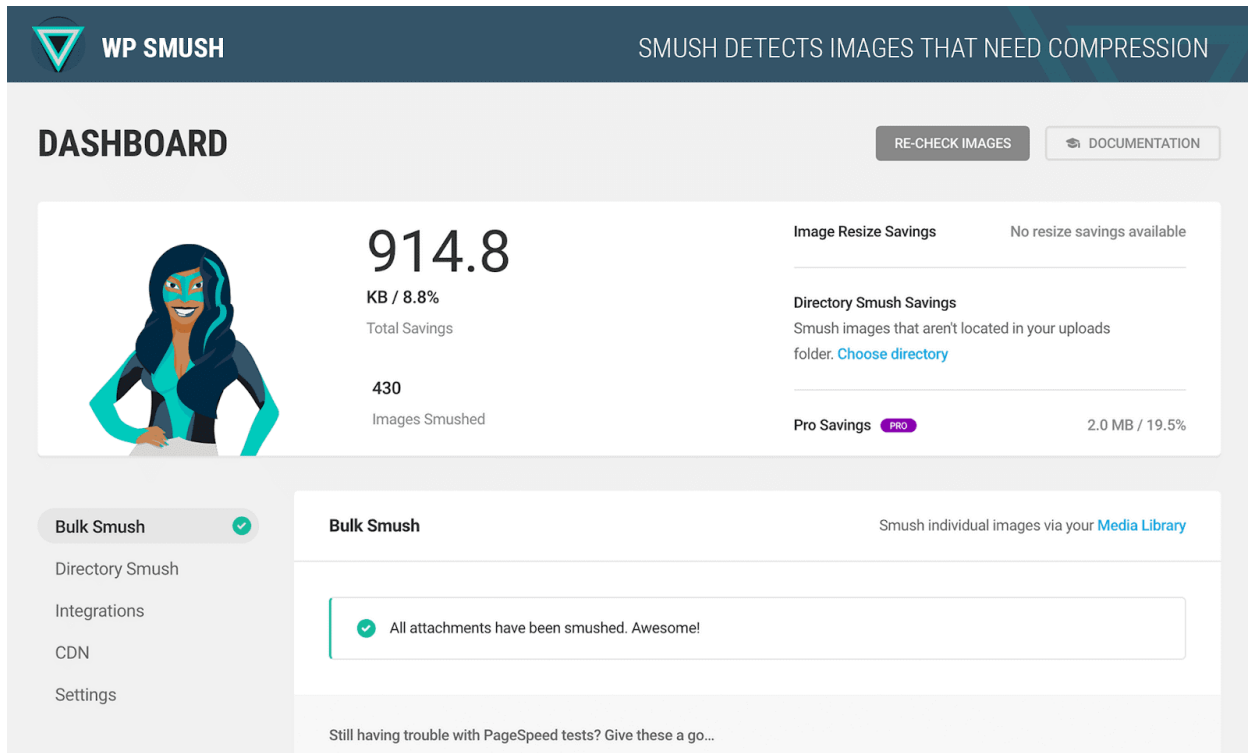
While this plugin might not help your site's speed, it certainly helps reduce the time it takes to optimize your images and files. Going back through large sites and sifting through file names and attributes is a huge hassle.

Media File Renamer solves this issue by renaming media files based on their image titles. When an image file is updated, the entire site is updated to include these references.

The free version of the plugin is an auto renamer so if you want manual control of your naming then you'll have to get the pro version which starts at $24 for an annual subscription.

3. WP Smush

This simple plugin allows you to simply and intuitively reduce the image sizes on your site without compressing the integrity or quality of the overall image.

WP Smush supports all the common file formats including JPEG, GIF, and PNG. Besides this, it offers:

- Removal of unused colors from images.
- Compatibility with other plugins.
- Removal of metadata from JPEG images.
- Ability to handle more than 50 images at a time.
- Ability to pinpoint what images are slowing down your site.

This video from the developer does a good job of walking you through the process.

4. WP Optimize
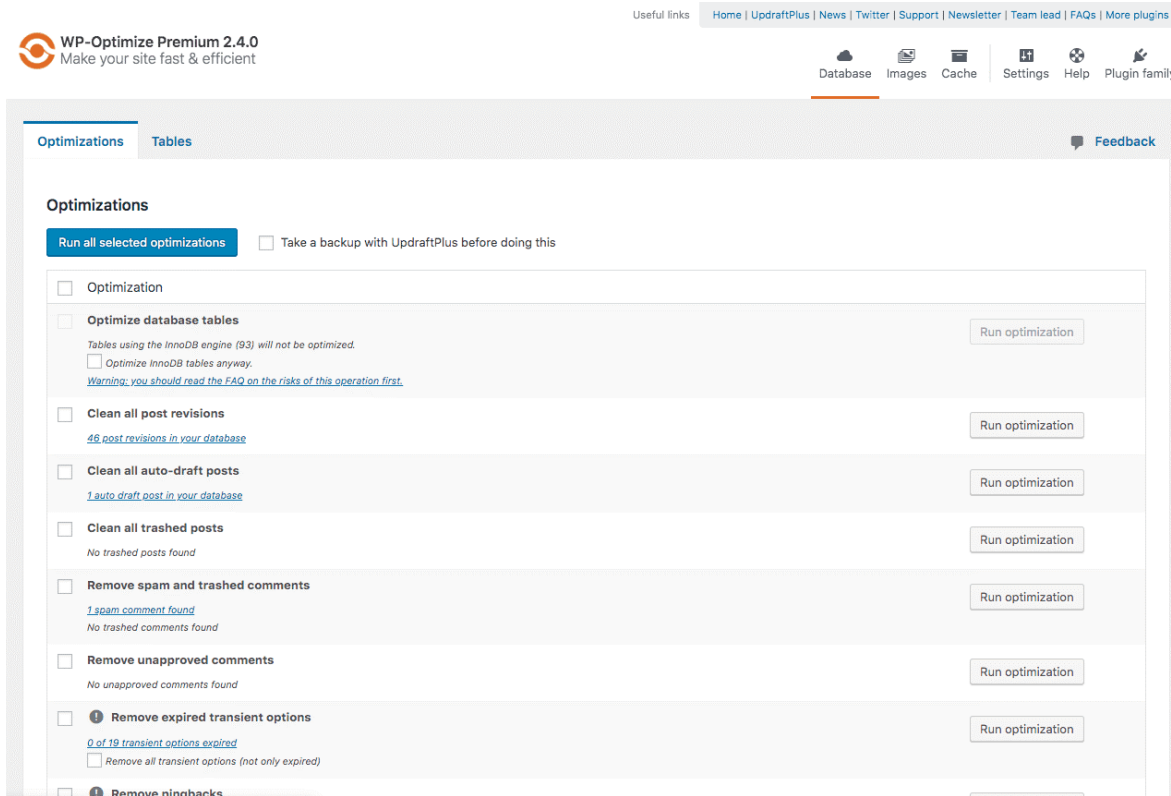
Another simple tool on the list, WP Optimize lets you optimize and streamline your site's database. The plugin has over 17 million installs and a high rating so the quality is undeniably good.

Besides cleaning up and optimizing your databases so they run better, WP optimize also offers:

- Scheduled automatic cleanups of revisions, spam comments, trashed content, etc.
- Defragmentation of MySQL tables.
- Database statistics overview.
- Image compression.
- Granular control over specific optimizations.

Mobile Optimization

The vast majority of content produced and consumed in the world is done on mobile devices like smartphones and tablets. Statistics show that 90% of the world's population above the age of 6 will own a mobile phone.

This means that not optimizing your site for mobile will be a huge deterrent to your long-term success. As previously mentioned, speed is important for sites to remain competitive, and being mobile-friendly is another essential part of the equation.

The following plugins will assist in making your site more mobile-friendly so that the people visiting it will have no reason not to stick around.

1. WP Touch Pro
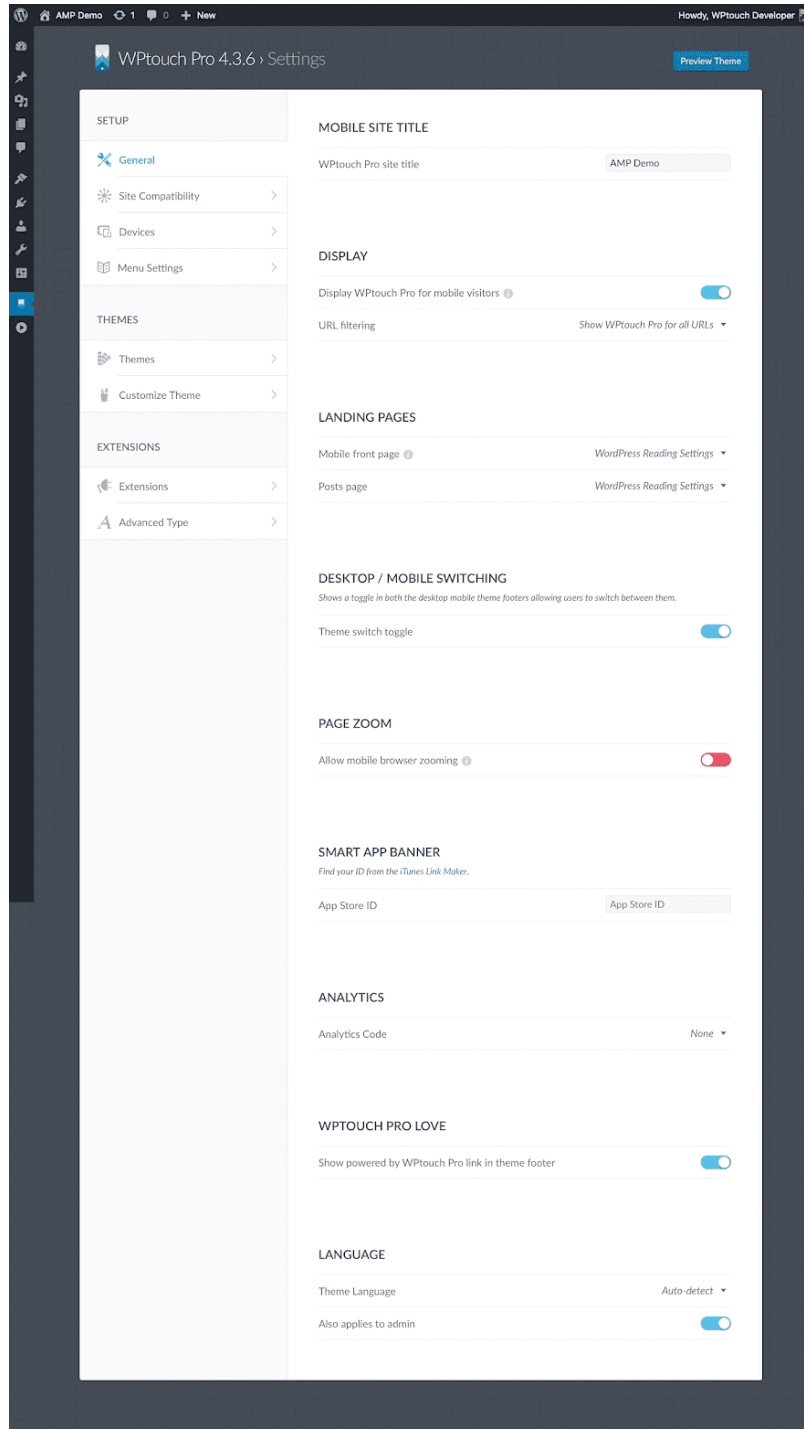
WP Touch Pro is an obvious first choice for this particular category of plugins. With over 13 million downloads, this tool has become a mainstay for almost everyone.

It replaces your site with a user friendly, mobile-focused theme. This change enhances the site, making it easier and faster to read.

It overlays a mobile-friendly theme on your site without compromising your current theme. Your content and URL remain the same. The plugin simply optimizes your content for different screen sizes. You can see just some of the customizable options the app offers in the screenshot above.

If you want more validation, WP Touch Pro is actually recommended by Google itself so implementing it could mean that your site performs more favorably in search rankings.

2. Autoptimize
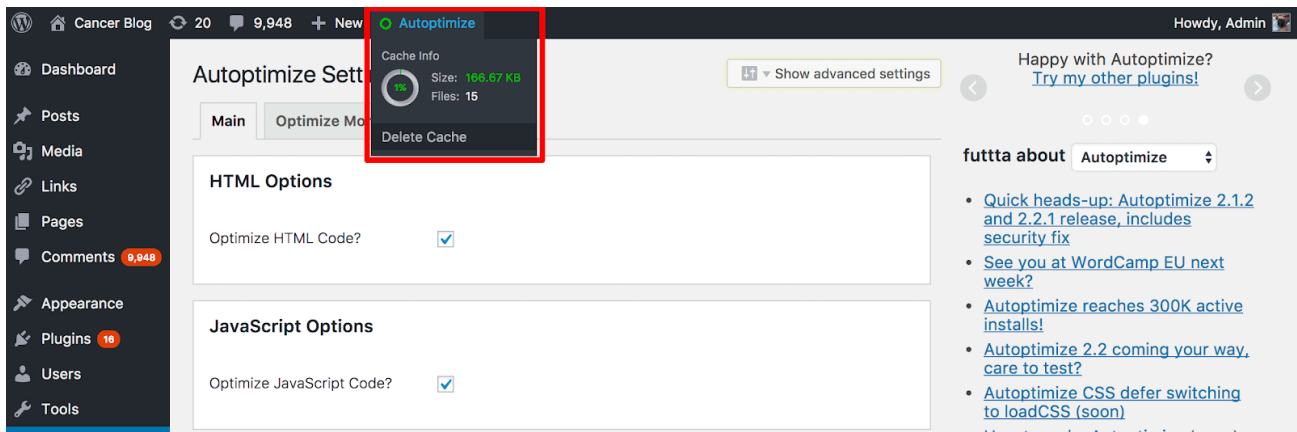
Regardless of whether your site is hosted through companies like GoDaddy or simply through WordPress.com, Autoptimize is a fantastic plug-in that helps improve your site's overall web upload speeds.

It does this by optimizing your database, deleting your caches, and aggregating scripts. These changes can reduce your site loading times by up to 30%.

This is a huge improvement by any metric and ensures that your visitors don't leave your site because of slow load times.

The plugin is super easy to use with a myriad of pricing models to choose from.

Wordpress Analytics Plugins

Knowledge is power and as a site owner, this statement should be at the forefront of everything that you do. Data never lies and will tell you the cold hard facts on how your site is doing and what improvements you need to be making.

Google Analytics is the best way to make sense of this and if used properly can help you craft effective strategies for your WordPress site experience. Plugins designed to optimize this data are therefore a great idea to use.

Knowing is half the battle and with these plugins, you'll be in good hands.

1. Monster Insights

No list on Google Analytics plugins could ever be complete without MonsterInsights. The app has more than 85 million all time installs and is hugely popular for good reasons.

A big advantage of MonsterInsights is that it is super easy to install and requires absolutely no coding knowledge. Once you're up and running, the plugin tells you exactly how visitors came onto your WordPress site. The reasons could be referrals, keyword search, or a backlink that led to you.

This data can help you pinpoint weaknesses or optimize trends to keep visitors flocking to your site. Monster insight also lets you get to know your visitors better. You can find out their age, their country, their gender, and even what browser they use.

This data comes from the MonsterInsights Website Audience Report and can be super useful when planning new campaigns and strategies. You can also use MonsterInsights to see what kind of content the audiences are searching for and the volume based on their demographic.

These features are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the vast array of tools MonsterInsights offers. Truly a must-have tool for anyone looking to gain more insight into their site and process.

2. Google Analytics Dashboard (Exact Metrics)
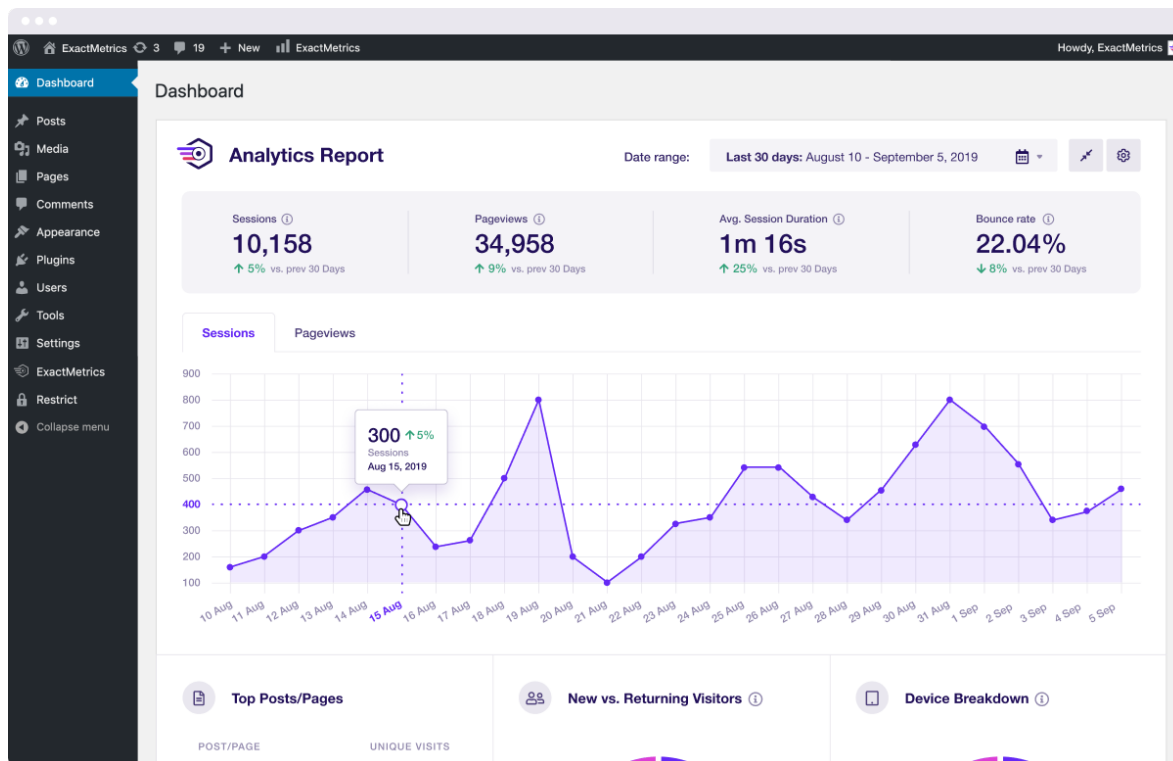
29 million installs later, Google Analytics Dashboard is a no brainer choice for a high-quality Google Analytics plugin.

The brainchild of Exact Metrics, this powerful tool intuitively displays your data right in your WordPress dashboard.

Installing the plugin is a bit more complicated than other options but the effort is well worth it. This plugin not only shows you your site's bounce rates, views, keywords, etc, it also gives useful real time statistics. You can monitor your visitors and traffic as they happen.

Google Analytics Dashboard by Exact Metrics is also compatible with multisite installs and multiple Google Analytics accounts as well.

3. Analytify

What if you want an option that is just as useful as the others but is much simpler and easier to understand? Well, that's where Analytify comes in.

This popular WordPress plugin simplifies Google Analytics data so that you can get a better overall grasp of what's happening with your WordPress site with just a quick glance.

The ease of use starts with the installation which just requires a simple 1-Click Authentication process. As soon as you're up and running the app will display your analytics data right in your WordPress dashboard.

Analytify, like its contemporaries, helps improve your site traffic and SEO by giving you insights on how you can make certain improvements. You can learn more about your audience, their likes, and dislikes, your retention rates, the engagement, and the list goes on and on. Knowing all this helps you craft better more tailored marketing strategies.

Analytify will also give you automated email reports of all these metrics too.

Taking Your SEO Efforts to the Next Level

These plugins won't work unless you do. They're tools, designed to help make your job easier but they can never replace the groundwork that has to be laid down for them to have any effect at all.

Don't get confused by the options and always keep your business or personal objectives at the forefront of everything you do. Use your unique requirements to dictate what plugin is the best choice for you and utilize them to do what they're designed to.

Optimizing any process takes time and your site is no different. But with these tools and the knowledge you already have, you'll be one step closer to making your most ambitious goals a reality.

Chapter 9

Just Say No to Hackers: How to Harden Your WordPress Security

Vahan Petrosyan

Director, IT and Infrastructure,
Search Engine Journal

When it comes to security, there is no WordPress-specific type of security that exists. All problems with security are common for all websites or applications.

WordPress security problems are of the most interest because it powers about **40%** of the web and because it is open source. When one finds a vulnerability either in the WordPress core or plugins, other websites using it become vulnerable because they all use the same code.

On the other hand, there are a decent number of plugins that you can use to harden your website security. Let's delve into how to harden your WordPress site against different types of vulnerabilities, though the scope of this article is wider and applies to all types of web applications.

The common types of vulnerabilities are:

- Backdoors.
- Pharma Hacks.
- Brute-force Login Attempts.
- Malicious Redirects.
- Cross-site Scripting (XSS).
- Denial of Service (DDoS).

These are the common types of vulnerabilities, but that doesn't mean they are limited to just these. When you think about security, in general, you should think 360-degrees about it.

There is no limited set of ways to hack a website. Attackers can use many techniques to access your site.

For example, they can steal your PC and have physical access to your computer. They can also use surveillance techniques to see your passwords when logging in from a public network to your website.

So think 360 when it comes to security.

Let's dive into how to harden our WordPress installs in order to make life a little more difficult for attackers.

Here are 16 ways to harden your WordPress website security:

- Use HTTPS.
- Use a strong password.
- Use password managers to store your passwords.
- Enable Captcha on Login forms.
- Prevent brute-force login attempts.
- Use two-factor authentication.
- Keep up-to-date plugins.
- Set Security HTTP Headers.
- Set the correct file permissions for WordPress files.
- Disable file editing from WordPress.
- Disable all unnecessary features.
- Hide the WordPress version.
- Install a WordPress firewall.
- Keep backups.
- Use SFTP.
- Monitor users' activities.

1. Secure Your Site With HTTPS

It isn't by accident that we'll start by securing the website with **HTTPS.**

Everything you do flows through the network and wire cables. **HTTP** exchanges data as plain text between browser and server. Therefore, anyone who has access to the network between the server and the browser is able to view your unencrypted data.

If you don't protect your connection, you're at risk of exposing sensitive data to attackers. With HTTPS, your data will be encrypted and attackers will not be able to read the data transmitted even if they have access to your network.

So the number one step for securing your website is enabling HTTPS. If you haven't moved to HTTPS yet, you can use this guide to **move your WordPress to HTTPS.**

Tools & WordPress Plugins You Can Use to Migrate HTTP to HTTPS

- **Better Search Replace.**
- **Database Search and Replace Script.**

2. Use Always Strong Passwords

It may sound funny, but the most common way hackers use to access your website are weak passwords or pwned passwords. These make you vulnerable against Brute-force attacks.

Enhance your security by using strong passwords more than any other way listed below.

Always use strong passwords and check regularly if they have been **pwned.**

WordPress Plugins to Enhance Passwords Security:

- **Disallow Pwned Password.**
- **Download Password Policy Manager.**
- **Password bcrypt.**

3. Use Password Managers to Store Your Passwords

When you log in while working from a public network, you can't be sure about who is watching what you are typing on your laptop or recording your passwords. In order to solve this problem, use password managers to easily access your passwords and store them in a secure place.

Even if your PC is accessed, they will not be able to get your passwords. Password managers are browser based and not WordPress plugins.

Password Manager Browser Add Ons:

- **LastPass.**
- **1Password.**
- **NordPass.**

4. Add CAPTCHA on the Login & Registration Form

When you've secured your website with HTTPS and used strong passwords, you've already made life for hackers pretty hard. But you can make it even harder by adding captcha to login forms.
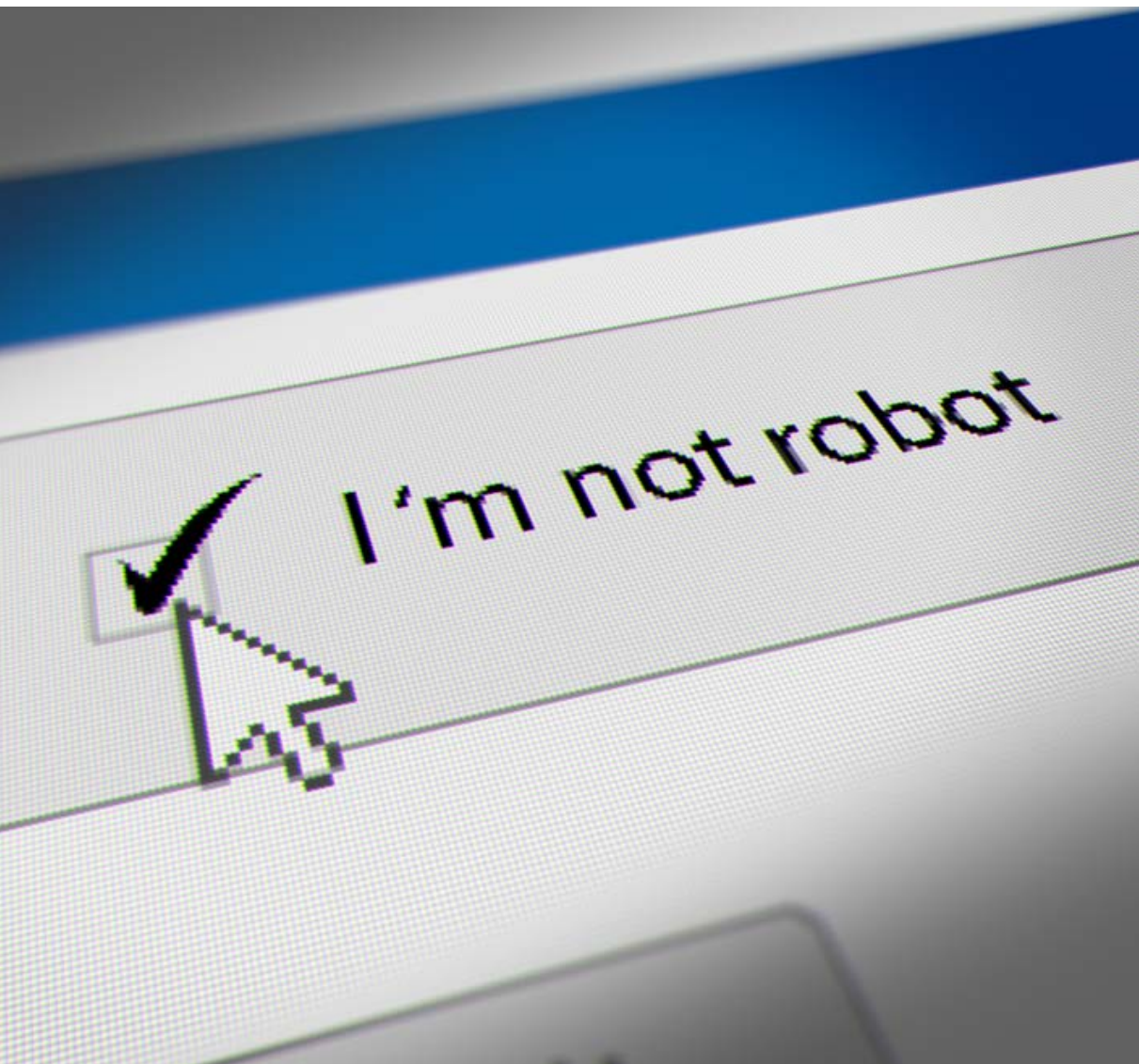
Captchas are a great way to protect your login forms against brute-force attacks.
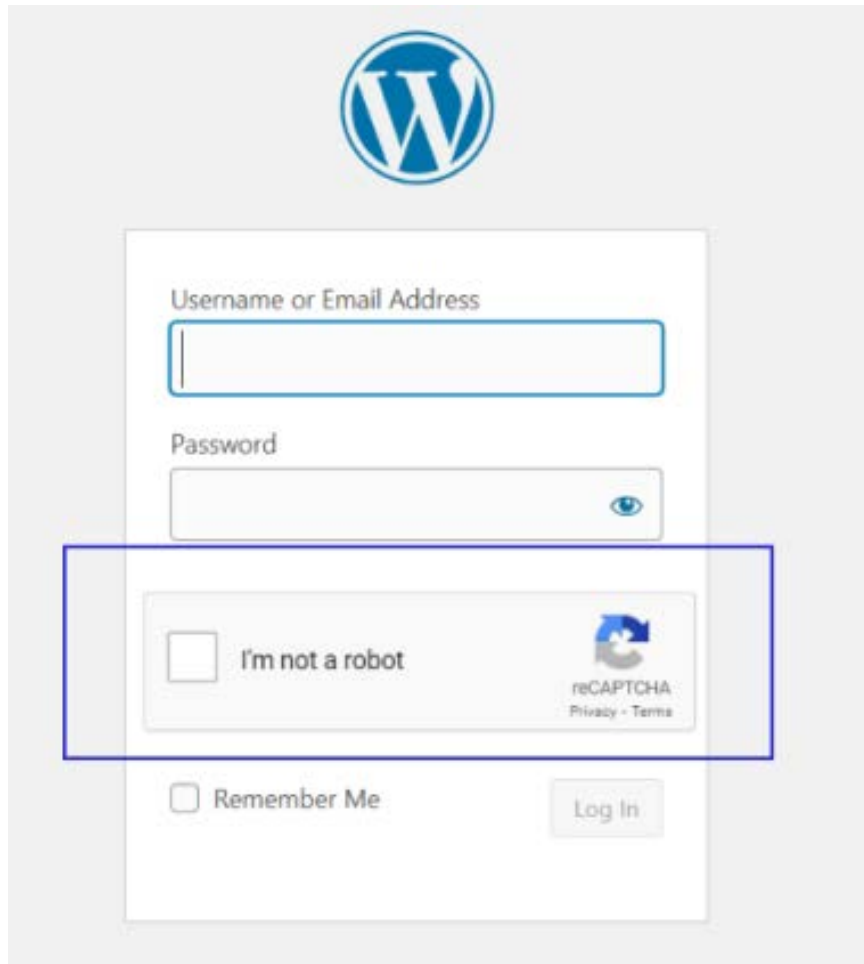
Plugins to Add Captcha on WordPress Login:

- **Login No Captcha reCAPTCHA.**
- **Login Security reCAPTCHA.**

5. Protect From Brute Force Login Attempts

Login captcha will give you protection against brute-force attempts up to a certain point, but not completely. Often, once captcha tokens are solved, they are valid for a few minutes.

Google reCaptcha, for example, is valid for 2 minutes. Attackers can use those two minutes to try brute-force login attempts to your login form during that time.

In order to solve this problem, you should block failed login attempts by IP address.

WordPress Plugins to Prevent Brute-Force Attacks:

- **WP Limit Login Attempts.**
- **Limit Login Attempts Reloaded.**

6. Setup Two-Factor (2FA) Authentication

With secure passwords and captcha on login forms, you are more protected, yes, but what if hackers used surveillance methods and recorded the password you typed on video to access your website.

If they have your password, only two-factor authentication can protect your website from attackers.
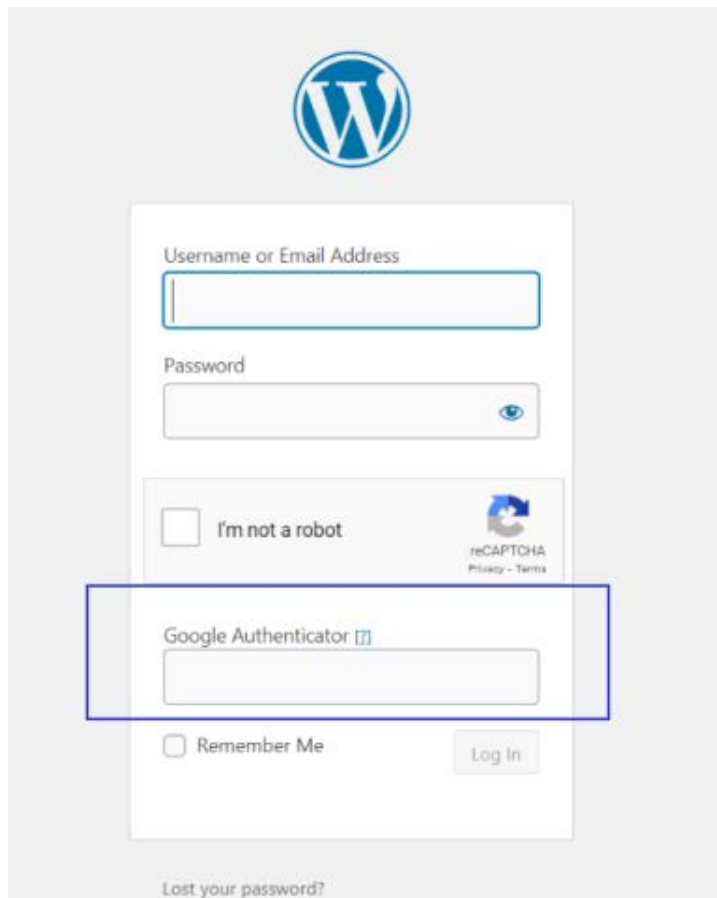
WordPress Plugins to Setup 2FA Authentication:

- **Two-Factor.**
- **Google Authenticator.**
- **WordPress Two Factor Authentication (2FA , MFA).**

7. Keep WordPress Core and Plugins up to Date

Often for WordPress core and plugins, **vulnerabilities** are found and reported. Make sure to update your plugins with the latest version in order to prevent websites being hacked from known and reported holes in files.

I wouldn't recommend switching to automatic updating since it could result in breaking your websites without your knowledge.

But I **strongly recommend** that you enable WordPress core's minor updates by adding this line of code in wp-config.php since these updates include security patches for the core.

```
define( 'WP_AUTO_UPDATE_CORE', 'minor' );
```

8. Set Security HTTP Headers

Security headers bring an extra layer of protection by restricting the actions that can be performed between the browser and server when one browses website. Security headers aim to protect against Clickjacking and Cross-site Scripting (XSS) attacks.

Security headers are:

- Strict-Transport-Security (HSTS).
- Content-Security-Policy.
- X-Frame-Options.
- X-Content-Type-Options.
- Fetch Metadata Headers.
- Referrer-Policy.
- Cache-Control.
- Clear-Site-Data.
- Feature-Policy.

We will not go deep into each security header explanation, but here is how to fix them.

WordPress Plugins to Enable Security Headers:

- **HTTP headers to improve web site security.**
- **GD Security Headers.**

9. Set Correct File Permissions for WordPress Files

File permissions are rules on the OS that host your WordPress files; these rules set how files can be read, edited and executed. This measure of security is very important especially when you host a website on shared hosting.

If set incorrectly, when one website on shared hosting gets hacked, attackers can access files on your website and read any content there – specifically wp-config.php – and gain complete access to your website.

- All files should be 644.
- All folders should be 775.
- wp-config.php should be 600.

The rules above mean your hosting user account can read and modify files and the web server (WordPress) can modify, delete and read files and folders.

Other users can't read the content of wp-config. php. If setting 600 for wp-config.php takes your website down, alter it to 640 or 644.

10. Disable File Editing From WordPress

It's a known feature in WordPress that you can edit files from the admin backend. It's really not necessary because developers use SFTP and rarely use this.
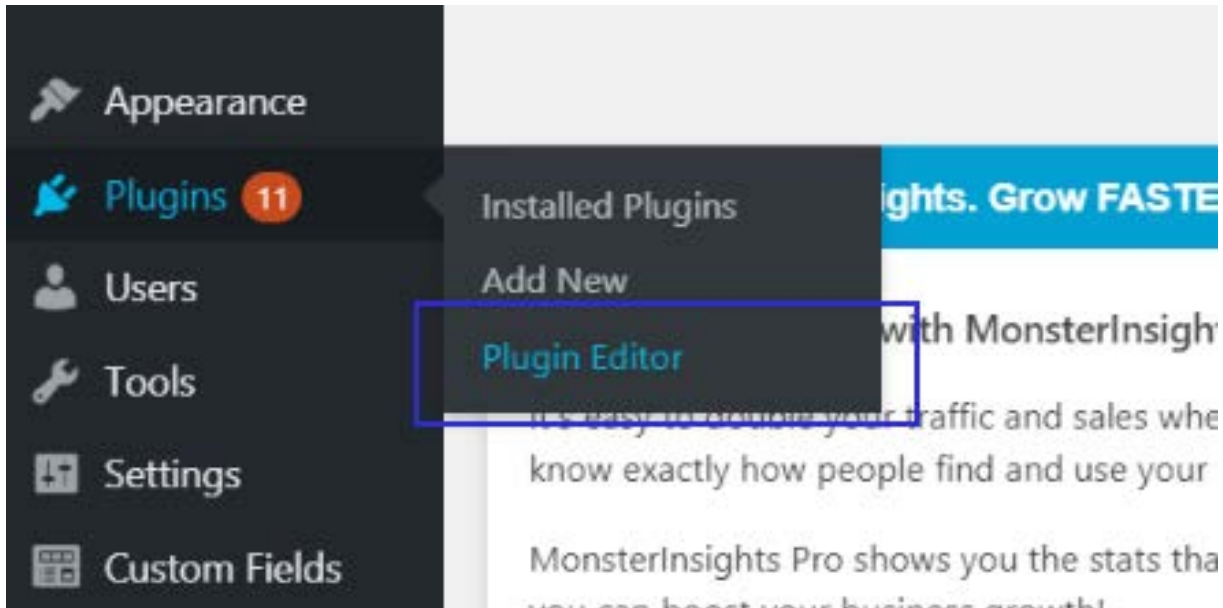
So disable it by adding one line of code in wp-config.php file

define('DISALLOW_FILE_EDIT', true);

11. Disable All Unnecessary Features

WordPress comes with many features you may not need at all. For example, the XML-RPC endpoint in WordPress was created for communicating with external applications. Attackers can use this endpoint for brute-force logins.

Disable XML-RPC using the plugin **Disable XML-RPC-API.**

Another issue that WordPress has built-in is providing a REST-API endpoint to list all users on the website.

If you append "/wp-json/wp/v2/users" to any WordPress install you'll see a list of usernames and user IDs as JSON data.

Disable users REST-API by adding this line of code into functions.php

```
function  disable_users_rest_json( $response, $user, $request  ){
    return '';
}add_filter( 'rest_prepare_user', 'disable_users_rest_json', 10, 3 );
```

12. Hide WordPress Version

WordPress automatically injects a comment with the version of WordPress in the HTML of the page. It gives the attacker the version of your installed Wordpress as additional information.
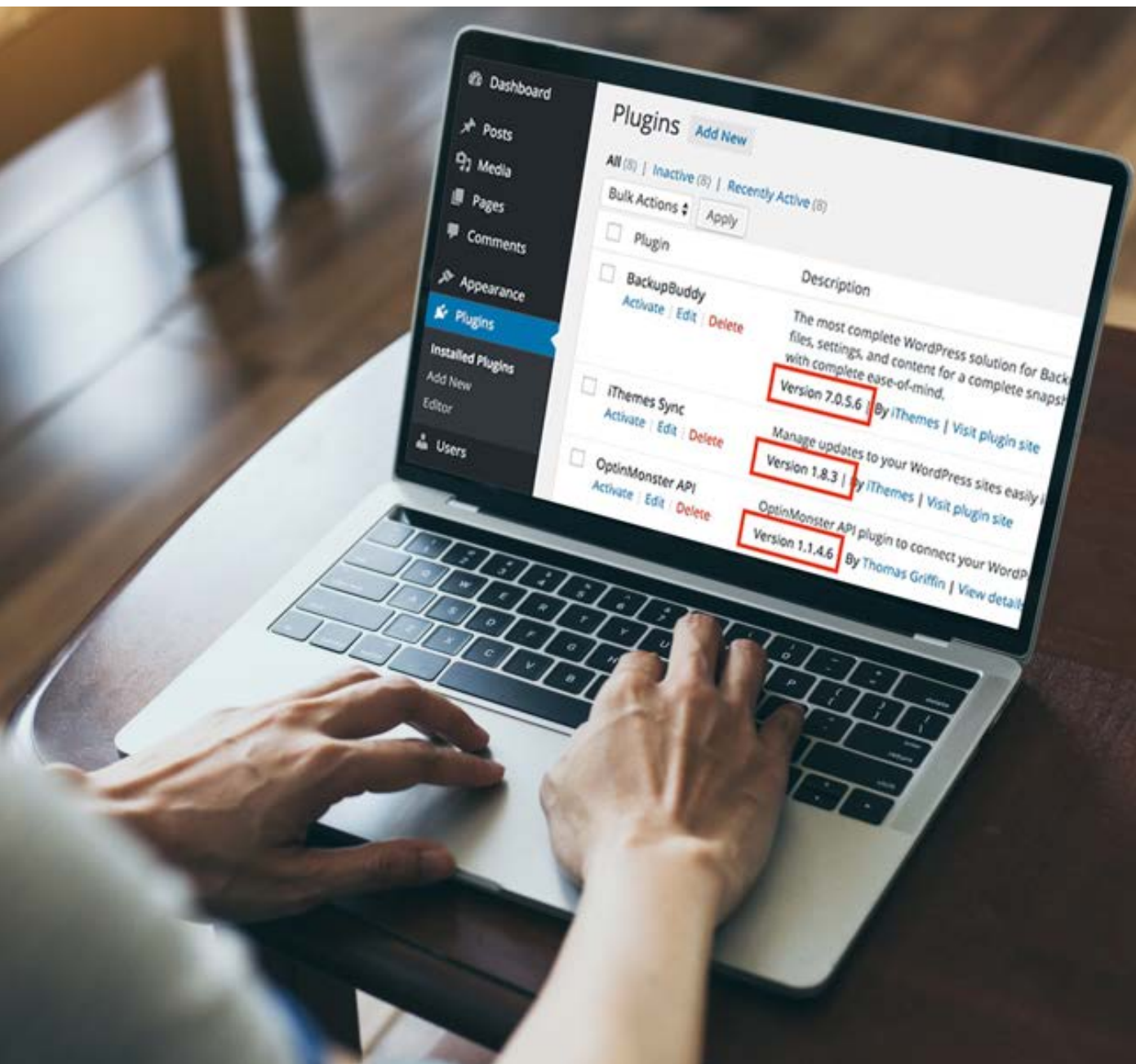
```
<link rel="wlwmanifest" type="application/wlwmanifest+xml" href="http://tester.org/wp-includes/wlwmanifest.xml" />
<meta name="generator" content="WordPress 5.4" />
<style type="text/css">.recentcomments a{display:inline !important;padding:0 !important;margin:0 !important;}</style></head>

<body class="home blog group-blog hfeed has-header-image has-sidebar colors-light">
<div id="page" class="site">
    <a class="skip-link screen-reader-text" href="#content">Skip to content</a>

    <header id="masthead" class="site-header" role="banner">

        <div class="custom-header">
```

For example, if you are using a WordPress version whose core was reported to have a vulnerability, the attacker knows he can use the technique reported to hack your website.

Hide WordPress Version Meta Tags Using These Plugins:

- **Meta Generator and Version Info Remover.**
- **WP Generator Remover by Dawsun.**

13. Install a WordPress firewall

A firewall is a web application which runs on websites and analyzes any incoming HTTP requests. It applies sophisticated logic to filter out requests that potentially may be a threat.

One can set up its rules on top of built-in rules of the firewall to block requests. One of the common types of attacks is SQL injection.

Say you run a WordPress plugin which is vulnerable to SQL injections and you don't know about it. If you run a firewall even if the attacker knows about the security flaw in the plugin he will not be able to hack the website.

This is because the firewall will block those requests which contain SQL injections.

Firewalls will block those requests from the IP and prevent successive dangerous requests from coming. Firewalls are also able to prevent DDoS attacks by detecting too many requests from a single IP and blocking them.

It's also possible to run DNS-level firewalls which run before requests are made to a web server. An example is **Cloudflare DNS firewall.**

The advantage of this method is that it's more robust against DDoS attacks.
Application level firewalls which run on the server let HTTP requests hit the web server and then block

it. That means the server spends some CPU/RAM resources to block them.

With DNS-level firewalls it doesn't spend server resources, thus it's more sustainable to attacks.

WordPress Firewall Plugins You Can Use:

- **Wordfence Security.**
- **Sucuri.**
- **All In One WP Security & Firewall.**
- **BulletProof Security.**
- **Shield Security.**

Note: If you decide to install firewalls, they may have features such as login brute-force protection or 2F authentication and you can use their features instead of installing the plugins mentioned above.

14. Keep Backups

If you get hacked, the best way to recover is by restoring the website from the latest version which wasn't infected. If you don't store website backups, cleaning up the website may be a time-consuming operation; and in some cases, it may not be doable to restore all information because the malware which was running erased all the data.

In order to avoid such scenarios do regular backups of your website database and files.

If not, you can use these plugins to run backups:

- **BackWPup.**
- **UpdraftPlus.**
- **BackupBuddy.**
- **BlogVault.**

15. Use SFTP

I guess most developers already use SFTP to connect to web servers, but it's important to make a reminder of this, just in case you still don't.

Like HTTPS, SFTP uses encryption to transfer files over the network making it impossible to read as plain text even if one has access to the network.

16. Monitor Users' Activity

We've discussed a bunch of ways to secure your website, but what about when one of your employees, who has access to website admin, does shady things such as adding links in content?

None of the above methods are able to detect a shady employee.

That can be done by watching activity logs. By looking into the activity of each user, you may find that one of the employees edited an article which they weren't supposed to. You can also look into activity that looks suspicious and see what changes were done.

WordPress Plugins to Monitor Users Activity:

- **Activity Log.**
- **User Activity Log.**
- **WP Activity Log.**

What to Do If You Get Hacked?

Even with all the advice from security experts and knowing the ways to harden your websites from hacks, they still do happen.

If your website was hacked, you need to perform these steps below to recover.

- Change all of your emails and other personal passwords first since hackers may have gotten access to your email first and thus be able to access your website.
- Restore your website to the latest known non-hacked backup.
- Reset passwords of all website users.
- Update all plugins if there are updates available.

Conclusion

Think 360 when it comes to security. Stress the importance of security to all of your employees so they understand the consequences the company may suffer if they don't follow security rules.

If you get hacked simply, recover your website from the backup and change all passwords to your website and emails asap.

Chapter 10

How to Protect a WordPress Site from Hackers

Roger Montti
Owner, Martinibuster.com

WordPress is a frequent target for hacking. Hackers are targeting the theme, the core WordPress files, plugins, and even the login page.

These are the steps to take to make it less likely to be hacked and to be able to recover easier if it should still happen.

How Hackers Attack WordPress

All sites on the web are under constant attack – whether it's a phpBB forum or a WordPress site – all sites are being probed by hackers. It's not unusual for a hacker to scan thousands of pages or try to log in hundreds of times a day.

And that's just one hacker. Sites are under attack by several hackers at the same time.

Typically it's not a person who is trying to hack you. Hackers employ automated software to crawl the web to probe for specific weaknesses in the website.

These automated software programs crawling the web are called bots. I call them hacker bots in order to distinguish them from scraper bots (software that is trying to copy content).

Secure Your WordPress Site With a Firewall

A firewall is a software program that blocks an intruder. In my opinion, the best WordPress firewall is a plugin called Wordfence.

What Wordfence does is to check if a website visitor's behavior matches that of an abusive bot. If the bot breaks certain rules, like asking for too many web pages in a short amount of time, Wordfence will then automatically block the bot.

Wordfence is also programmed to allow legitimate bots like Google and Bing on the site.

There are advanced features that let a publisher see what bots are attacking a site and to view where the bot is coming from, like if it's a bad bot coming from Amazon Web Services or Bluehost for example. Wordfence provides the publisher the ability to block the bot by their IP address, the entire IP address range, or even by a fake browser user agent that the bot is using.

About User Agents (UA)

A **user agent** is identifying information that a browser sends that tells a website what browser it is (Chrome, Firefox, Vivaldi), and what operating system it is operating on (Windows 10, Mac OS X).

For example, this is a user agent string for a Safari 11 browser on a Mac OS X computer:
Mozilla/5.0 (Macintosh; Intel Mac OS X 10_11_6) AppleWebKit/605.1.15 (KHTML, like Gecko) Version/11.1.2 Safari/605.1.15

Bots use a lot of different user agents in order to fool websites and sneak in. For example, some bots pretend to be a browser on Windows XP.

The actual amount of real users on Win XP are close to zero, I can create a rule with Wordfence to block all user agents with Windows XP as the operating system and with that one rule, I can block thousands of bad bots, regardless of what country they are coming from or IP address.

The bad bots will sometimes respond by changing to another user agent, so by combining these rules, a publisher stands a chance of blocking a wide range of bad hacker bots.

And that's with the free version of Wordfence.

The paid version can block entire countries. So if you don't have legitimate site visitors from certain countries, you can block every visitor that's coming from those countries.

WordPress Defense Against Exploits

Additionally, the paid version of Wordfence will protect you in advance from many compromised themes and plugins before those plugins are fixed.

Once Wordfence researchers are aware of an exploit they will update the premium version of the firewall to provide subscribers with protection from those exploits, sometimes weeks before the exploit is fixed by the compromised theme or plugin developer.

Website Security Hardening

Another free plugin that provides an additional layer of protection is called Sucuri Security. Sucuri (owned by GoDaddy) helps harden the WordPress security to block bad bots from taking advantage of certain kinds of attacks. It also has a malware scanning feature that checks all files to see if they've been altered.

Sucuri will alert you every time someone logs into your site, helping publishers to identify if a hacker is logging in. Sucuri can also alert a publisher if a file was changed, something that hackers do.

These are the features of the free version of Sucuri:

- Security Activity Auditing.
- File Integrity Monitoring.
- Remote Malware Scanning.
- Blacklist Monitoring.
- Effective Security Hardening.
- Post-Hack Security Actions.
- Security Notifications.

The paid version of Sucuri includes a website firewall.

Limit Logins to Your Site

WordFence is able to block bots that are repeatedly filling in user names and passwords on the WordPress login page.

But if you want to focus on limiting those logins, there is a plugin called, Limit Login Attempts Reloaded that allows publishers to automatically block all hackers who enter a set number of failed name and password combinations.

For example, you can set it to block hackers after three attempts to guess the password.

These are the features of the login blocker:

- Limit the number of retry attempts when logging in (per each IP). This is fully customizable.
- Informs the user about the remaining retries or lockout time on the login page.
- Optional logging and optional email notification.
- It is possible to whitelist/blacklist IPs and Usernames.
- Sucuri Website Firewall compatibility.
- XMLRPC gateway protection.
- Woocommerce login page protection.
- Multi-site compatibility with extra MU settings.
- GDPR compliant. With this feature turned on, all logged IPs get obfuscated (md5-hashed).
- Custom IP origins support (Cloudflare, Sucuri, etc.)

The Limit Login Reloaded plugin provides a fast way to shut down hack bots that are trying to guess a password.
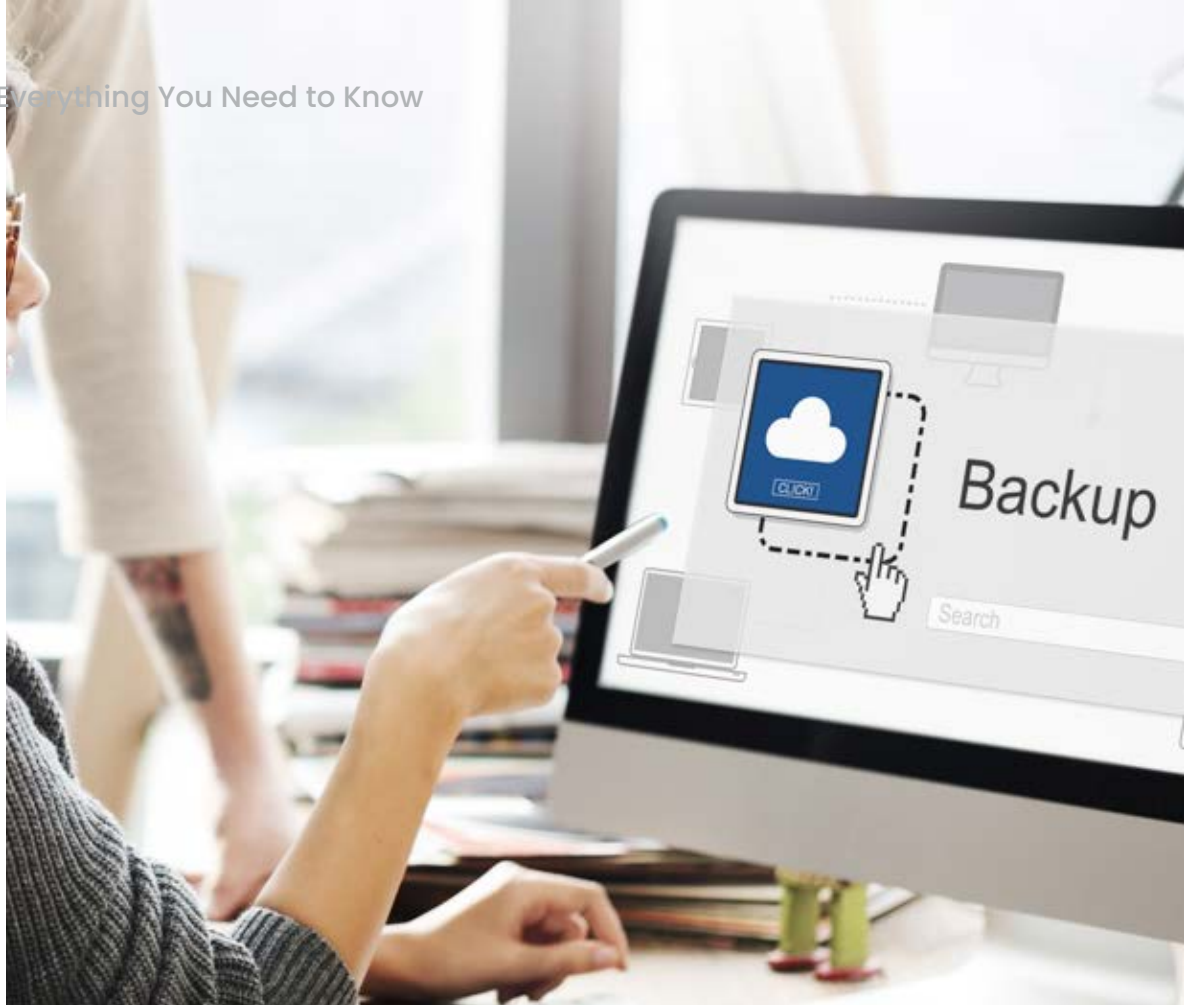
Backup Your WordPress Site

It is important to automatically create a daily backup of your website. Any catastrophic event that takes the site down can be recovered from with a backup.

There are many backup solutions but the one that I have found to be immensely useful is called UpdraftPlus WordPress Backup Plugin. UpdraftPlus is trusted by over two million users, it's a well-regarded choice.

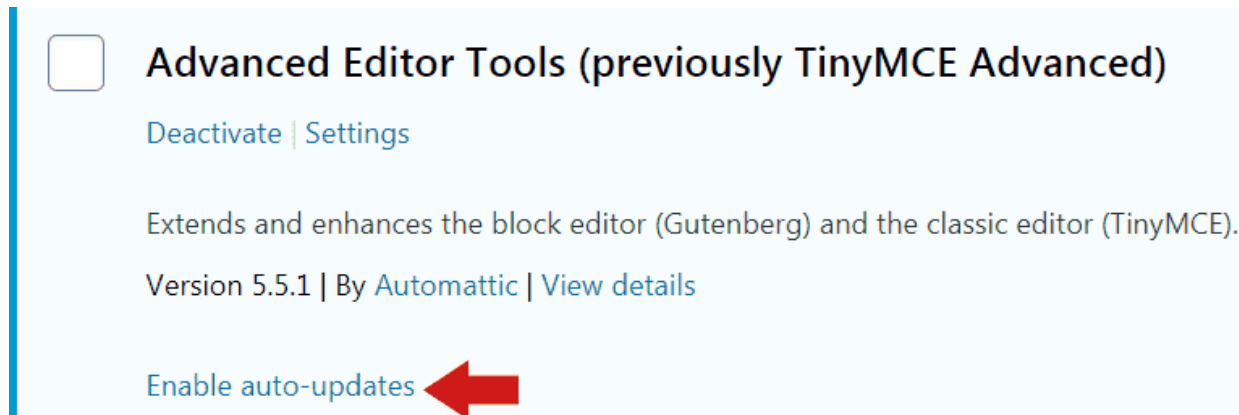It can be configured to email the backups every day or send them to a cloud storage location like Dropbox.

I once accidentally removed all the theme layout files from a site, completely removed the look of the site. But I was able to restore the site to exactly how it was before by using an UpdraftPlus backup. It was easy to do and I was so thankful.

Update All Themes and Plugins

It's important to always update all themes and plugins. WordPress provides a way to update all plugins automatically, which is convenient for publishers or businesses who don't log in and do updates often.
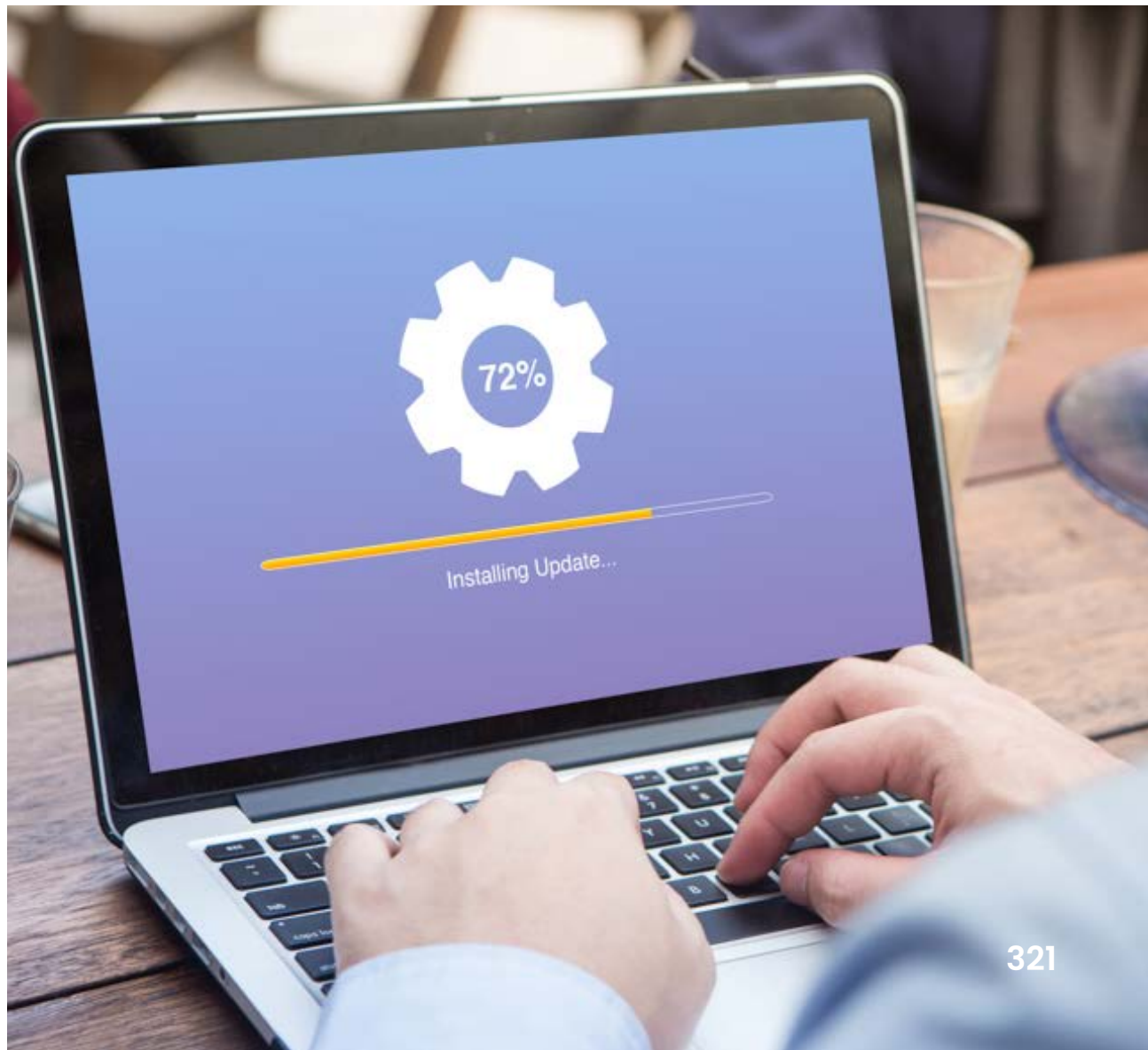
By enabling the auto-update feature a publisher can be assured of having the most up-to-date software. Having an out-of-date plugin is one of the leading causes of being hacked.

There are reasons not to enable the auto-update feature, but the negatives tend to happen rarely. For example, an updated plugin might be incompatible with other plugins.

But for sites that don't change frequently, the auto-update feature is probably a good thing to enable.

Beware of Abandoned Plugins

A final warning about abandoned plugins. Some plugins can continue to work years after they've been abandoned by their developer. What can happen is that these old plugins may contain a vulnerability. But because they are abandoned, it will never get fixed.

Another issue is that hackers sometimes buy the old plugins and update them with malware and viruses.

Check all your WordPress plugins to make sure that they have not been abandoned and appear to be updated on a fairly frequent basis.

Protect Your WordPress Site from Hackers

For many sites, simply taking these small steps to secure a website is enough to keep the sites from getting hacked. The free versions of these plugins provide an extraordinary amount of protection and the premium versions give even more protection.

There are many security-type plugins and some of those have actually contained vulnerabilities themselves. Wordfence and Sucuri are in my opinion top choices for WordPress security.
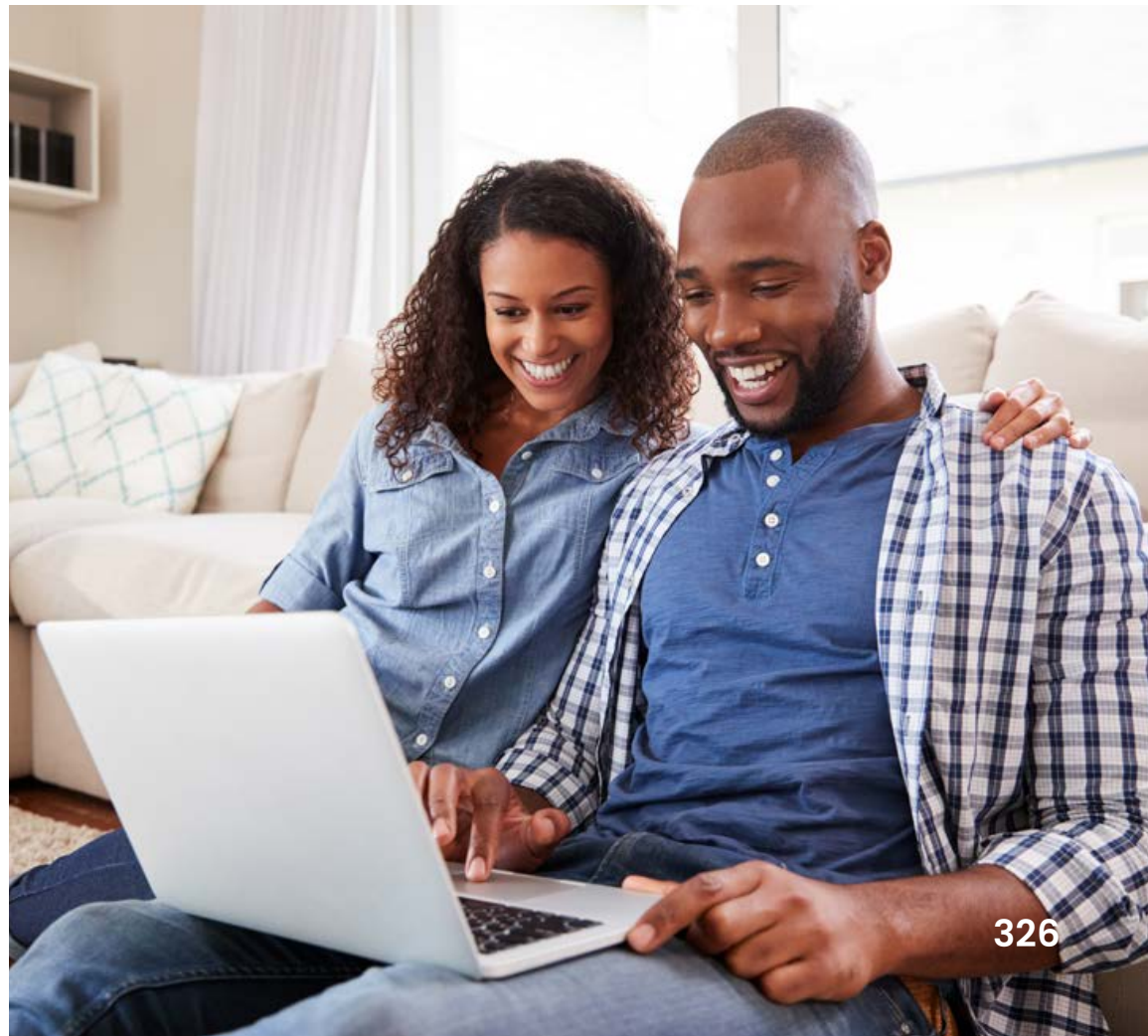
Citations

WordFence Security
Sucuri Security
Limit Login Attempts Reloaded
UpdraftPlus

Chapter 11

WordPress Mistakes to Avoid
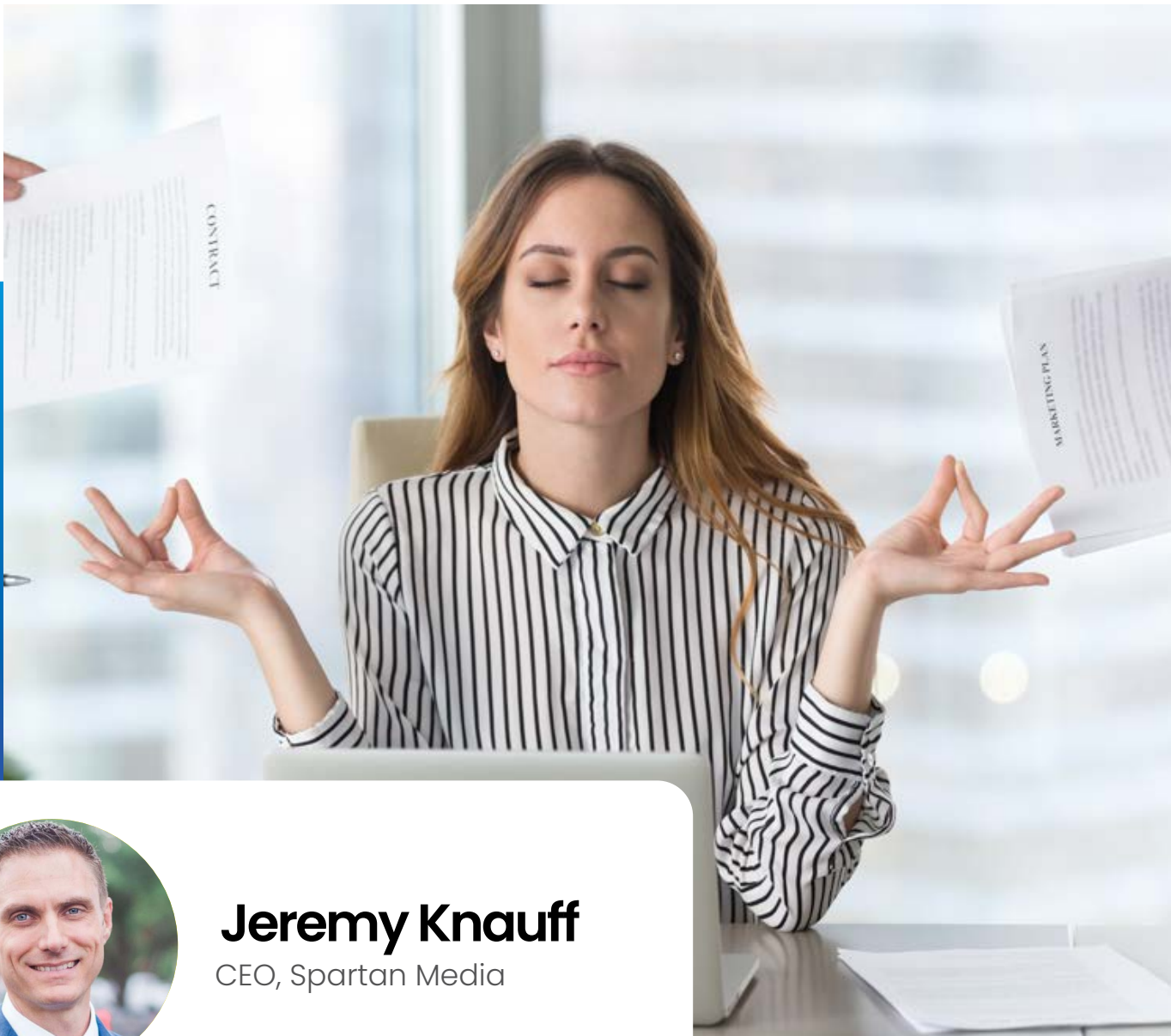
Jeremy Knauff
CEO, Spartan Media

WordPress is an amazingly powerful and flexible tool, but like any tool, its wide array of options means it's easy to make mistakes using it.

While all of these mistakes will adversely affect your website, some can be absolutely devastating. That's why it's so important to know what they are so you can avoid them.

So in this article, I'm going to outline ten common WordPress mistakes and how to avoid them.

Mistake #1: Using Poorly-Coded Themes

This is the first and most important thing to look at because it forms the foundation for your SEO efforts, and frankly, most themes suck in this regard.

Whether your theme is custom-built, purchased from a theme vendor, or downloaded for free from the WordPress repository, there are a few critical details you need to evaluate to ensure it will not put you at a disadvantage, including:

HTML Validation

This is critical because invalid HTML can cause rendering issues, which affect both users and search engines. When this happens, you can lose visitors because your website doesn't display and/or work properly for them, and you can rank poorly because search engines can't properly render your page and understand the content on it.

There's a simple and free tool for checking HTML validation via **W3C's Markup Validation Service** but I want to include a caveat – while I think valid HTML is important, I'm not an HTML validation purist. What I mean by that is there are cases where some errors may not be worth fixing from an ROI (Return on Investment) perspective.

It's also important to note that you may not be able to fix some errors because they may be coming from something you don't have the ability to edit, such as core functionality in some themes or plugins. In cases like this, if you're faced with severe errors that are causing rendering issues, it may make more sense starting over and rebuilding from the ground up.

HTTP Requests

Many themes load a ridiculous number of scripts, images, fonts, and other types of files, which cause your pages to load more slowly.

The worst part is that many themes load these files unnecessarily. Rather than loading files only on pages where they are used, many themes simply load them on every page, which results in a significantly slower load speed. **Page speed** is critical, both for users and for SEO.

There's no particular number to aim for, but fewer is always better from a performance standpoint – especially if your website loads slowly.

Excessive DOM Size

This may sound incredibly technical, but it's actually pretty simple. It just means we need to ensure that the HTML for our WordPress site is as efficient as possible.

While that may seem trivial, efficient HTML code can play a huge role in how well a site performs because each element has an impact on **memory usage, style calculations, and layout reflows.**

Many themes use excessive HTML elements, often nested several levels deep, and this quickly destroys performance. We see this with page builders, but we also see it at the theme-level because most developers focus on the visual appearance with little regard to code efficiency.
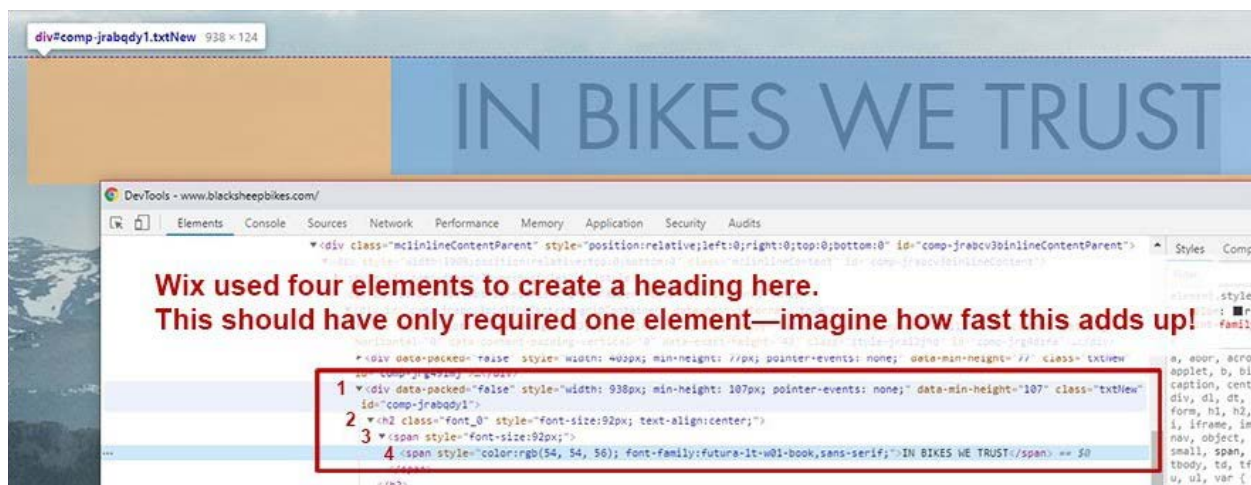
Mistake #2: Using Page Builders

Some may disagree, but I believe using page builders is a huge mistake.

I understand the arguments in favor of them – they make it easier for people to add and edit designed content. But the problem is that they also create a lot of bloated code, add unnecessary HTTP calls, and often, introduce HTML errors that you can't fix.

I've never seen a single page builder that produces clean, efficient code.

I published an extremely in-depth **article about website builders** a while back, and many of the issues that apply there apply equally to WordPress page builders.

Mistake #3: Installing Excessive Plugins

One of the things that makes WordPress so powerful is the simplicity of adding functionality by simply installing one or more plugins. Gone are the days of having to hire a developer and spend thousands, or tens of thousands of dollars just to add a new feature.

But this can also create significant problems.

The first problem is that there's a wide range of development quality in these plugins. As with themes, many plugins are poorly coded, which slows down the load speed and introduces HTML errors into your website. Often, these plugins also load a bunch of scripts, CSS files, images, and fonts, which further degrades speed and creates a poor user experience.

Another problem is that because it's so easy, many people make the mistake of adding too many plugins. This causes your websites to load more slowly no matter how well each one may be coded because it still requires processing power to execute the functionality they provide and to include any external files they load.

Mistake #4: Not Optimizing Media

We're all carrying an incredibly powerful camera in our pocket these days, which gives us the ability to easily add new photos to our WordPress website, but this also leads to a common and significant mistake.

When you take a picture with your iPhone or Android device, the image will generally be significantly larger than it needs to be for use on your website.

These large, high-resolution images are great for printing, or even for cropping a smaller section to be displayed at full size without losing image quality. But if uploaded directly to your WordPress media library, they will often be stored as full-sized, unoptimized images.

Some themes will automatically resize uploads based on a set of dimension pairs to help eliminate this issue. Many do not, however.

If your WordPress site is already up and running and you're just starting to address this issue, the good news is that you don't need to re-upload everything in your media library because there are a variety of plugins available to automatically resize them.

I want to point out that it's absolutely critical to back up your website before running tools like this because if they delete or overwrite something you didn't intend them to, you'll need a way to undo that.

I covered optimization of media extensively in my article **How to Improve Page Speed for More Traffic & Conversions.**
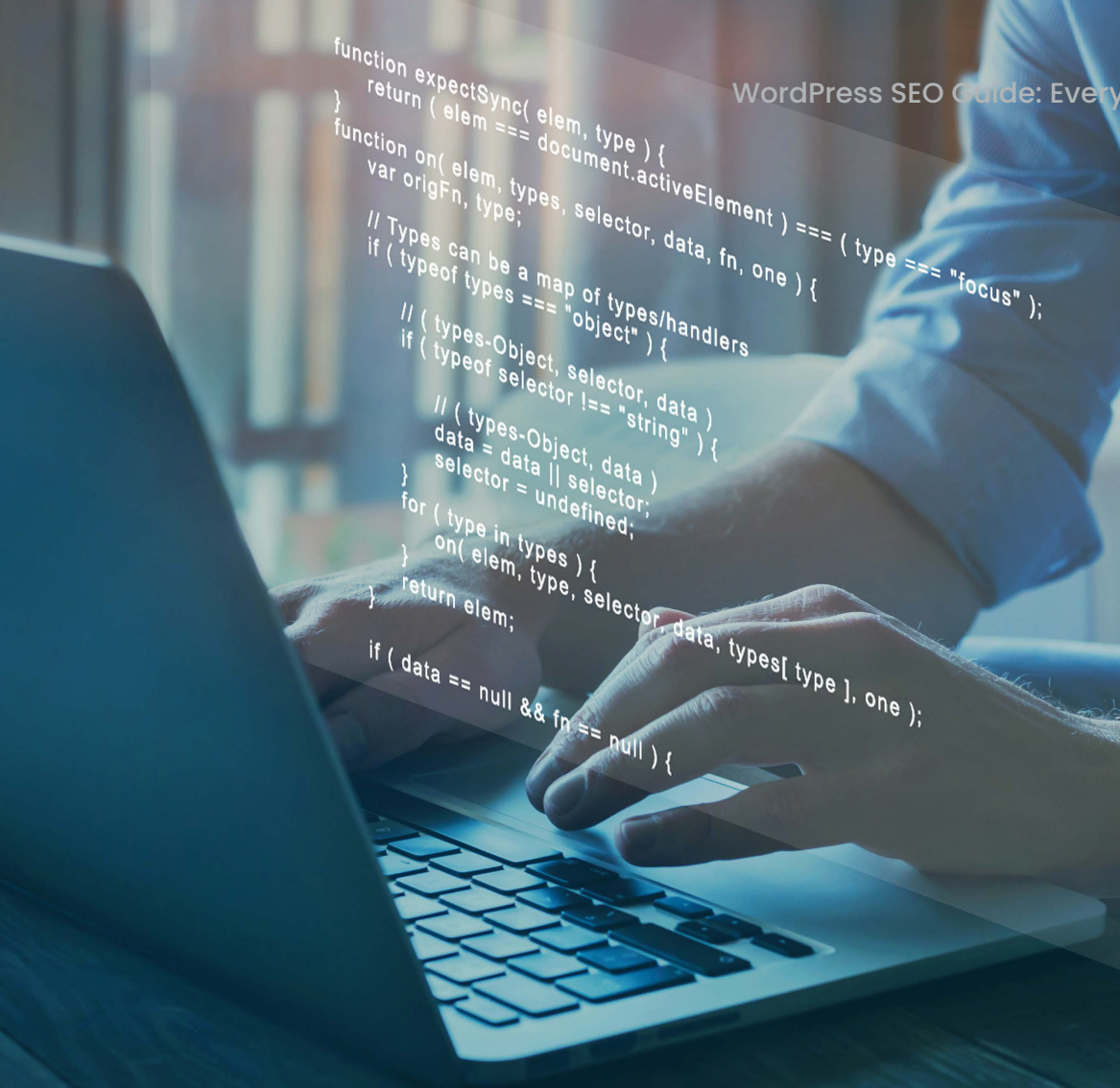
Mistake #5: Omitting an XML Sitemap

While everyone can benefit from having an XML sitemap, this is especially important on larger websites because it helps search engines to find and crawl all of your pages. Particularly the ones that may be buried deep with few links pointing to them.

Surprisingly, this critical feature is not yet native to WordPress, so you will have to rely on a plugin. I generally rely on **Yoast** for this because it also incorporates several other features that we need, but there are a number of plugins that can dynamically create your XML sitemap each time you add, modify, or delete pages, posts, and media.
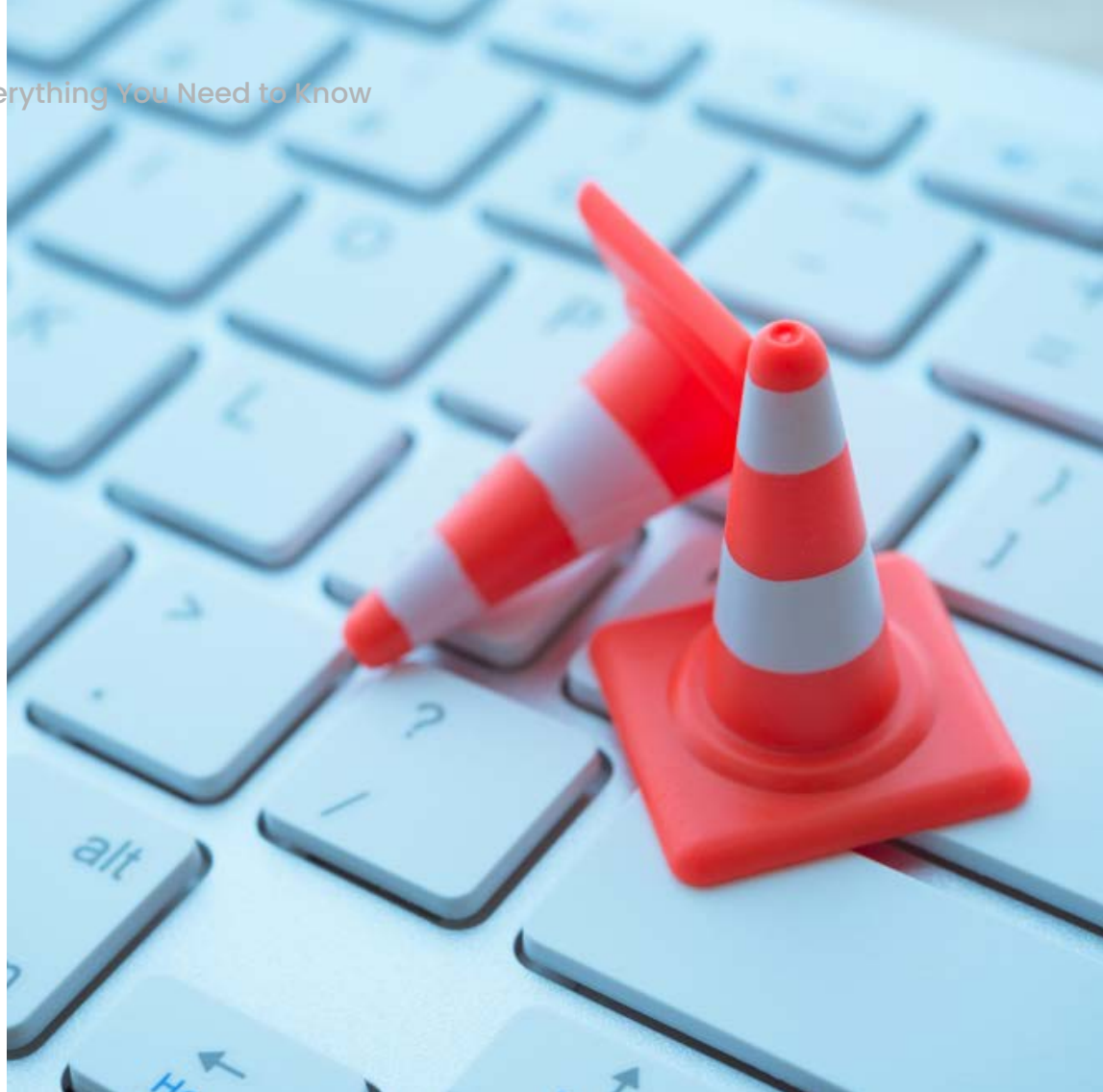
Mistake #6: Skipping Updates

Given what I do for a living, I get to see the backend of a tremendous number of websites, and I am always surprised at how out of date some people are willing to let their plugins and themes and even WordPress core get. After decades of consistently seeing this, I really shouldn't be surprised though.

This common mistake can have devastating consequences because these updates patch not only performance, design, and usability issues, but also security holes that may give hackers the ability to get into your website.

Once they get in, they can do all kinds of malicious things, ranging from the obvious – like deleting or defacing a website, to the subtle – like intercepting credit card info or adding outbound links.

If you know you're the kind of person who won't make time to regularly update WordPress core, I recommend that you turn on automatic updates.

Mistake #7: Overlooking Security

We've already talked about the security implications of not keeping your plugins, themes, and WordPress core up to date, but keeping your website secure goes far beyond that.
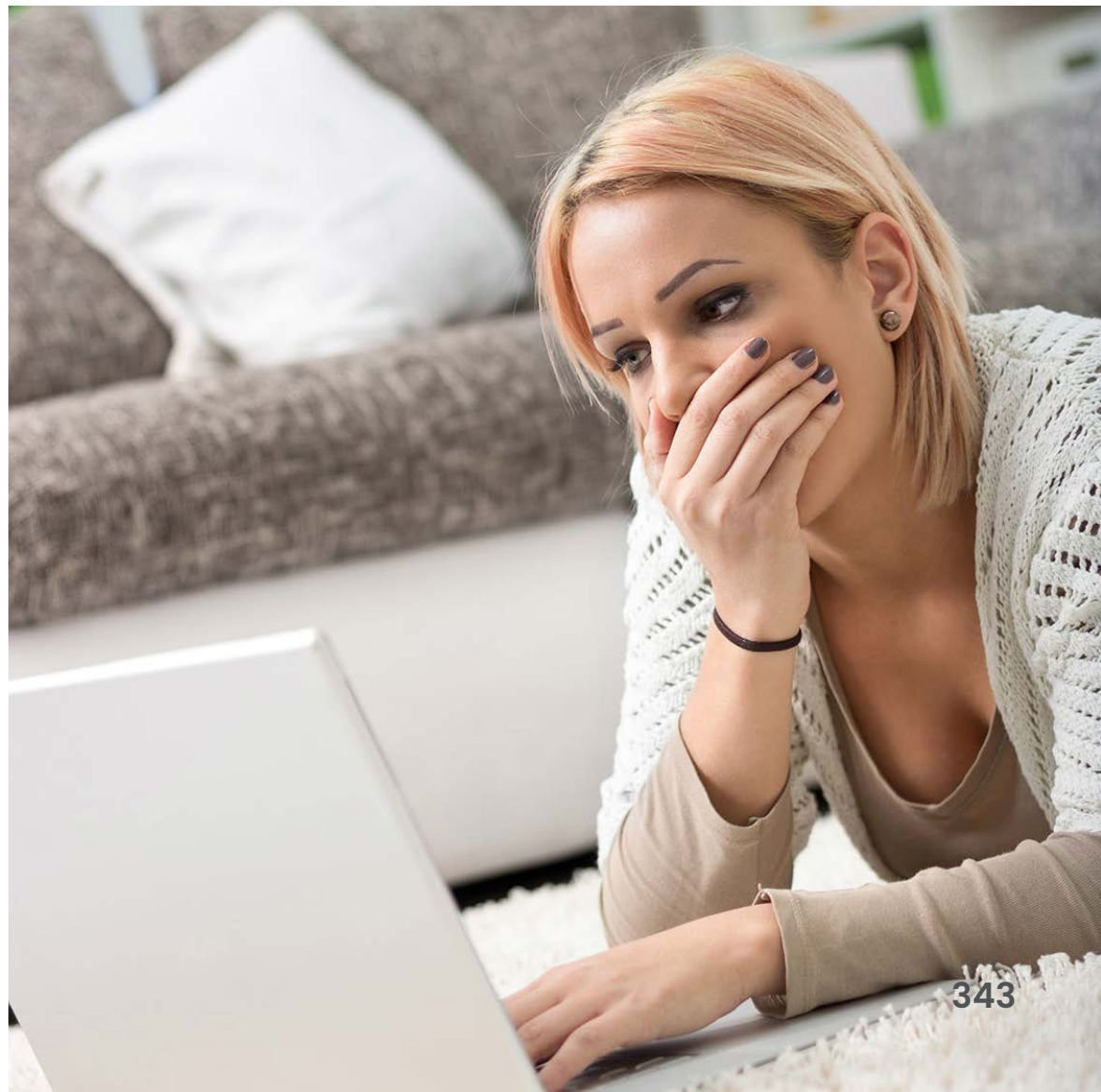
It's important to point out that there is no way to make your website completely secure. But by taking steps to harden your security, you'll deter most hackers, with the rare exception of those who are specifically targeting you.

This is because hacking is largely a numbers game where hackers crawl thousands or even millions of websites looking for easily exploited vulnerabilities.

Don't Use a Default Username

By default, the first username in a WordPress install will generally be "admin" which should be changed because it's the username hackers will try first.

If you're setting up a brand new website, this is simple – just change it during the installation process.

If you have an existing website, there is no way to change usernames within the admin area, however, you can log into your hosting account's phpMyAdmin and modify the WordPress database directly.

You should also change the display name in your user profile so that you aren't broadcasting your username to the world with each post.

Lockdown your admin area

There are multiple ways to limit access to your admin area to a particular IP, which will prevent most hacking attempts.

Linux Server (Most Web Servers)

This is a simple process of creating a .htaccess file with the right content and uploading it to your wp-admin folder.

Simply fire up a text editor, create a new file and paste the code below. Be sure to replace xx.xx.xx.xx with your IP, which you can find by entering "what's my ip" into a Google search.

```
# ALLOW USER BY IP
<Limit GET POST>
order deny,allow
deny from all
# Replace with your IP address
allow from xx.xx.xx.xx
</Limit>
```

Windows Server

I've never hosted anything on a Windows server, and the process here is a bit foreign to me, so if you're on a Windows server, I'll just encourage you to search Microsoft's support documents to find the appropriate process for your version of Windows.

Plugins

I look at this as a last resort because it is the least efficient method to limit access to a particular IP. It also poses another problem in that when your IP changes, you'll be unable to update the plug-in to your new IP.

The only way to access your admin area at that point will be to login via FTP and delete the plugin. If you're going to go through all of that, you're better off just using .htaccess in the first place.

Enable TFA
(Two Factor Authentication)

Two-factor authentication is a powerful tool to protect your website because it sends a code to your mobile device that you must enter before logging in. This means that without physical access to your device, someone else won't be able to access your admin area.

This requires a plugin, and there are a number of free and paid plugins available to create this functionality.

Limit login attempts

This is one more simple way to harden your WordPress website's security by blocking login attempts from a particular IP after a certain number of failed attempts.

This also requires a plugin, and there are a number of free and paid plugins available to create this functionality as well.

Mistake #8: Not Implementing Backups

Everyone needs automated backups – this is an essential part of having a website.

Aside from enabling you to easily roll back changes, it also may help you to quickly recover from a hack by restoring an older version of your website.

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Your backup schedule will depend to some degree on how frequently you modify your website, but at the very least, it should run weekly. I like to keep several months worth of backups in case a hack occurs and goes unnoticed for a while – this enables us to go back far enough to find a clean backup to restore from.

While these backups can live on your webserver to speed up the restore process, ideally, they should also be backed up to the cloud so that you always have a clean copy.

Mistake #9: Omitting Schema

In the world of SEO, we need every advantage we can find, and while schema may not directly impact ranking, it can have a positive impact on clickthrough-rates because of added visual cues.

This means that your website may earn clicks that would have otherwise gone to other higher ranking websites simply because your listing in the search results drew more attention.

Schema is basically a way to communicate to search engines what your content is about, and how the entities within your content relate to each other.

You'll want to implement your schema as JSON, which is a type of JavaScript, rather than microdata, which is HTML markup.

There are a number of plugins available, both free and paid, to help with this, but I personally prefer to write the JSON and insert it into the code myself because this gives me greater control without having to add yet another plugin. And sometimes, we have to do this because plugins can't handle some of the more complex scenarios we run into.

For example, let's say you're working with a national brand with multiple franchise locations. In this case, some pages may need schema for the parent company, while others need the schema for both the parent company and the local franchise. That requires a custom approach.

Mistake #10: Not Properly Configuring Permalinks

The default permalinks that WordPress creates are not ideal from a search perspective, so we'll want to change them.

This is a relatively easy fix, and it's essential because a proper URL structure helps search engines to better understand the hierarchy of your website.

You'll want to change this setting from whatever it's currently at to the following: