

# Getting Started with WordPress Plugins: 11 Things You Need To Know

[iThemes.com](http://iThemes.com) | [PluginBuddy.com](http://PluginBuddy.com) | [WebDesign.com](http://WebDesign.com)



## Introduction

iThemes Media, LLC was founded in 2008 by [Cory Miller](#), a former newspaper journalist and public relations/communication practitioner, turned freelance moonlighting web designer, turned full-time entrepreneur. Miller founded iThemes in his home, fulfilling a lifelong dream of running his own company.

Since then, the company has grown into a full enterprise providing professional, premium themes ([iThemes.com](#)), professional plugins ([PluginBuddy.com](#)) and over 250 hours of professional web design and WordPress developer training – with 15-20 new courses being added each month ([WebDesign.com](#)). These three brands make up what is generally referred to as the iThemes brand.

Throughout this time of growth, we've learned a lot of do's and don'ts. In fact, most of the products we create and our own internal operating procedures have come out of mistakes we've made--and sometimes they were whoppers! (Have you heard the story behind why we created [BackupBuddy](#)?)

If you are reading this, you are probably already using WordPress and are familiar with a handful of plugins. WordPress is an outstanding Content Management System (CMS), which is why we recommend it so strongly and have built an entire business around supporting people who use it.

But WordPress can't do everything alone--that's where plugins come into the picture.

**“There are no limits to what you can do with plugins...but just because you *can* do something with a plugin, doesn’t mean that you *should*.**

**And that’s where [Getting Started with WordPress Plugins](#) comes in.”**

Plugins are tools that expand what you can do with your WordPress site, without having to know how to write or edit code. There are no limits to what you can do with plugins – if you want to do it, there is probably a plugin for it – from design features to SEO, from social media to building a community, from security to spam prevention. There are more than 15,000 plugins available in the WordPress.org repository, and hundreds more premium plugins available in the commercial marketplace.

But just because you can do something with a plugin doesn’t mean that you should. And that’s where [Getting Started with WordPress Plugins](#) comes in.

In [Getting Started with WordPress Plugins](#), we’ll show you eleven things you need to know to help sift through the choices and decisions surrounding the use of plugins to ensure that you create a lean, secure, creative, and functional WordPress site. These practices will serve as guidelines to prevent pitfalls (believe us, we know them), so you can get on with the business of your business.

Ultimately, our goal is to make people’s lives more awesome...and we know that using the Best Plugin Practices to create [rockin’ websites](#) will produce great businesses, and in turn, produce high quality lives and desirable lifestyles. Please let us know what you think and how we can best support you in creating the life you want.

**--The Entire Team at PluginBuddy.com**

## 11 Things You Need to Know:

Sometimes (well, usually) Less is More	4
If You're Not Using It, Delete It	5
Don't Be Too Cool For School	6
Avoid Overlapping Plugins	7
Use the Real McCoy	8
Ask People You Trust	9
Keep Your Plugins Up To Date	10
Consider Coding Minor Plugin Functions	11
When Your Site Stops Working...It's Usually Because of a Plugin	12
Always Use These Must-Have Plugins	13
Practice Respect	15

## Plus:

Tools and Support to Do the Work	17
Recommended Books	19



*This eBook contains [links](#) that a printed version won't.  
Only print if you must.*

## Key #1: Sometimes (well, usually), Less is More

Plugins are great resources because they allow your site to do things it otherwise wouldn't be able to do. But, the more plugins you have, the greater the risk of problems occurring within your site. Plugin problems can be random and unexpected, or more specific issues related to plugin or WordPress upgrades. Plugins can also conflict with other plugins or even themes.

In addition, each active plugin will slow down your site by some amount. Imagine that each active plugin slows down the site by 5 milliseconds (some more and some less). If you have 20 active plugins, that means every page will take a tenth of a second longer to load than if no plugins were active.

If you catch yourself asking "Do I have too many plugins installed?", then you probably do. Just remember to keep the number of plugins reasonable.

## Key #2: If You're Not Using It, Delete It

Many people keep a library of inactive plugins sitting on their site. Since you have the option of deactivating a plugin, it may seem tempting to leave it on your server.

But even disabled plugins can pose a major security risk, so if you aren't using the plugin, remove it entirely. You can always reinstall the plugin if you change your mind later.

## #3:

# Don't Be “Too Cool For School”

There are tons of cool plugins that do fun things. But since plugins slow your site, and could pose some security issues, it's important to make sure the plugin serves a genuine purpose--and isn't installed just because it's cool.

Cool is OK, of course, but probably not a strong enough reason to use a plugin. Each plugin you use should do something important to enhance your visitor's experience at your your site. The way you use plugins affects your site's design, and ultimately affects your brand\*\*.

\*\*Check out the special report at [iThemes.com](http://iThemes.com) on [The 5 Keys To Rockin' Websites](#) to learn about the importance of branding.

## #4:

# Avoid Overlapping Plugins

Plugins that overlap in services are just taking up valuable space and bandwidth, and potentially posing additional security risks. You simply don't need 4 plugins that handle redirections, 6 plugins that create SEO, and 8 different social networking sharing plugins.

In addition to slowing your site down, it's just more you have to keep up with. And who wants that?



## #5: Use The *Real McCoy*

Use plugins that come from either the WordPress Repository (extend) or from a trusted premium plugin developer, like PluginBuddy.com.

Since plugins have the potential to create security gaps in your site, you want to be sure they have been vetted by knowledgeable developers who stand behind their work with professional support.

Trusted plugin providers will provide updates to address any bugs or security issues, as well as updates to keep pace with the latest version of WordPress.

## #6: Ask People You Trust

The WordPress community is a rich resource of people who love what they do, have tested and tried many different plugins, and are eager to help out and share advice. Use their knowledge and experience if you have questions about a plugin. For example, you could ask people on Twitter whether they like one plugin or another. Use the hashtag #WordPress and you're sure to get more advice than you expected!

## #7: Keep Your Plugins Up To Date

Developers provide updates to their plugins to:

- a) add new functionality
- b) patch security holes and to fix bugs
- c) keep up with the ever changing WordPress Core.

If you aren't updating your plugins when the developer provides it, you are exposing yourself to potential frustrations and possible breaches. As plugin developers, we can honestly tell you that we don't update plugins just for the fun of it (well, it is fun), but we ultimately want to ensure that our plugins function at their peak levels of performance. And that's what we want for you and your site--peak performance!

## #8: Consider Coding Minor Plugin Functions

If a plugin only performs a minor function, the code may be better off residing on the theme's functions.php file rather than within a stand-alone plugin. Plugins are great because they provide the coding for you, but if the function is really simple, why not save your plugin "bandwidth" for more critical functions?

Just remember that if you place the functionality in the theme file, it stays with the theme. If you change themes, that functionality goes away, too. Make a note to remember these details and recreate it for your new theme. Another (advanced) option is to code an all-inclusive plugin that has your common functions and just use that.

**\*\***Learning how to write code in your theme files can seem daunting, but with the right guidance it doesn't have to be difficult. The [WordPress Developer Course](#), a benefit of membership at [WebDesign.com](#), shows you how edit your functions.php file as a way of minimizing the number of plugins you use.

## #9: When Your Site Stops Working... It's Usually Because of a Plugin

If some part of your site just all of a sudden isn't "working like it did before", then it's likely a conflict between plugins or between a plugin and your theme. If you've recently added a plugin, you can bet a plugin conflict is the source of the problem. This doesn't mean you can't use the plugin--but you'll have to figure out what's going on so you can make an informed choice about how to proceed.

The best way to "find the problem" is to deactivate all your plugins... and slowly (one-by-one) reactivate the plugins to find the plugin causing the issue. Once you know which plugin is the culprit, you can then evaluate the importance of that particular plugin.

## #10: Always Use These Must-Have Plugins!

From our experience, these plugins are vital to every WordPress site.

They perform exceptional functions that would be challenging for even the intermediate WordPress user to code into their functions.php file. Because they come from reputable and trusted sources and have been individually developed by professional plugin developers, you can rest assured they are secure and safe.

**BackupBuddy** – Already in use on over 11,000 sites, this plugin is an absolute MUST. BackupBuddy is the only backup solution that backs up your entire WordPress installation – not just the database – AND allows you to migrate or restore your site with just a few clicks. With BackupBuddy, you can literally be back up and running within seconds of a crashed site.

**LoopBuddy** – This brand new and innovative plugin gives you complete control over how the WordPress “Loop” displays your content. LoopBuddy allows you to control the way your content looks, lets you create different looks for different types of content, and even gives you the flexibility to create a new Loop (look) for each post, page, category, archive, post type, etc. LoopBuddy can be used on any theme in widgets and by using shortcodes.

For the full LoopBuddy experience, your theme should be compatible with LoopBuddy. If your theme isn't already, contact your theme developer and ask them to add the code that will open up the Loop for you to use LoopBuddy. (Or consider using [iThemes Builder](#) since it's already fully compatible.)

**Gravity Forms** – Gravity Forms is like contact forms on steroids. It would probably be more accurate to describe it as a complete information gathering system. You can use this plugin for simple and advanced contact forms, but also for order forms and other information gathering essentials. It even includes add-ons for some email programs, Paypal, Freshbooks, and more.

\*\*We use Gravity Forms at [PluginBuddy.com](http://PluginBuddy.com) – in fact, we use it on all our brand websites.

**Google XML Sitemaps** – This is an essential plugin for helping search engines index your site more effectively and efficiently. With this sitemap, the search engine crawlers can see the complete structure of your site and retrieve it more efficiently. Additionally, this plugin will notify all major search engines every time you create a post about new content.

**Widget Logic** - This plugin gives every widget an extra control field called “Widget logic” that lets you control the pages that the widget will appear on. This is perfect for creating customized sidebars for categories, specific pages, or special promotions you have going on. What’s also nice is that the developer, rather than asking for a donation to himself, suggests if you like and use the plugin, that you consider a small donation to Cancer Research in the UK.

**All-in-One-SEO Pack** – This plugin optimizes your WordPress site for search engines. Not only can you set specific SEO data for each page or post, you can override any title and set any meta description or keywords you want. It works right out of the box for beginners – even optimizing your titles automatically - or advanced users can configure the more advanced settings.

## #11: Practice Respect

Sometimes with plugins it's a matter of "you get what you pay for". If you use a free plugin, remember that you haven't paid for all the hard work the developer did – work that makes your site better. You also haven't paid for support, so be reasonable in what you expect or request.

With premium plugins, you will receive upgrades and support based on the terms of your license (often an annual license). Make sure you know the terms – and definitely take advantage of the great support being offered. The WordPress community is a close one. Word about how you treat one developer will spread, so we still recommend practicing respect in all your interactions.

At PluginBuddy, we take support seriously and have built our business around providing world-class support to accompany our premium plugins. We are so committed to this that we have full-time employees around the globe available to serve and assist. With that kind of dedication and financial outlay, we offer our plugins with an annual license to cover upgrades and support. Without it, well, we wouldn't be able to provide support and upgrades, which in our book, would be disrespectful toward our customers.



## Bonuses:

While these eleven things you need to know are pretty straightforward, we also recognize that living up to all these might take some work. This section is designed to share tools and resources we use on a regular basis that may be of assistance to you.

Our goal is that you have the most rockin' website you can, and that your plugins support what you want your site to do without weighing it down. When you do this, you are well on your way to creating a rocking website that helps you design a great business and live an awesome life.

### Tools and Support to Do the Work:

PluginBuddy

BackupBuddy

iThemes Builder

WebDesign.com

The Web Designer's ToolKit

Hostgator Hosting

Gravity Forms

### Recommended Books

WordPress All-in-One for Dummies

WordPress for Dummies

## Tools and Support to Do the Work:

### **PluginBuddy**

PluginBuddy has an entire collection of WordPress plugins that can help you customize your site, giving it a unique look and creating a magnetic experience for your readers. Basically the plugins at PluginBuddy help you do more, more easily. From back up to mobile to unique plugins for displaying content, we've got you covered.

[Read more](#)

### **BackupBuddy**

This is our #1 selling plugin because of how easy it is to use and how much peace and relief it brings to users. Knowing your site is backed up and can be restored or migrated at a moment's notice gives you power and control over your site.

[Read more](#)

### **iThemes Builder**

A powerful WordPress theme that gives you flexibility and functionality, without having to modify any of your theme code. It also includes support from the iThemes team to help you make the most of Builder, plus the Builder SEO plugin and the super-easy-to-use Style Manager.

[Read more](#)

### **WebDesign.com**

WebDesign.com already has over 250 hours of professional WordPress and web design training available, with 15-20 additional courses being added every month. Membership also includes the much-raved about WordPress Developer's Course, as well as multiple premium training programs.

[Read more](#)

### **The Web Designer's ToolKit**

This is the 3-in-1 success building toolkit for anyone wanting to manage their own website or have their own web design business. This ToolKit includes everything you need – the All-Access Theme Pass, PluginBuddy Developer Suite, WebDesign.com Premium Annual Membership and your personal copy of WordPress All-in-One for Dummies.

[Read more](#)

### **Hostgator Hosting**

Our recommended WordPress-friendly and BackupBuddy-friendly hosting resource.

[Read more](#)

### **Gravity Forms**

Contact Forms, Order Forms, plus so much more.

[Read more](#)

## Recommended Books:

### *WordPress All-in-One for Dummies*

A thorough how-to guide for maximizing your WordPress experience. This one giant book includes eight mini-books in one. (Our own Cory Miller is one of the authors!) *WordPress All-in-One For Dummies* is included with the [Web Designer's ToolKit](#) from [iThemes.com](#).

### *WordPress for Dummies*

The basic best-selling guide to WordPress for beginners, fully updated for the newest version of WordPress. Written by Lisa Sabin-Wilson, a good friend of iThemes and founder of one of our partner companies, [AllureThemes.com](#).

PluginBuddy is the leader in premium, professional WordPress plugins for web developers and website owners who want rockin' websites that get the job done without having to touch a line of code.

PluginBuddy provides a full library of plugins to meet virtually all professional website needs, making it easier for sites to produce better results. Each PluginBuddy plugin is accompanied by world-class support and updates.

Visit [PluginBuddy.com](https://PluginBuddy.com) to select the plugins you need.

## **SPECIAL OFFER**

### **Save 25%**

Purchase any plugin from [PluginBuddy.com](https://PluginBuddy.com), including the all-encompassing **PluginBuddy Developer Suite**, and save 25% by using the coupon code **PBTHANKS25** at checkout.

Your savings will be applied automatically and within moments you can be on your way to using your brand new plugins!

**Create your Rockin' website today!**