

WordCamp Asia 2023

# How can theme developers monetize in the era of Block Themes?

Hidekazu Ishikawa  
@kurudrive



# Who am I ? - Self introduction -

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Hidekazu Ishikawa

 From Japan

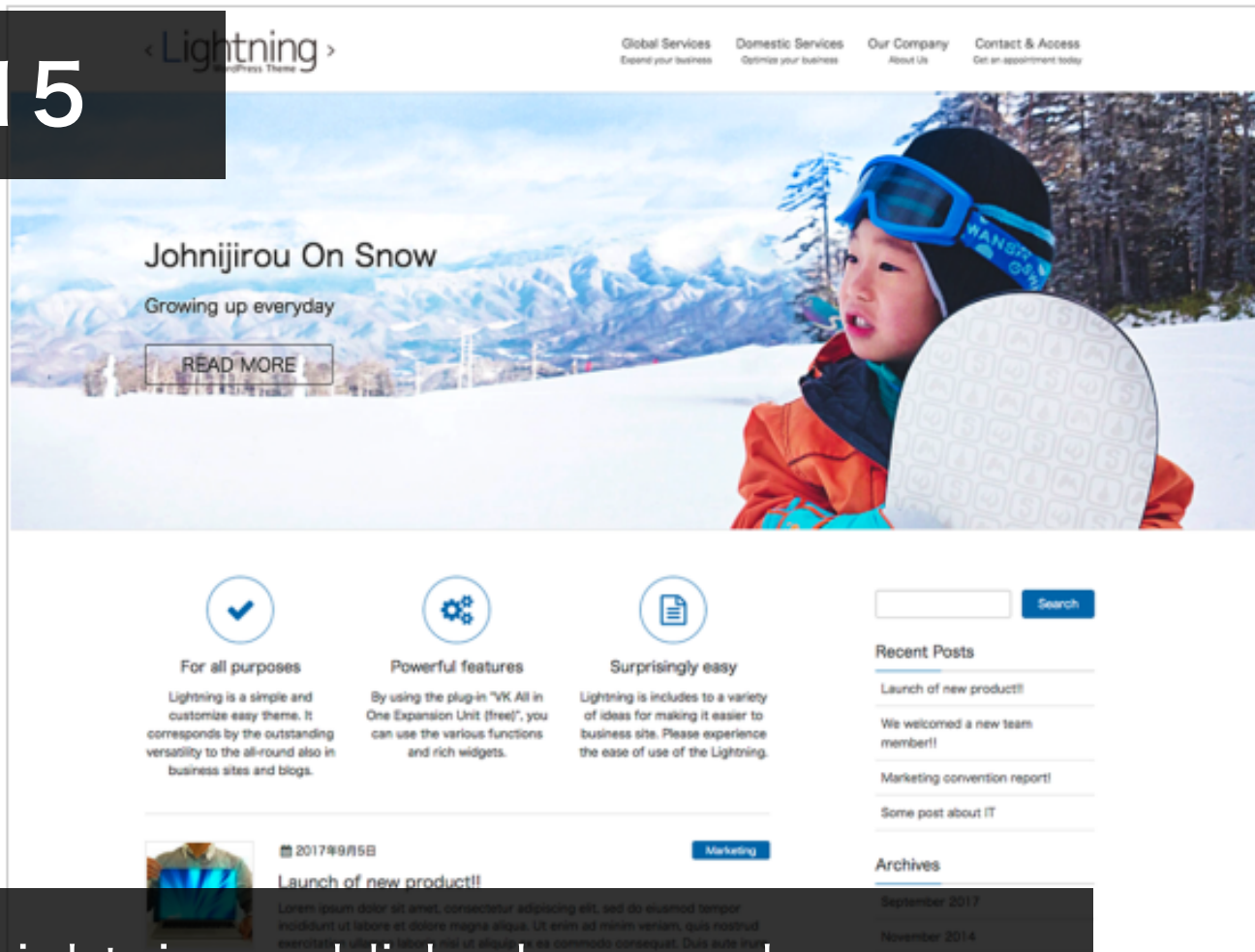
 Theme developer / CEO



In 2012, General-purpose theme development



2015



Theme Lightning published on wordpress.org

Thanks to 80,000+ active installs

Lightning is a very simple & easy to customize theme which is based on the Bootstrap. It is also very friendly with custom post types and custom taxonomies. When you add a new one, the breadcrumbs will be adjusted and posts will look beautifully without editing or adding a template files.

Preview

Download

Version: 15.2.4

Last updated: December 26, 2022

Active Installations: 80,000+

WordPress Version: 5.5 or higher

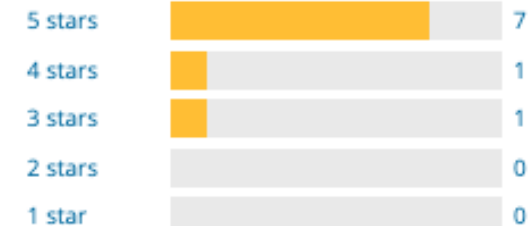
PHP Version: 5.6.0 or higher

[Theme Homepage](#) →

## Ratings

[See all >](#)

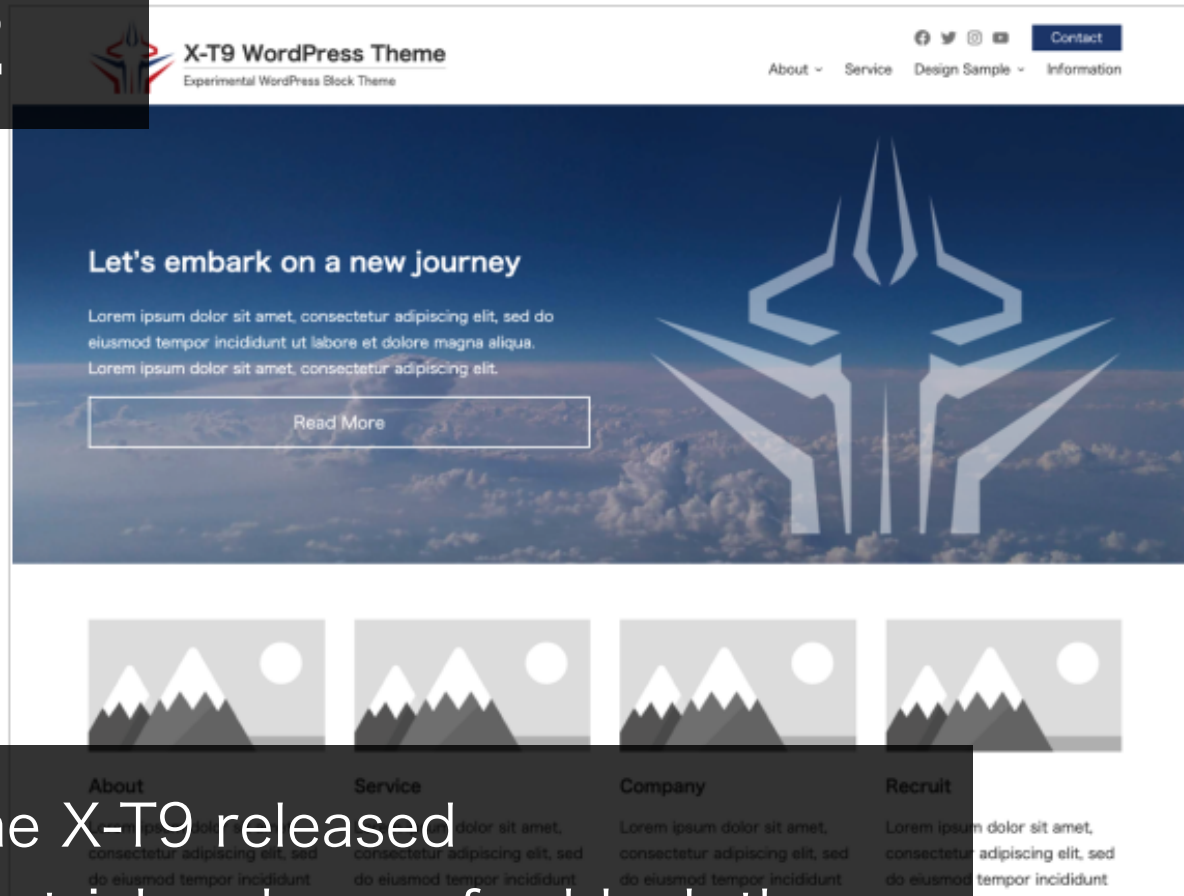
★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5 stars.



Add my review

2022

# X-T9 By Hidekazu Ishikawa



Style variations

Preview

Download

Version: 1.3.4

Last updated: December 23, 2022

Active Installations: 200+

WordPress Version: 6.1 or higher

PHP Version: 7.2 or higher

[Theme Homepage →](#)

## Ratings

[See all >](#)

This theme has not been rated yet.

5 stars		0
4 stars		0
3 stars		0
2 stars		0
1 star		0

[Add my review](#)

Block theme X-T9 released  
Currently in trial and error for block theme

In addition, development and sales of other plug-ins

# Business model of theme authors ( Before full site editing )

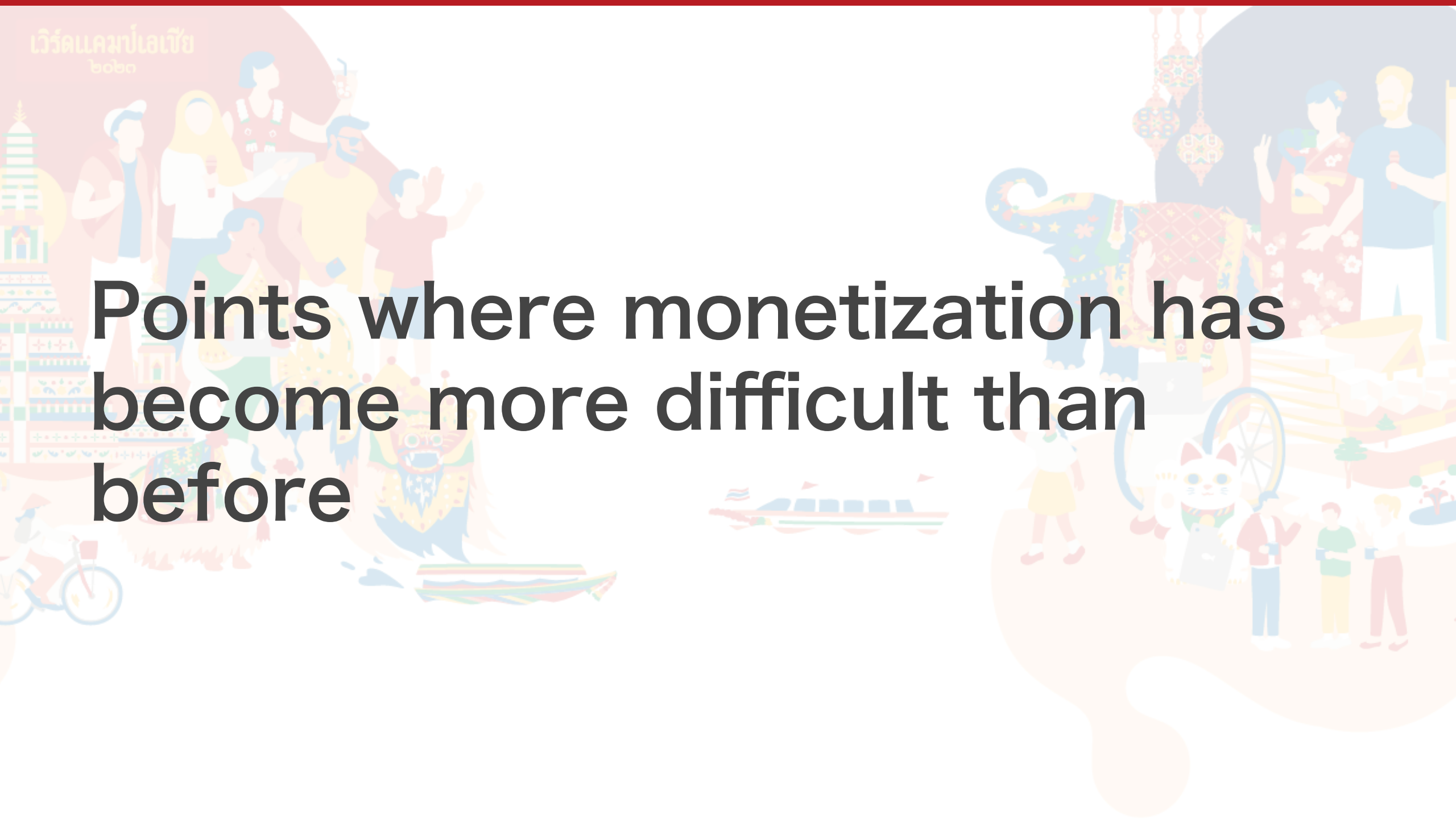
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## Sale

- Premium Theme (Classic theme)
- theme extension plugin
- block extension plugin ... etc.

Simply create a theme → Sell zip file

Relatively possible to sell and make money.



**Points where monetization has  
become more difficult than  
before**

**# 01**

**Traditional monetization points  
become less effective**

# Before Full Site Editting

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Selling Premium theme

 Header Setting

 Footer Setting

 Layout Setting

 Slider Setting ...etc

 User

↑ Easily edit /  Reward ↓




 Theme authors



# Era of Full Site Editing

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The entire site can be customized with no code!

-  Header and footer layout
  -  Specify color and font size
  -  Margin / Padding / Gap settings ...etc
- Much less theme dependent.

**Then as someone who made a living out of  
theme sales...**

Monetization points  
disappeared!!!!

$((((( ;^\circ \omega^\circ )))$

A matter of life and death

**# 02**

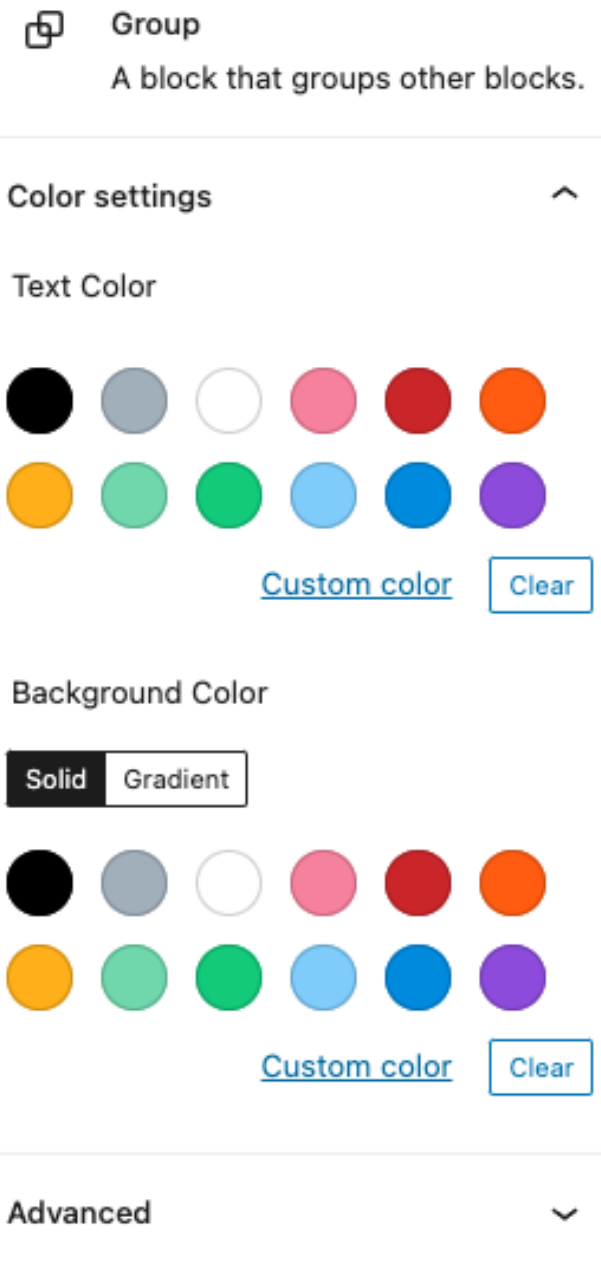
**Decreased monetization effect  
by original Block features.**

# Early block editors

- 😞 No margin adjustment function
- 😞 No border setting
- 😞 Can't Advanced layout  
( need like Media Block ) ... etc

We have developed our original blocks

→ Used them as added value  
(monetization points).



# WordPress version upgrade...

- Advanced layouts are now possible with core blocks (Block Patterns).
- The similar function is added to the core block, etc.

 Group  
Gather blocks in a container.



Color ⋮

☐ Text

☐ Background

Typography ⋮

SIZE DEFAULT ↔

S M L XL

Dimensions ⋮

PADDING ↔ ↺

BLOCK SPACING ↔

Border ⋮

☐ PX ● ↺ ↻

RADIUS

PX ● ↺ ↻

Advanced ⌵

Monetization points  
disappeared!!!!

$((((( ;^\circ \omega^\circ )))$



## In addition ...

- Released original blocks become an ongoing maintenance burden
- We have to keep checking Gutenberg's development closely ( to avoid unnecessary development ).

**# 03**

**CSS output by WordPress  
becomes complicated**

- The influence of CSS output by WordPress has increased
- It is difficult to deal with specification changes such as block CSS
- Apart from CSS knowledge, it became essential to understand WordPress's unique CSS method

Probably many theme & custom block developers are facing this issue?

However, it is inevitable in the evolution of WordPress.

| T – T ) .oO ( I know. I love WordPress... )

In this way,

The area that theme developers have focused on for monetization is greatly influenced by full site editing.

As a result, I feel that the conventional monetization of "theme sales" will be difficult.



# Future direction of theme-related business

**How add value and  
differentiate?**

( • W • ?

# Differentiation by block pattern

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## 🔑 Easiest way

Selling themes and plugins that include various block patterns

Header / Footer / Contents etc.

There is nothing that users cannot create on their own,  
so it is weak as a point of monetization.



# Differentiation by Global Styles variations

## 🔧 New Easiest way

“Global Styles variations” Feature Introduced in WordPress 6.0

We can create different variations within a single theme.



# Block Patterns / Global Style Variations

Even general users can make it, but...

- High quality products created by professional designers  
→ High added value of course

👉 New extensibility and monetization points.

# Our case

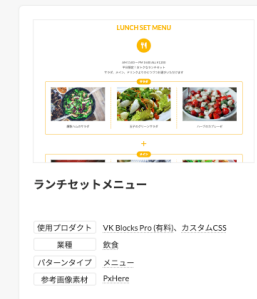
## Publish our own Block Pattern Directory

<https://patterns.vektor-inc.co.jp/>

 Only available in Japanese

(Inspired by the Org site:

<https://wordpress.org/patterns/>)

This image shows the search and filter interface. It includes two dropdown menus for '業種' (Industry) and '使用プロダクト' (Used Product), both currently set to '指定なし' (Not Specified). Below these are checkboxes for 'パターンタイプ' (Pattern Type), including 'セクション' (116), 'CTA' (11), 'Q&A' (5), 'コラムレイアウト' (41), 'スタッフ紹介' (5), 'スライダー' (5), 'テキスト' (2), 'ヒーローエリア' (10), 'ボタン' (4), 'メニュー' (9), 'レビュー' (3), '地図' (1), '料金表' (8), '注目' (1), '流れ' (11), '表' (3), '製品紹介' (3), 'プレミアムパターン' (59), and 'ページ全体' (46). There are also checkboxes for '404' (1), 'サービス案内' (7), 'トップページ・LP' (6), 'プライバシーポリシー' (1), '会社案内' (5), and '採用情報' (3). A '使用デモサイト' (Use Demo Site) dropdown is set to '指定なし', and a 'キーワード' (Keyword) input field is empty. There are checkboxes for '気に入りで絞り込む' (Filter by Favorite) and '気に入りで絞り込む' (Filter by Favorite), with a link to '詳細はこちら' (Details Here). A red '検索' (Search) button is at the bottom.

**Why we created our own pattern directory?**



# 1. Still difficult only with core blocks

Want to use our original blocks and CSS  
to provide higher quality patterns

! .org allowed only core blocks and can't use Custom CSS.

## 2. language problem

Characters look different in English and double-byte characters



English

News

Download

Extensions

Learn

Community

About



Get WordPress

## Pricing table

[Buttons](#) [Columns](#) [Featured](#)

Copy Pattern

Add to favorites

Even if it looks not bad in English but...

Default (960px)

### Single

Enrich our  
growing  
community.

- General admission and member discounts for one adult

### Family

Support  
special  
exhibitions.

- General admission and member discounts for two adults

### Patron

Take support  
to the next  
level.

- General admission and member discounts for two adults



# Japanese

## 価格表

[Buttons](#) [Columns](#) [Featured](#)[Copy Pattern](#)

The balance is bad.

Default (960px) ▾

### 個人

成長するコミュニティをサポート。

- 大人1名の一般入場料と会員割引
- 特別展ごとに1枚の無料チケット

### ファミリー

特別展示をサポート。

- 大人2名の一般入場料と会員割引
- 特別展ごとに4枚の

### 後援者

次のレベルの支援。

- 大人2名の一般入場料と会員割引
- 特別展ごとに5枚の無料チケット



### **3. Theme style affects**

Even if user paste the .org pattern,  
user need to make adjustments.

## 4. Monetization

| = w = ) .oO ( We can't monetize only with the .org pattern directory, so... )

# How we monetize?

( • W • )

# Through our pattern directory, Offer premium features to paying users

## Paid User Benefits

1. Premium patterns available
2. Favorite pattern registration function
3. Link function for favorite registered patterns

# 1. Premium patterns

- As the name suggests, the design and sample sentences are more elaborate and ready to use.
- Patterns available to only paying users  
(need logged in)

## 2. Favorite pattern registration function

Patterns are added one after another

→ hard to find

Function to register own favorite patterns

※ Same functionality as [wordpress.org](https://wordpress.org)

### 3. Link function for favorite registered patterns

Call patterns registered in favorites from the user's site with API

Users can use it directly from the edit screen of their site

[ image screen capture or fig ]

# What is a value-added pattern?

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Creating and developing more patterns has become very important for developers who were in the theme sales business.

Where is the added value that is the key to monetization?



# With many beautiful patterns, is it easy to make a page?

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Of course we make and provide stylish and common patterns. But...

- Many non-professional users can't think about page structure in the first step
- They can't think of the sentences to write



## **For the End-user ( Business owner )**

Just rewrite the text to suit their business.

## **Commissioned creation**

By using a pattern as a draft of the page,  
the meeting with the client becomes smooth

# Localization is essential

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When providing as a pattern for the entire page including sentences

- Must be in the language of the country
- A design optimized for each language (characters/typefaces) is better
- Content and design trends vary by region (country)

🔑 With localized versions, no competition with English-speaking developers.

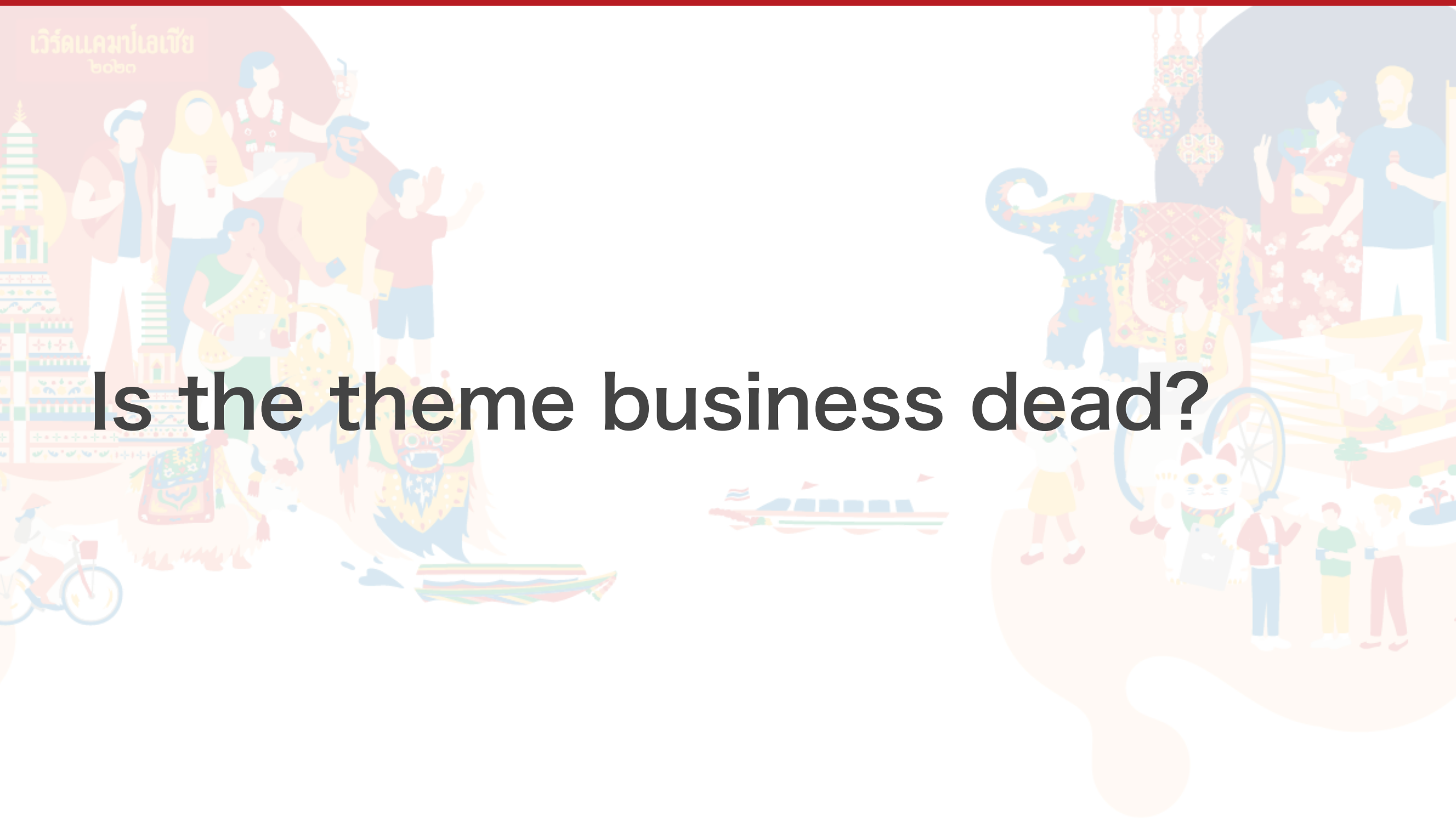
# Demerit

- Non-English = fewer targets
- Industry limited = fewer targets
- Hard to make properly

(=W=;

เวิร์ดแคมป์เอเชีย  
๒๐๒๓

**Is the theme business dead?**



# Theme is important after all

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Themes and patterns are closely related to the global styles

Bring in a partial pattern from outside and use it

→ There is a problem with the uniformity of the design.

Having said that "full site editing reduces theme dependency", **the importance of the theme is high.**

# Has the barrier to entry been lowered?

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Designers who are not good at programming

- Designers can a variety of products without programming skills.
- It is necessary to understand WordPress-unique specifications such as theme.json
- Need to make and provide a lot of patterns



# Users need good themes and highly practical patterns

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FSE is highly configurable and customizable but...  
→ Too much configuration work

**It's quite cumbersome to make from scratch**

Adobe Illustrator ≠ Anyone can create high-quality designs to meet their purpose

# Responsive design compatibility

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How to control display elements according to screen size?

With a single screen width, it might be possible to lay out well somehow.

However, when it comes to layout on multiple widths, it's actually not that easy.

If a theme/pattern to meet your purpose is available, you can have website faster by purchasing it.

It will be difficult to monetize the theme alone, but...

Considering it as a set with a value-added patterns and global styles,  
there will be many business opportunities.

If a theme/pattern to meet your purpose is available, you can have website faster by purchasing it.

# At the end

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What do you think about future theme business?

Please share your opinion

- Twitter #WCAsia @kurudrive
- Talk to me! ( with simple words and short sentence )

**Thank you**