

WordCamp Asia 2023

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

Hidekazu Ishikawa

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Who am I ? - Self introduction -

Hidekazu Ishikawa

-  kurudrive / kurudrive_en
-  From Japan
-  Theme developer / CEO



2012 First General-purpose theme published.

Lightning

By [Hidekazu Ishikawa](#)



2015

The screenshot shows the Lightning theme homepage. At the top, there's a banner with a photo of a child wearing ski goggles and a snowboard. Below the banner, the title "Johnijirou On Snow" and subtitle "Growing up everyday" are displayed, with a "READ MORE" button. The main content area has three circular features: "For all purposes" (checkmark icon), "Powerful features" (gear icon), and "Surprisingly easy" (document icon). To the right, there's a search bar and a "Recent Posts" sidebar with links like "Launch of new product!!", "We welcomed a new team member!!", "Marketing convention report!", and "Some post about IT". At the bottom, there's a "Marketing" category section and an "Archives" section showing posts from September 2017.

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

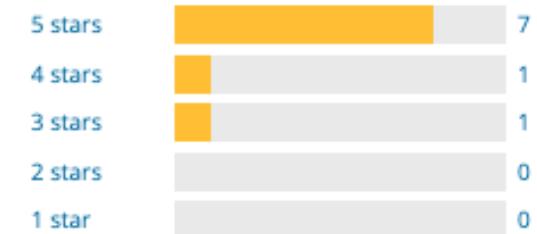
PHP Version: 5.6.0 or higher

[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

Ratings

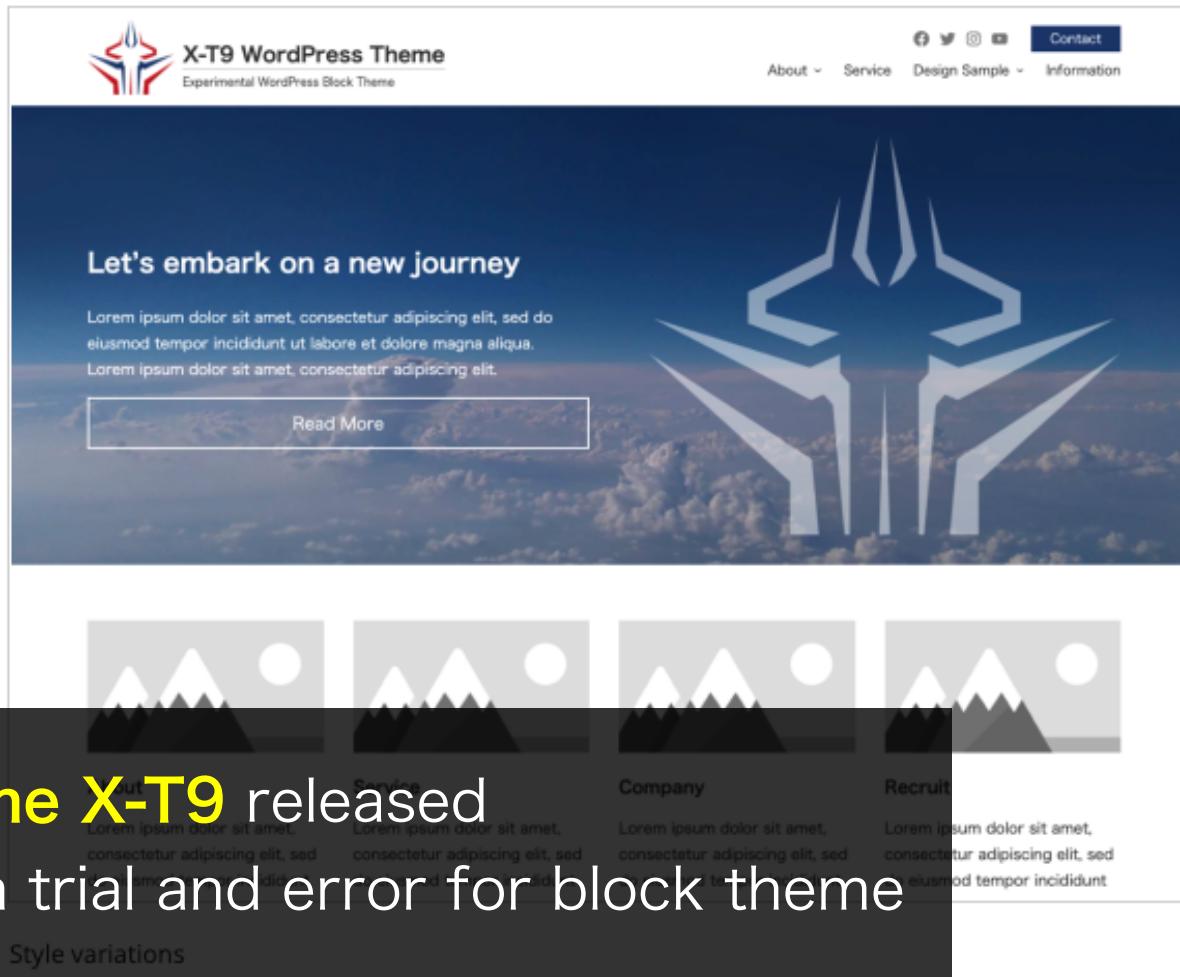
★★★★★ 4.5 out of 5 stars.



[Add my review](#)

2022

X-T9 By Hidekazu Ishikawa



Block theme X-T9 released

Currently in trial and error for block theme

In addition, development and sales of **theme extension plugin** and other plug-ins

[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

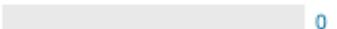
[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

Ratings

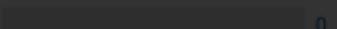
This theme has not been rated yet.

5 stars  0

4 stars  0

3 stars  0

2 stars  0

1 star  0

[Add my review](#)

Business model of theme authors (Before full site editing)

Create and Sale

- ➥ Premium Themes
- ➥ Theme extension plugins
- ➥ Block extension plugins ... etc.

➥ Relatively possible to sell and make money.



Points where monetization has become more difficult

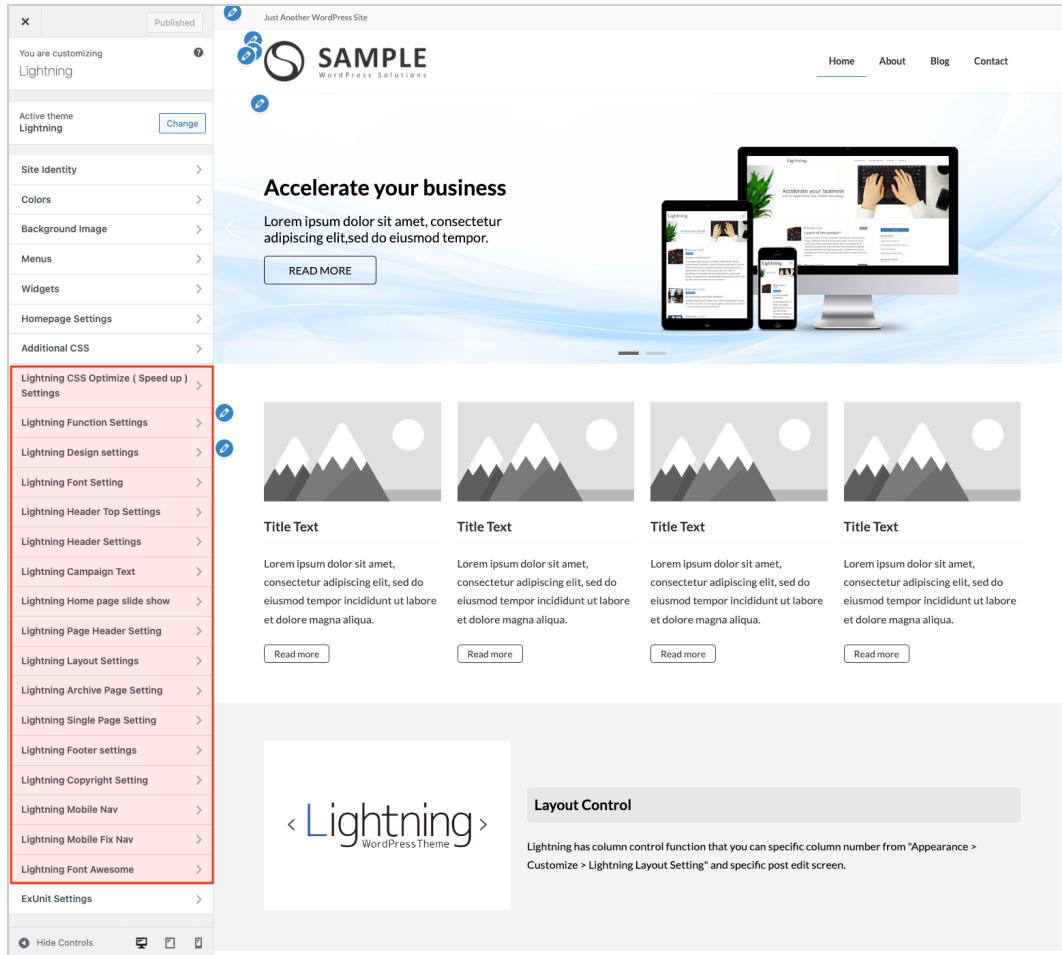
01

Traditional monetization points
become less effective



Before Full Site Editting

Selling Premium theme



😊 User

↑ Easily edit ↓ Reward 💰

😊 Theme authors

Era of Full Site Editing

The entire site can be customized with no code!

- ✍ Header and footer layout
- ✍ Specify color and font size
- ✍ Margin / Padding / Gap settings ...etc

I can do it !

→ **Much less theme dependent.**



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

Monetization points disappeared...

(` ; w ; `)

A matter of life and death

illilli _|_ |○ illilli

02

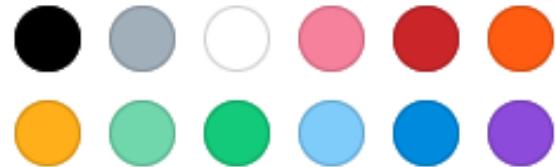
Decreased monetization effect
by original Block features.



 Group
A block that groups other blocks.

Color settings ^

Text Color



[Custom color](#)

[Clear](#)

Background Color

[Solid](#) [Gradient](#)



[Custom color](#)

[Clear](#)

Advanced ▼

Early stage block editors

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

We have developed our original blocks

→ Added value (monetization points).

 Group
Gather blocks in a container.



Color

Text

Background

Typography

SIZE DEFAULT

S M L XL

Dimensions

PADDING

BLOCK SPACING

Border

PX

RADIUS

PX

WordPress version upgrade...

- Advanced layouts are now possible with **Core blocks** and **Block Patterns**.
- The **similar function** is added to the **core blocks**

Monetization points disappeared...

(` ; w ; `)

In addition ...

- Original blocks become an
ongoing maintenance burden
- It became necessary to
keep a close watch on Gutenberg's developments.
※ to avoid unnecessary development.

03

CSS output by WordPress
became quite complicated



Many theme & custom block developers are facing this issue?

It is inevitable in the evolution of WordPress.

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

The area that theme developers have focused on for monetization is greatly influenced by FSE.

It has become difficult to monetize traditional "theme sales".



Future direction of theme-related business

How add value and differentiate?



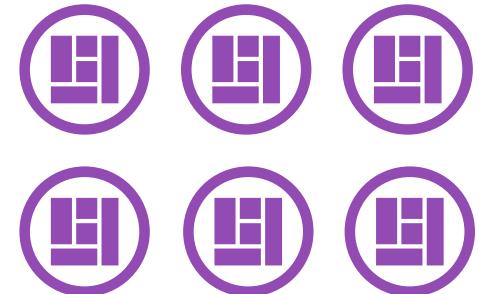
Differentiation by block patterns

☞ Easiest way

Includes various block patterns.

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

Block Patterns



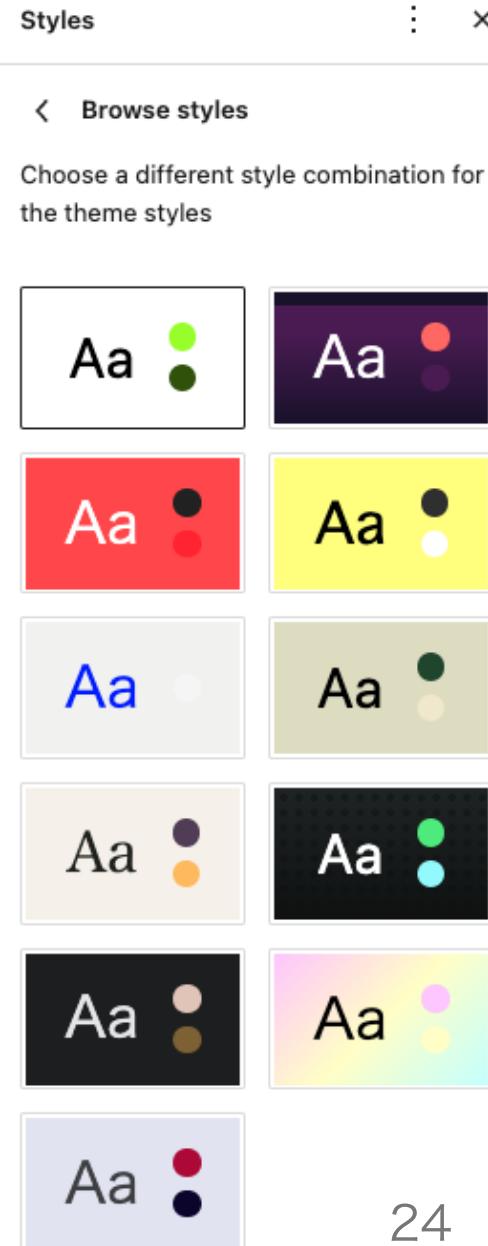
Theme

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
→ High added value of course



New extensibility and **monetization points**.

Our case

Before FSE

Theme License Package

- ▀ Theme (Lightning / Classic / Free)
- ▀ **Theme extension** plugins (Lightning Pro Unit)
- ▀ **Block extension** plugin (VK Blocks Pro)
- ▀ Support

- Expected to taper off due to less reliance on the theme
- Even if sell only the pattern, it seems to be difficult because even users have the impression that they can make them on their own
- We have to move to block themes too

Passport License Package

-  **Theme** (Classic Theme Lightning / Free)
-  **Theme extension** plugins (Lightning Pro Unit)
-  **Block extension** plugin (VK Blocks Pro)
-  Support
-  **Theme** (Block Theme X-T9 / Free)
-  **Premium Patterns**

This configuration is

- **User can use both**
(Classic theme and Block theme)
- **Keep existing users by the value of the Premium Patterns**
even if the value of the classic theme declines
- **Acquire new users**
through the value of our Premium Patterns



Block Patterns is extremely important

Publish our own Block Pattern Directory

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

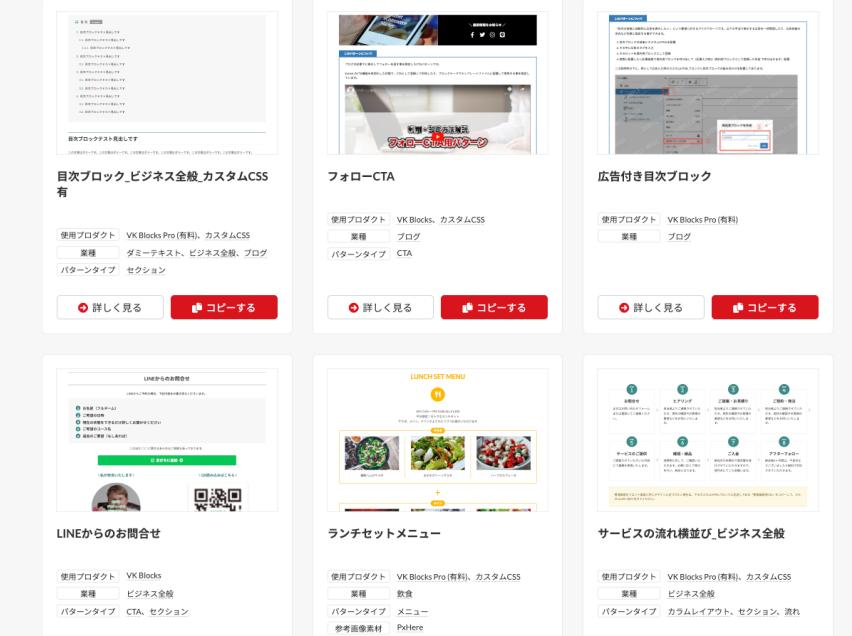
 Only available in Japanese

Inspired by the Org site:

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



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Vektor Pattern Library. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Patterns, Usage Methods, My Account, and Log In. Below the header, a banner reads "Copiable Block Patterns Library" and "WordPressのブロックエディタで使えるパターンを公開しています。あらかじめデザインされたパターンをコピー＆ペーストすることで、見た目そのまま自分のサイトで使っていただくことができます。". Below the banner are search filters for Category (指定なし), Pattern Type (セクション (116)), Usage Product (指定なし), and Keyword (キーワード). A red search button labeled "検索" is at the bottom.



The screenshot shows a grid of 12 different block patterns, each with a preview image, title, usage product, category, pattern type, and "View" and "Copy" buttons. The patterns include:

- 目次ブロック_ビジネス全般_カスタムCSS有 (Category: 指定なし, Pattern Type: セクション)
- フォローCTA (Category: VK Blocks Pro (有料), Pattern Type: CTA)
- 広告付き目次ブロック (Category: VK Blocks Pro (有料), Pattern Type: セクション)
- LINEからのお問合せ (Category: VK Blocks, Pattern Type: CTA, セクション)
- ランチセットメニュー (Category: VK Blocks Pro (有料), Pattern Type: メニュー)
- サービスの流れ横並_ビジネス全般 (Category: VK Blocks Pro (有料), Pattern Type: カラムレイアウト, セクション)

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



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

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

ファミリー

特別展示を支援。

- 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

3. Theme style affects

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

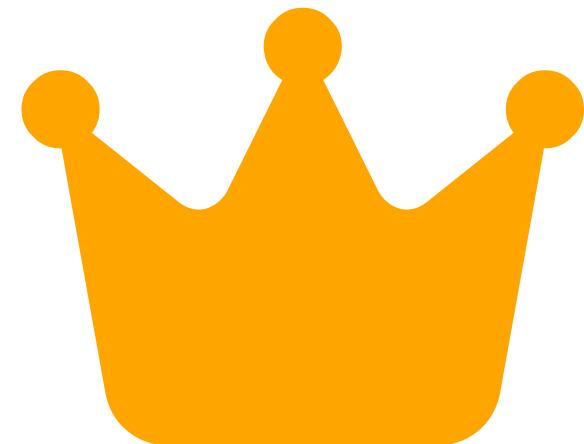
How to increase product value?

we need to make an effort to
get users to continue to license
even if the dependency of the theme decreases.
(Acquisition of new users)



1. Premium patterns

- Available to only paying users
- The design and sample sentences are
more elaborate are ready to use.



Ready to use?

We provide stylish and common patterns but...

Many **non-professional users**...

- :(**Can't think about page structure** in the first step
- :(**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

- 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)

Localized versions

No competition with English-speaking developers.

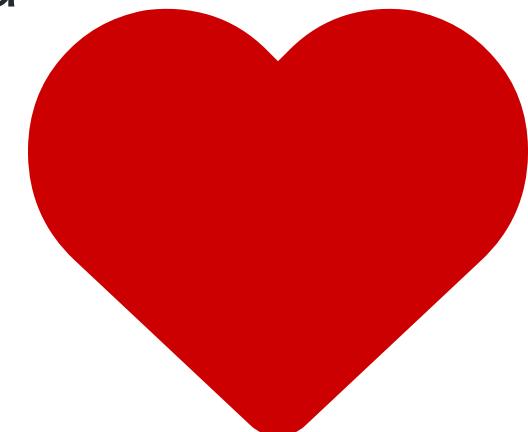
2. Favorite pattern registration function

Patterns are added one after another

→ Hard to find

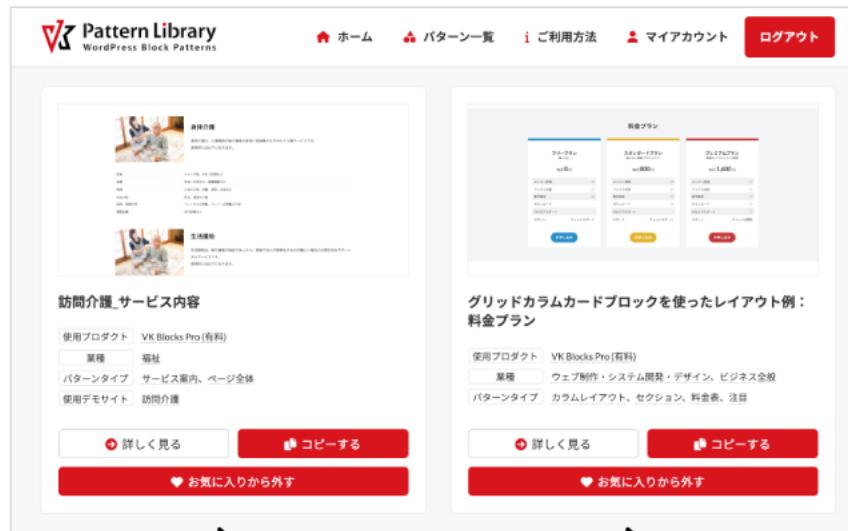
Users to register own favorite patterns and
easily recall them.

※ Same functionality as wordpress.org



3. Link function for favorite registered patterns

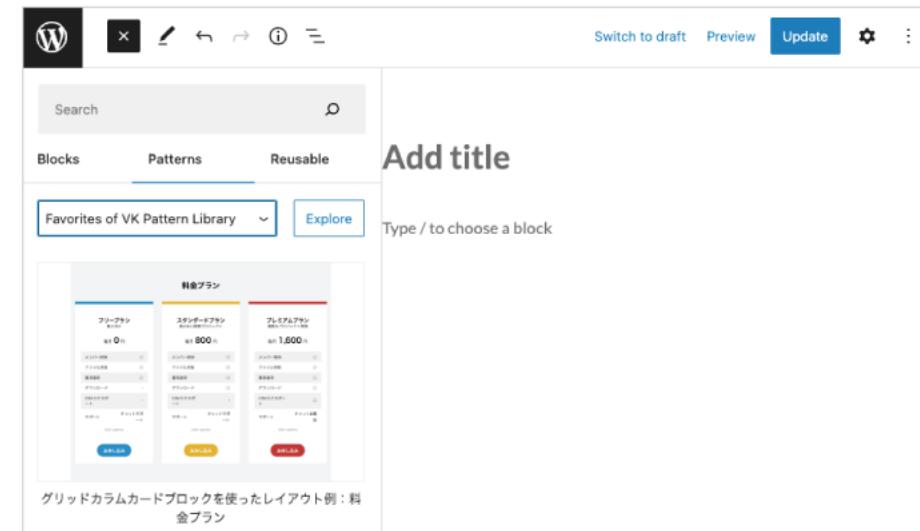
Pattern library



Add to Favorites

API
↔

User's WordPress



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

Is the theme business dead?

Theme is important after all

Themes and patterns are closely related to the global styles

Bring in a partial pattern from outside and use it
→ Problem with the uniformity of the design.

The importance of the theme is high.

Users need good themes and highly practical patterns

FSE is highly configurable and customizable but...

→ **Too much configuration work**

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

Know how to use



Can create designs



Same for WordPress

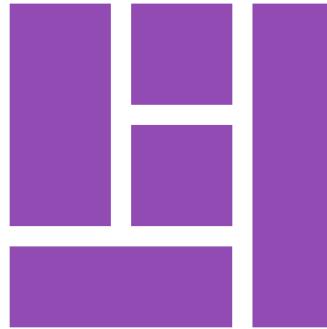
Responsive design compatibility

How to control display elements according to screen size?

- With a single screen width,
it might be possible to lay out well somehow.
- **Layout on multiple widths are actually not that easy**

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

A set with a **Value-added patterns** are
there will be **many business opportunities**.



**Value-added
Patterns**

At the end

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