

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



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**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. Three circular icons represent features: "For all purposes" (checkmark), "Powerful features" (gear), and "Surprisingly easy" (document). 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!!", and "Marketing convention report!". A small preview of a post about a new product is shown at the bottom.

Theme Lightning published on [wordpress.org](https://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

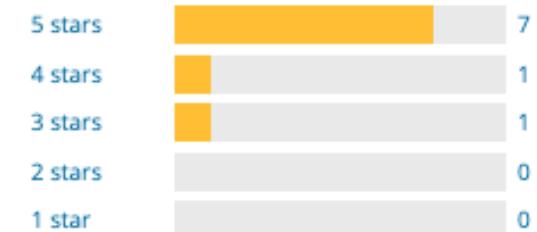
PHP Version: 5.6.0 or higher

[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

## Ratings

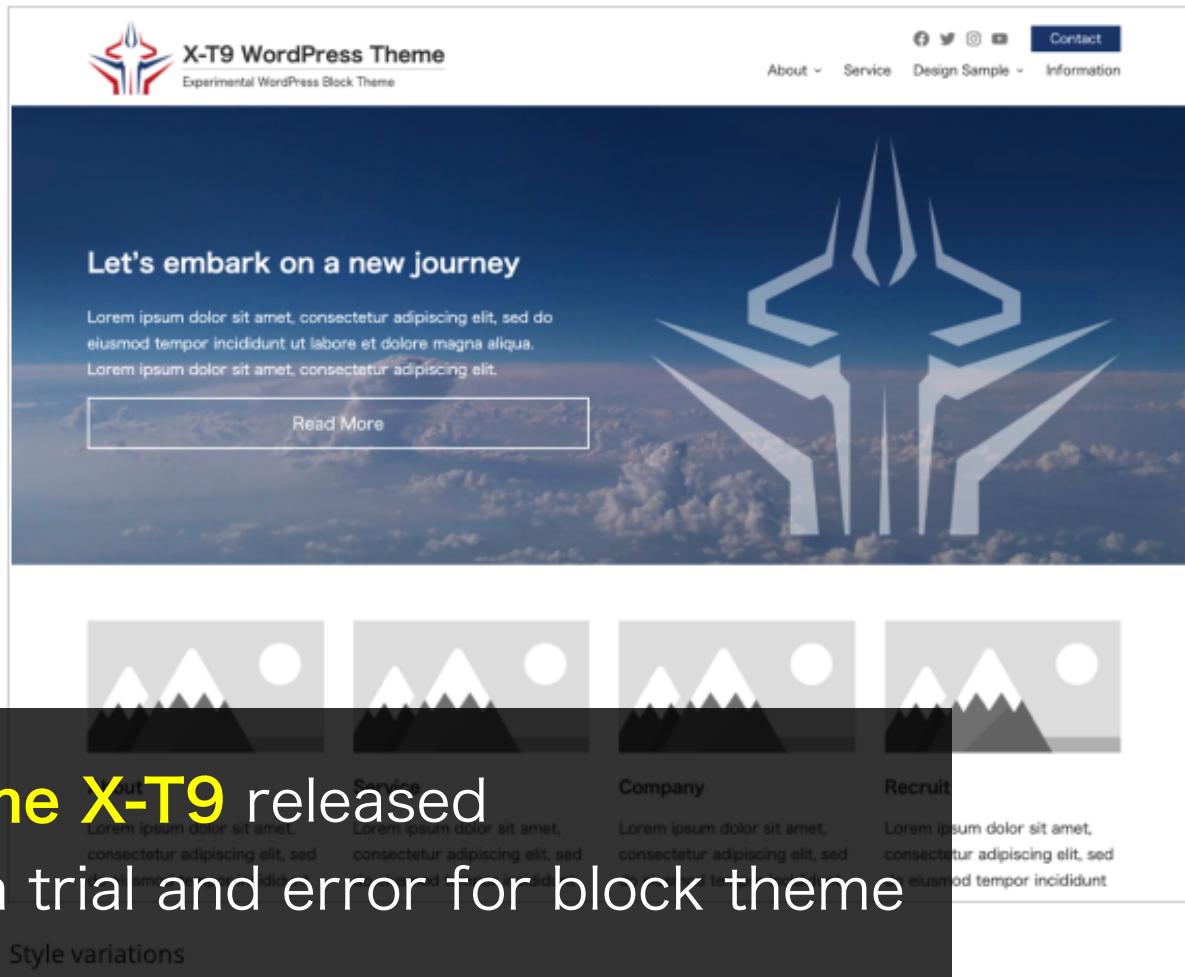
4.5 out of 5 stars.



[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

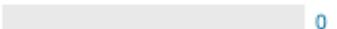
[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

### Ratings

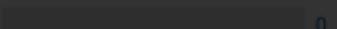
This theme has not been rated yet.

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 )

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Create and Sale

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

➥ Relatively possible to sell and make money.



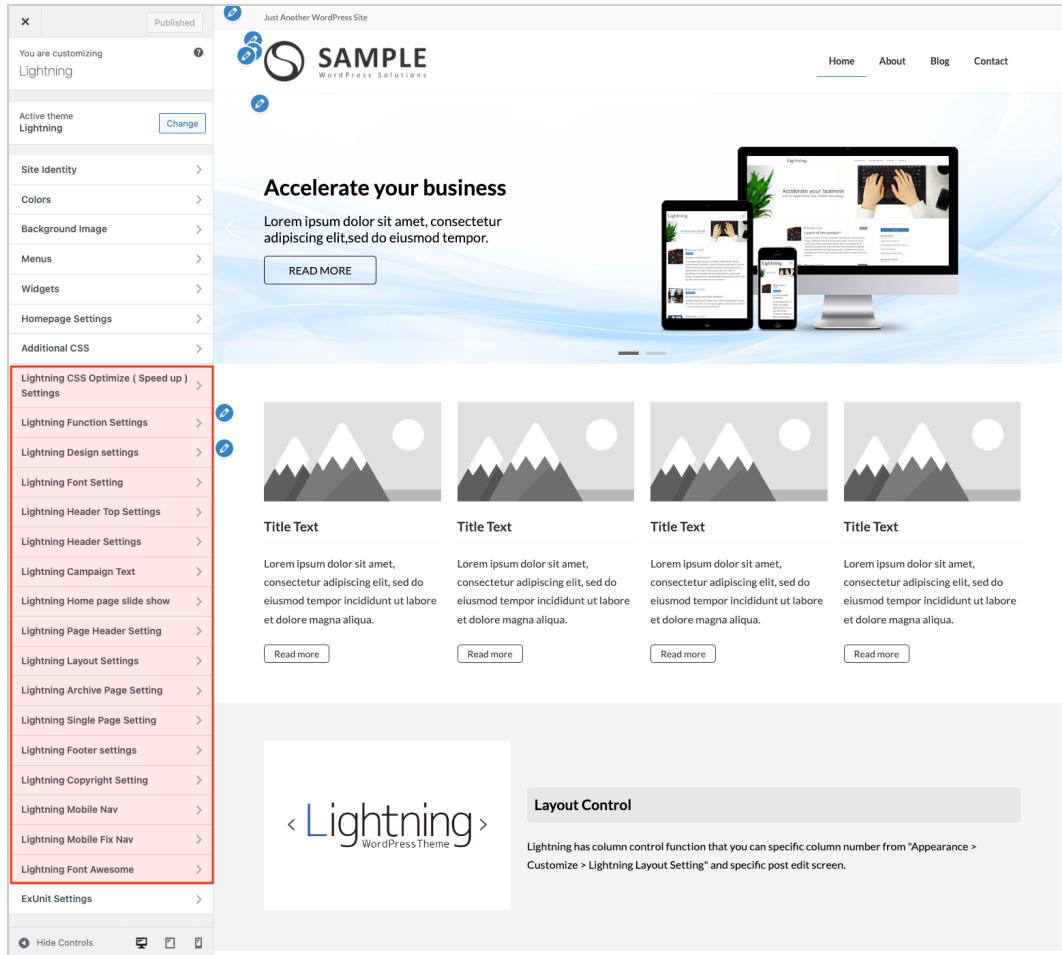
# Points where monetization has become more difficult

# 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

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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

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

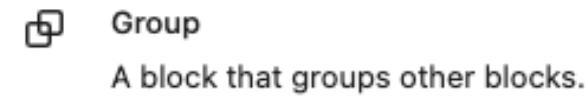
Decreased monetization effect  
by original Block features.

# Early stage block editors

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

We have developed our original blocks

→ **Added value** ( monetization points ).



## Color settings ^

### Text Color



[Custom color](#) [Clear](#)

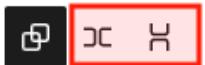
### Background Color



[Custom color](#) [Clear](#)

## Advanced ▾

 Group  
Gather blocks in a container.



#### Color

 Text

 Background

#### Typography

##### SIZE DEFAULT

S M L XL

#### Dimensions

##### PADDING

##### BLOCK SPACING

#### Border

#### RADIUS

# WordPress version upgrade...

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

# Monetization points disappeared...

(` ;  $w$  ; `)

## In addition ...

- 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**

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

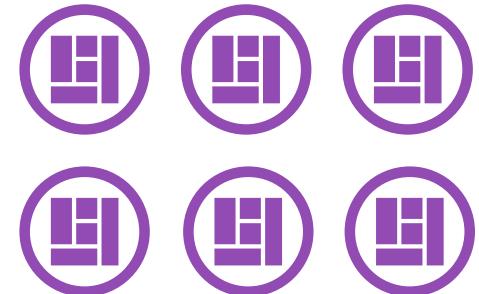
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## ☞ Easiest way

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



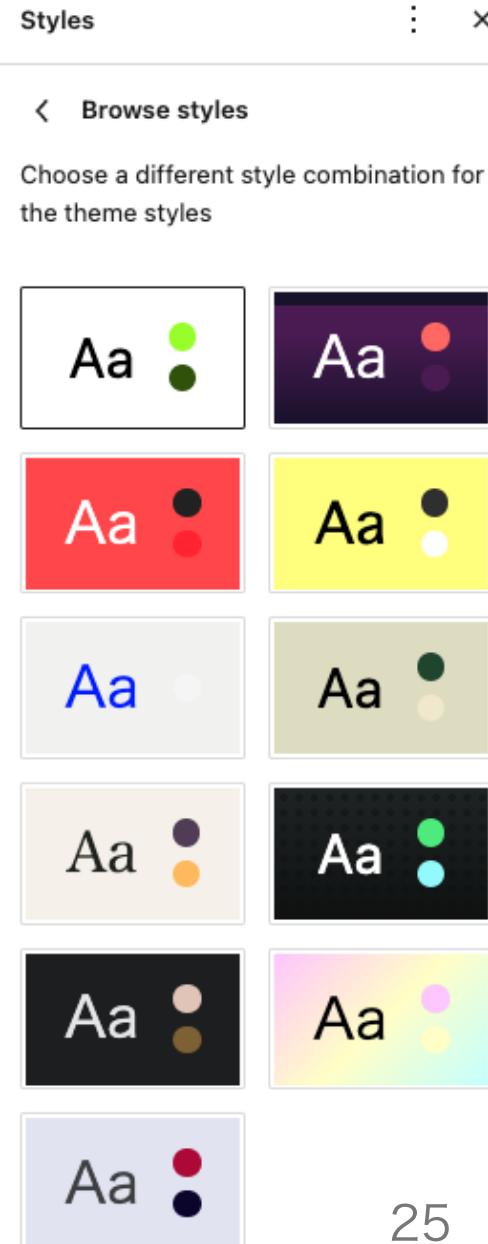
Theme

# 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 designers  
→ High added value of course



**New extensibility** and **monetization points**.

# Our case

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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 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
- 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 Pattern**

This configuration is aimed at

- **User can use both**  
the classic theme and the new block theme
- **Keep existing users by the value of the pattern library**  
even if the value of the classic theme declines
- **Acquire new users**  
through the value of our pattern library



**Block Patterns is extremely important**

# Publish our own Block Pattern Directory

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

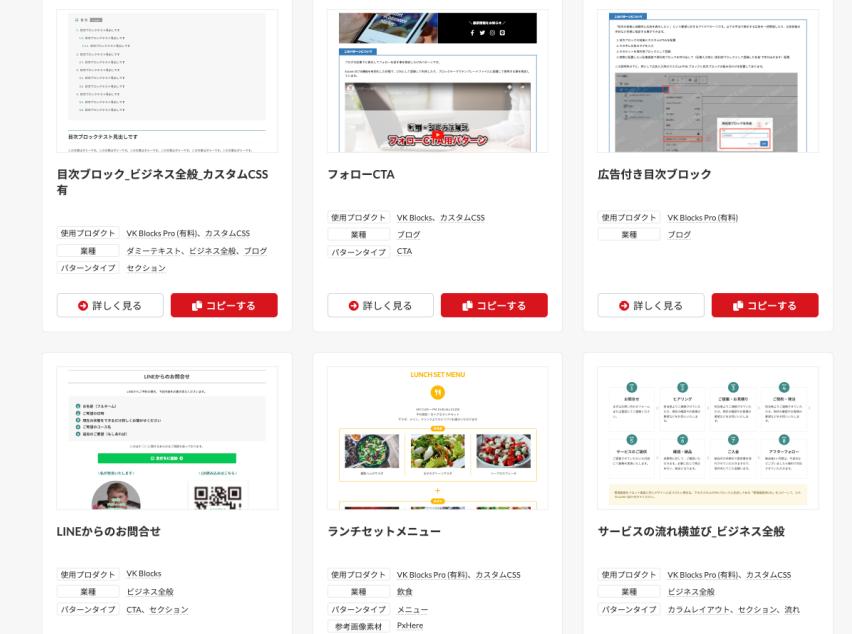
 Only available in Japanese

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?

It is necessary to have the license continued even if the theme dependence decreases.

( Acquisition of new users )

That's why we offer the following services



# 1. Premium patterns

As the name suggests

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



# Ready to use?

We make and 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

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- 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.

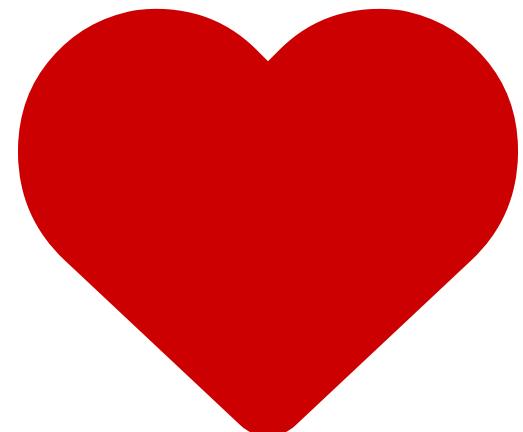
## 2. Favorite pattern registration function

Patterns are added one after another

→ **Hard to find**

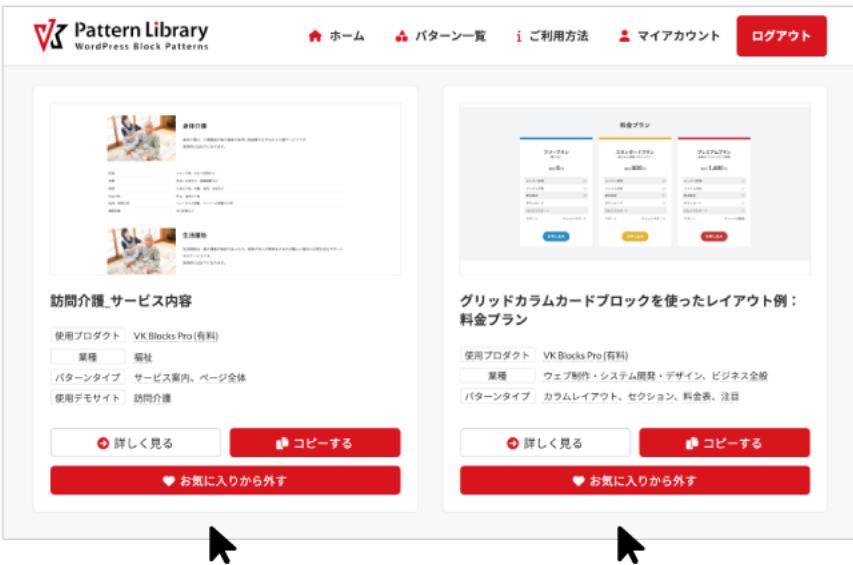
Function to register own favorite patterns

※ Same functionality as wordpress.org



# 3. Link function for favorite registered patterns

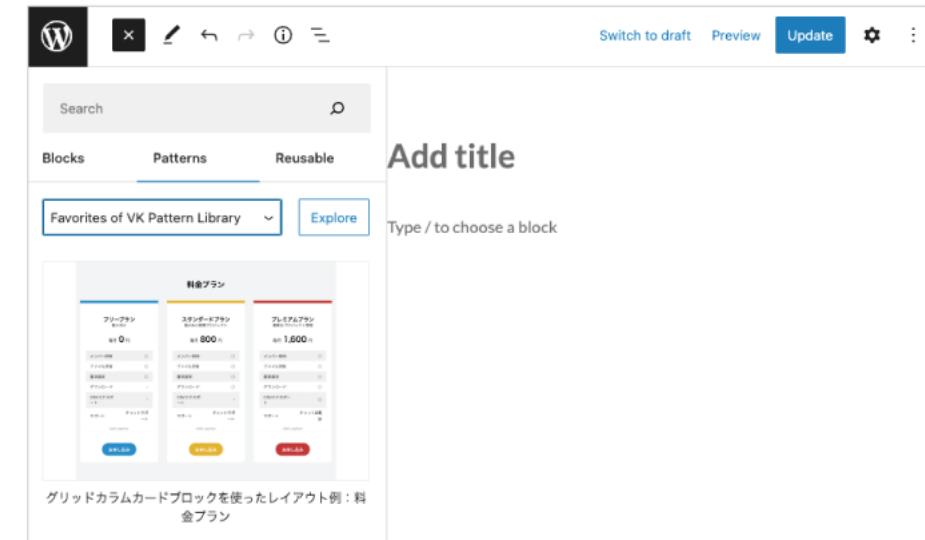
## Pattern library



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

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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

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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

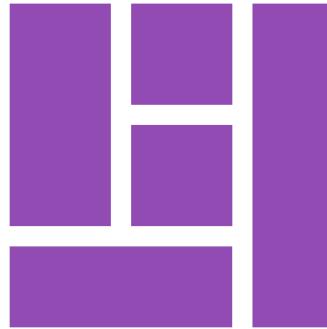
---

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

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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