

WordCamp Asia 2023

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

Hidekazu Ishikawa
@kurudrive



Who am I ? - Self introduction -

Hidekazu Ishikawa

 From Japan

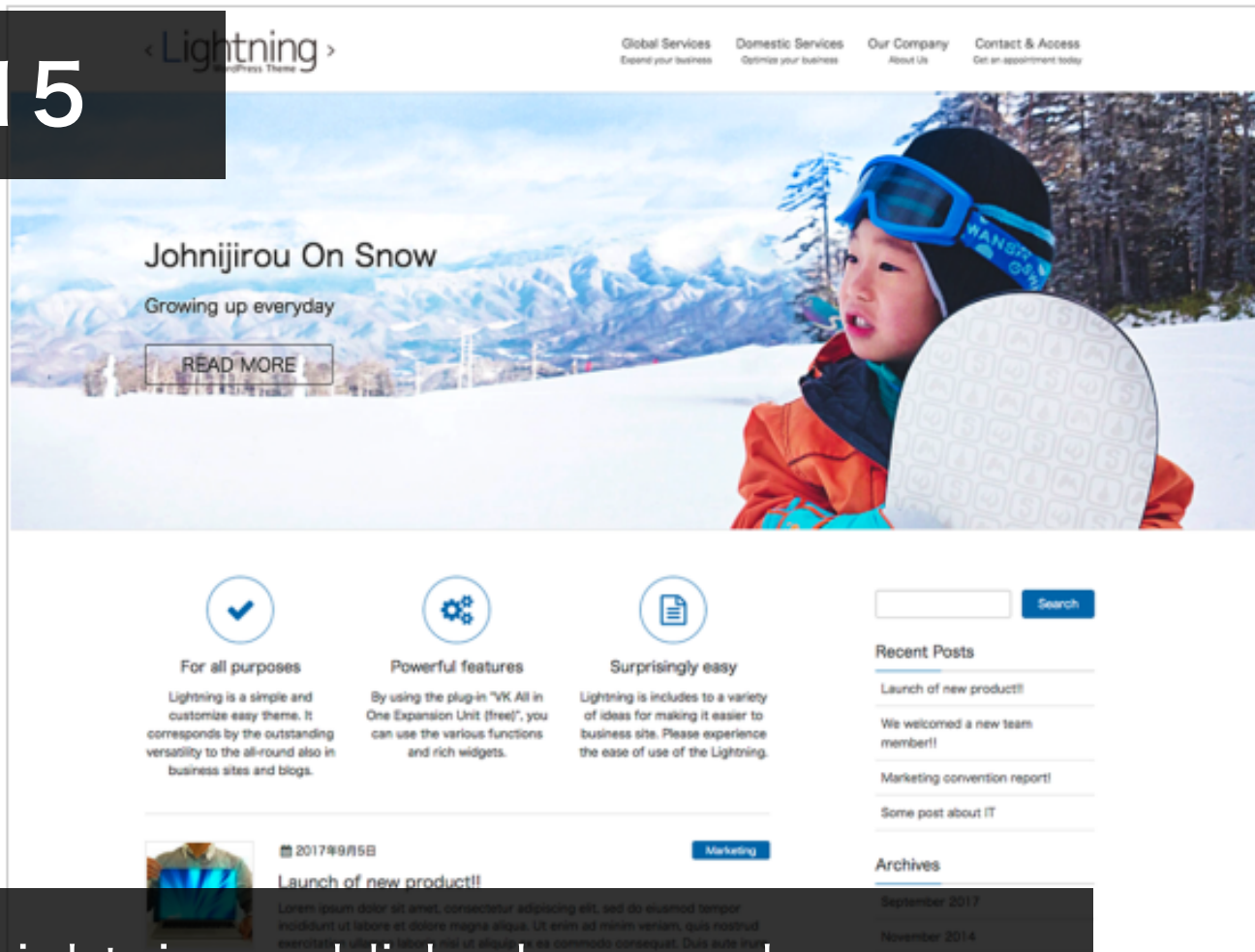
 Theme developer / CEO



Since 2012, I have developed and distributed general-purpose WordPress themes for business in Japan.



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

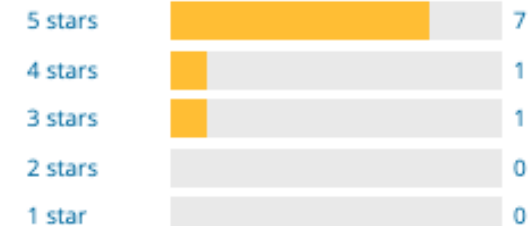
PHP Version: 5.6.0 or higher

[Theme Homepage](#) →

Ratings

[See all >](#)

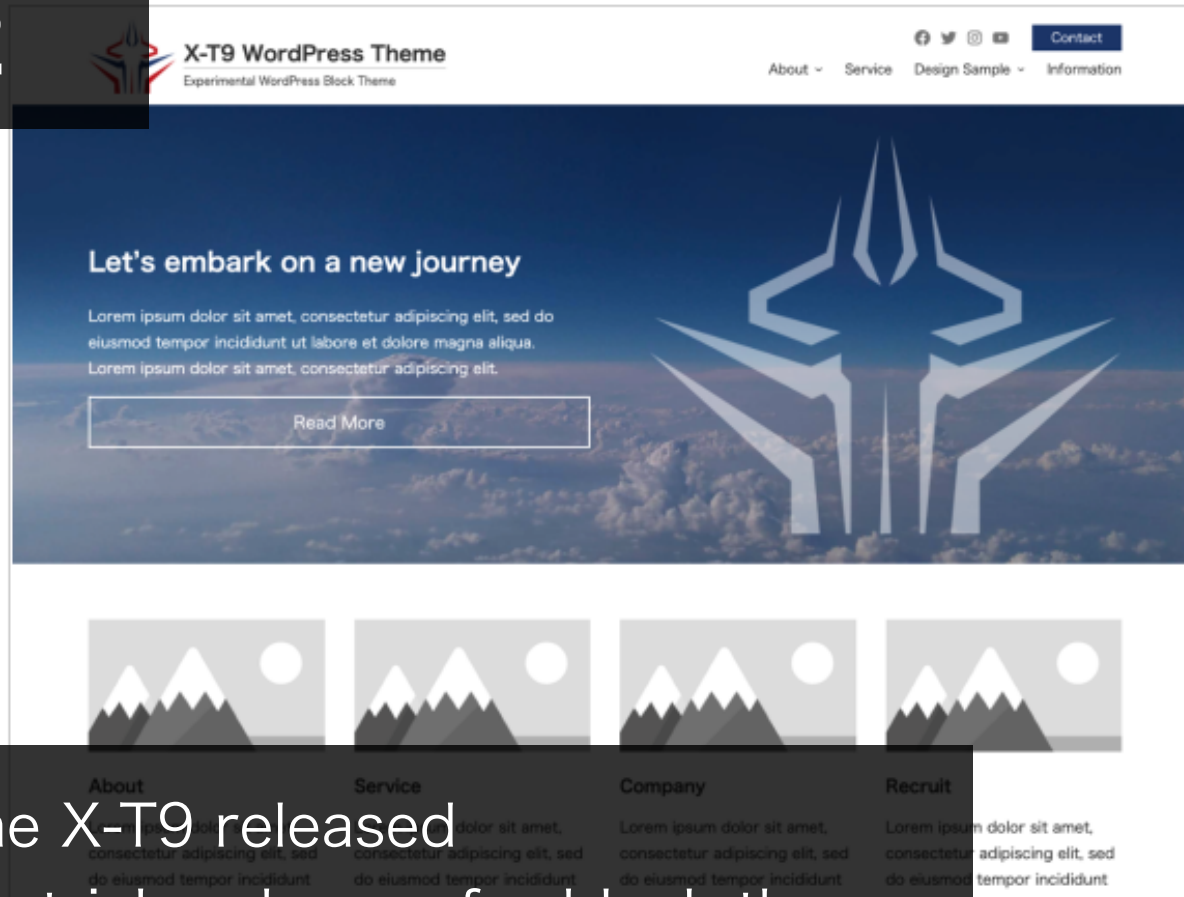
★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5 stars.



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

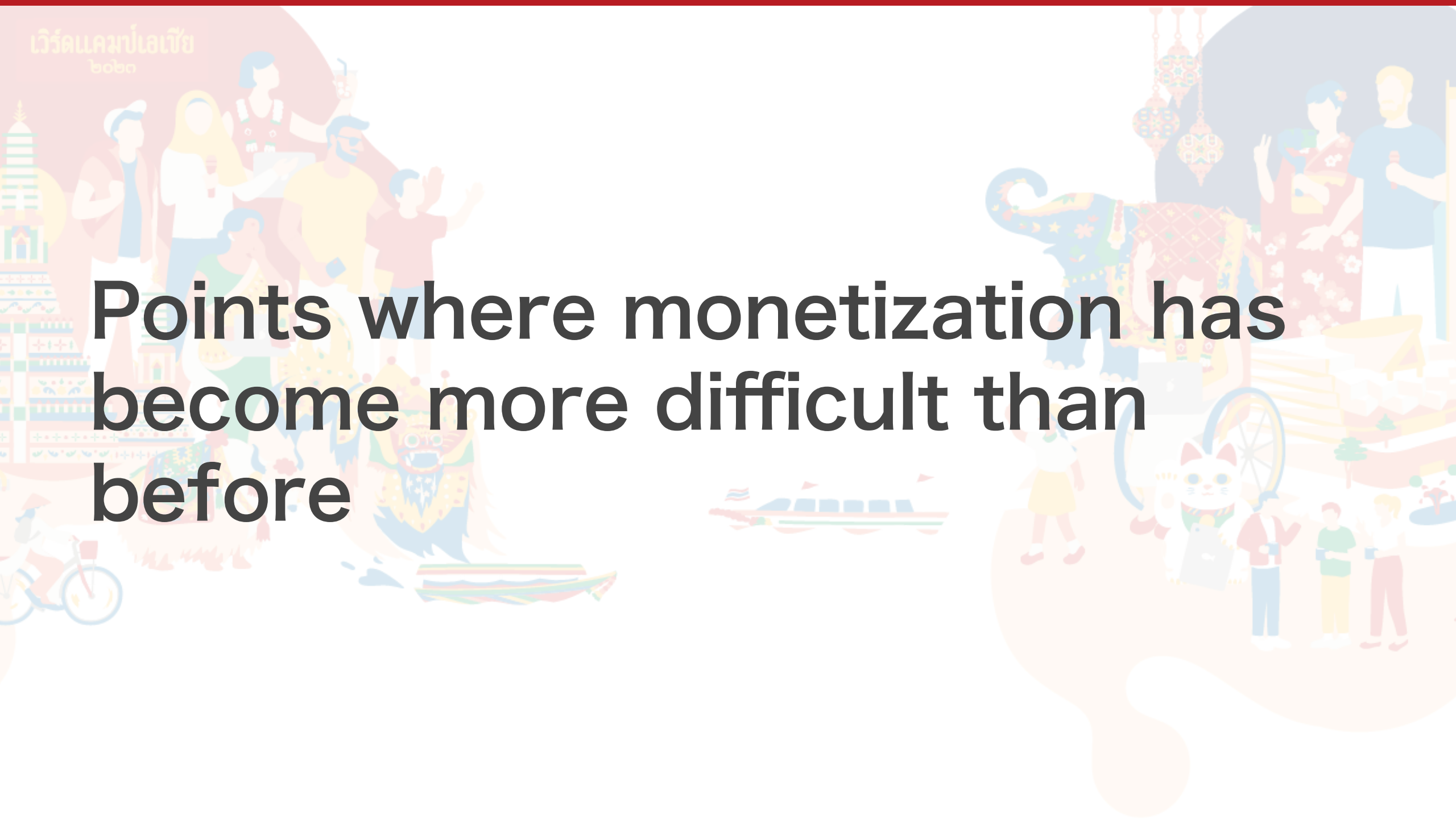
In addition, development and sales of other plug-ins

Business model of theme authors (Before full site editing)

- Theme sales (Classic)
- Selling plugins of theme function extension
- Selling plugins of extension block ... 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

User want to change

💬 Display element of the header

💬 Layout of my site

💬 Fonts and colors ... etc

😞 Users who don't understand code and CSS can't customize as desired.

Theme authors
develop themes with unique editing functions
and sell Premium themes

😊 Users

← Easily edit
💰 Paid →

😊 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

→ 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 days when block editors were implemented, WordPress blocks lacked a lot of features.

ex.

- Margin adjustment function
- Border setting
- Advanced layout Block(like Media Block) ... etc

→ We have developed our original blocks and 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.

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,

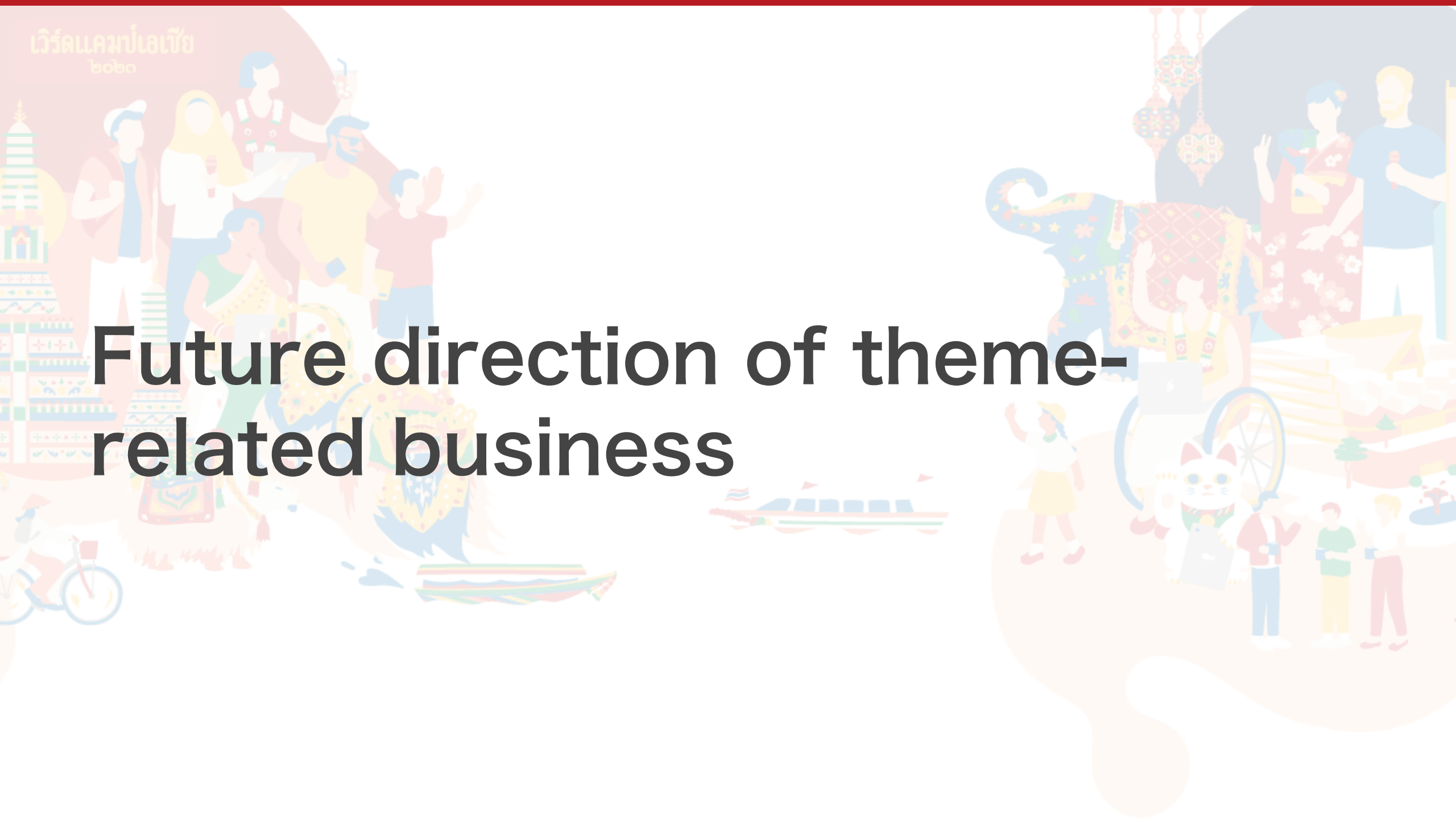
The area that theme developers have focused on for monetization is greatly influenced by full site editing.

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



เวิร์ดแคมป์เอเชีย
๒๐๒๓

Future direction of theme- related business



**How add value and
differentiate?**

(• W • ?

Differentiation by block pattern

🔑 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.

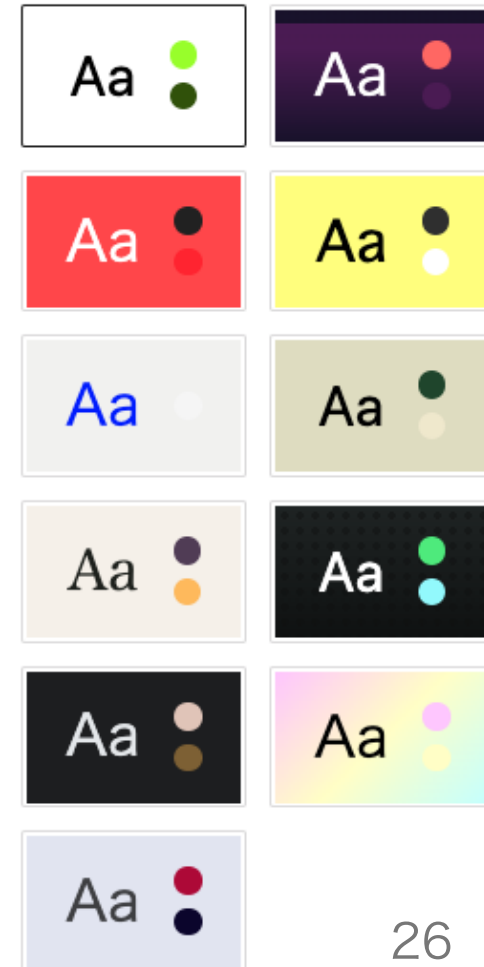
[View](#)[Save](#)

Styles



< Browse styles

Choose a different style combination for the theme styles



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

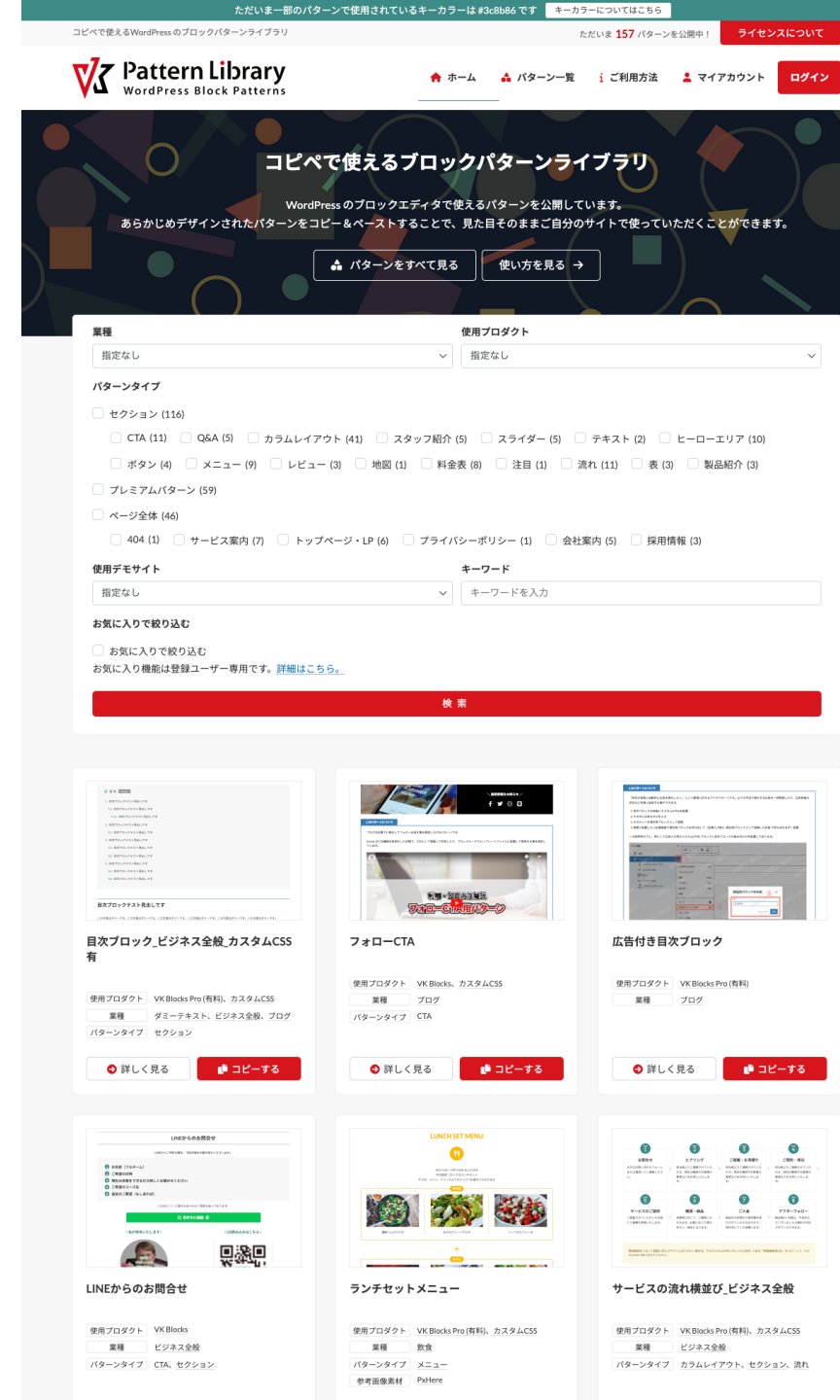
Publish our own Block Pattern Directory

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

 Only available in Japanese

(Inspired by the Org site:

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



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



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

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?

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?

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

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.

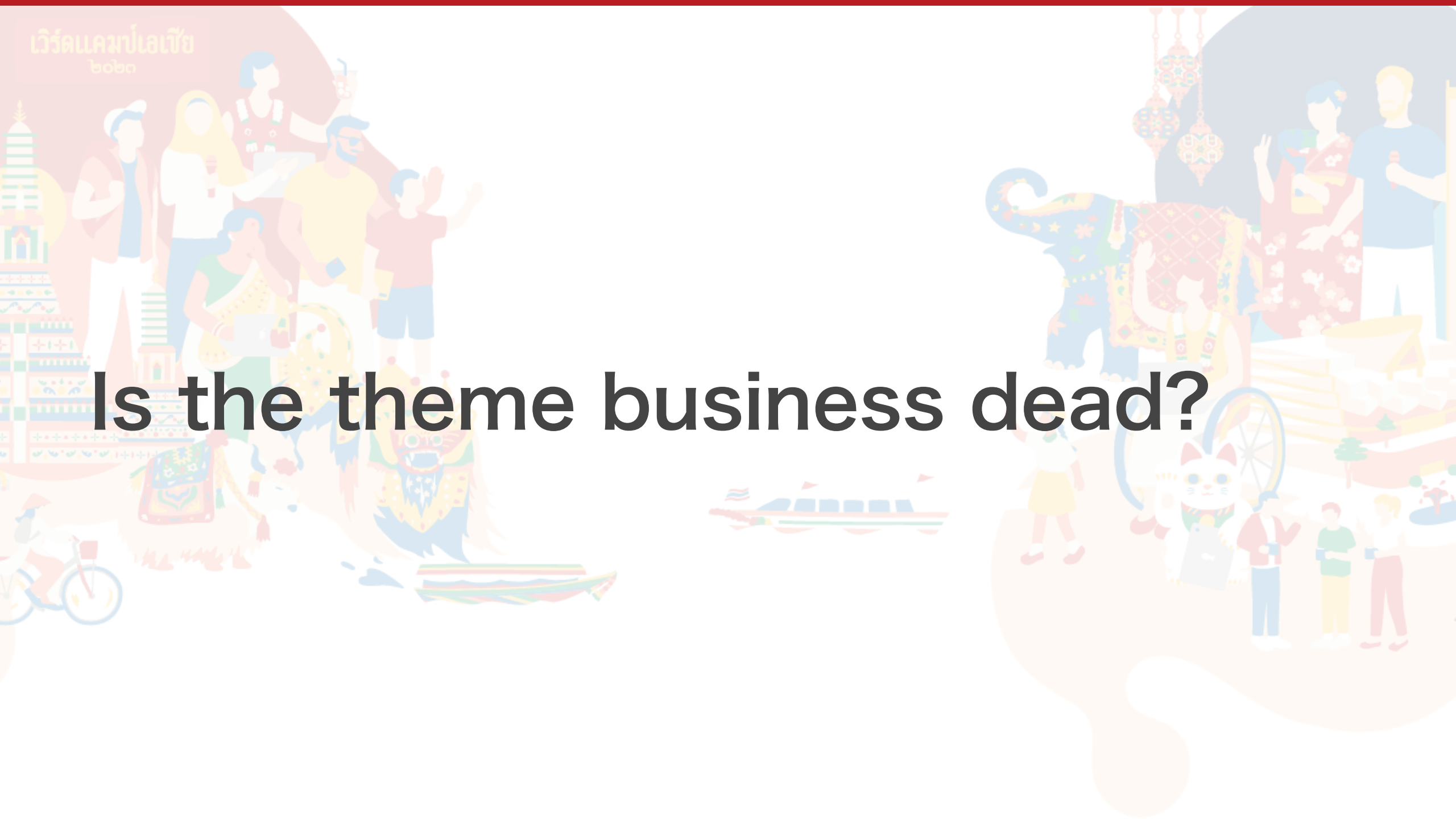
Demerit

- 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

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?

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

FES 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

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

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