

How to Launch Your Own Website with WordPress
HKS Communications Program
Wednesday, October 17, 2018

What is WordPress?

WordPress is an open-source content management system (CMS) invented in 2003 by then-19-year-old Matt Mullenweg to build and maintain websites. It now commands 60% of the CMS market and is used by 32% of all new websites.

What can I do with WordPress?

Anything! Originally just for blogs, WordPress has matured into a fully featured CMS that can be used for portfolios, event calendars & registration, podcasts, e-commerce, and more.

What makes WordPress so popular?

Besides being easy to use and extensible, WordPress is also free, open-source software (**FOSS**). This means anyone can download and use the software for any purpose, modify it, and redistribute it, all for free. You never need to worry about WordPress as a company selling your data or going out of business and taking your website with it; even if the company went bankrupt tomorrow, its products would still be alive, available, and updated indefinitely.

Where do I get WordPress?

There are two kinds of WordPress: WordPress.com is a service that will host your site for you; or you can download the software from WordPress.org and run it yourself anywhere else. Both are completely free up-front but have different features and requirements—learn more at GetWP.com:

| WordPress.com | WordPress.org |
|---|---|
| Free hosting | Self-hosted |
| 288 themes | Infinite themes |
| Constricted functionality | Support for plugins |
| Cannot modify PHP code | Customizable code |
| Secure and backed up | Responsible for own security & backups |
| 3 GB storage | Storage varies — often infinite |
| Advertisements | Ad-free |
| Less knowledge needed | Learn by doing |

Can I import/export my content?

Yes! If you have a website somewhere else and wish to move to WordPress, you can import your content (text and media). If you decide to move from WordPress to another platform, or from WordPress.com to WordPress.org (vice versa), you can also export your content. Note that moving between WordPress and a different CMS will often preserve your site's content only, and not its style and design.

What does WordPress cost?

If you use WordPress.com, then all you need to do is create a free account! Optional paid upgrades (ranging \$8 to \$25 per month) will enable additional features as podcasting, e-commerce, and SEO.

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If you download the free software from WordPress.org, you'll need to pay a hosting company to run the software for you. I recommend DreamHost, which offers unlimited storage and bandwidth and comes with one free domain name, for \$7.95/month: <https://kgagne.com/dreamhost>

What plugins do you recommend?

Plugins are additional pieces of software that change or expand WordPress' features. Many plugins are free or have free versions, including the following:

- **Jetpack:** Made by Automattic, the same company that runs WordPress.com, this plugin adds almost three dozen features to your site.
- **Akismet:** Prevents your site from being spammed.
- **iThemes Security:** Prevents your site from being hacked.
- **All in One SEO Pack:** Optimizes your site for search engines.
- **TablePress:** Powerful utility for creating tables and importing Excel files.
- **Redirection:** Lets you change URLs without breaking links.
- **WP Featherlight:** Opens images in a lightbox in the current window.
- **WP Smush:** Reduces image file sizes, making sites load faster.

These and my other favorite plugins can be found at <https://profiles.wordpress.org/kgagne#content-favorites>

Where can I go for help?

WordPress has a very active and supportive community. If you have questions, feel free to ask online in the free support forums found at WordPress.org.

If you prefer in-person help, there's a free meetup of WordPress users the last Monday of every month. Visit <https://www.meetup.com/boston-wordpress-meetup/> for more details.

If you need custom development (such as coding or design) on an existing site and have a small budget, I recommend the professionals found at PressFoundry.com. If you need an entire site built from scratch and have a bigger budget, try DQuinn.net. I have contracted each of these firms for past projects and have been extremely satisfied with the results.