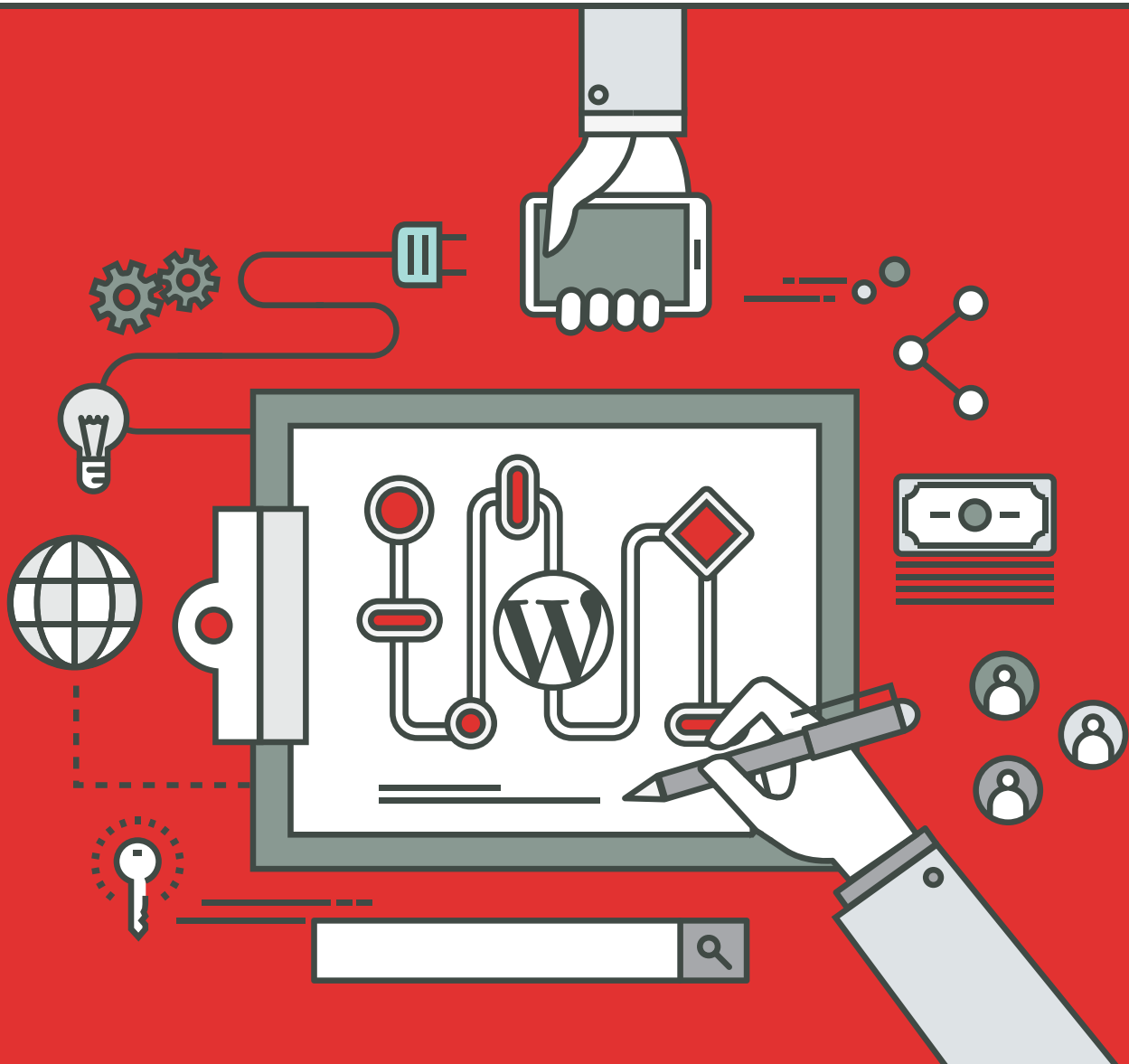




BEYOND MARKETING

HOW SMART COMPANIES USE WORDPRESS TO IMPROVE EVERY ASPECT OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS

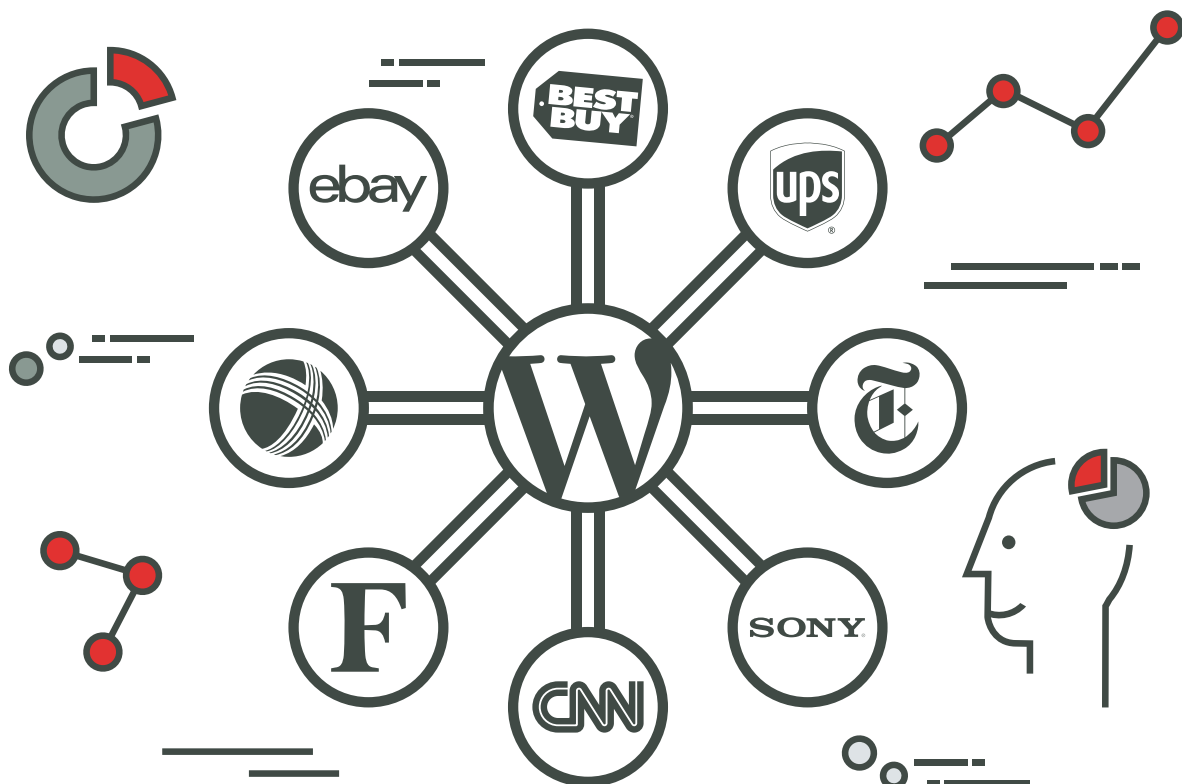


INTRODUCTION TO WORDPRESS

For companies that need to make a splash online—and these days, who doesn't? —WordPress is the business behemoth. An astounding **26.4 percent** of businesses with known content management systems are using WordPress¹, drawn to its user-friendly functions and seemingly infinite themes, plugins, widgets and updates.

WordPress is more than a content management platform. It's an **online ecosystem** designed to provide all the tools companies need to take their marketing to the next level. WordPress has much to offer, including options that can help companies efficiently service the accounts they already have, while building their business for the future.

Here's a fresh look at WordPress and the strategies it offers in other key areas besides marketing. You'll find innovative ways to create and deliver value, maximize efficiency, generate revenue and keep your customers happy. Implementing the ingenious features you've admired on other websites is easier and more economical than you might expect. And while countless options are available, WordPress makes it easy to focus on the best tools to help your particular business save time and money. Here are some companies that rely on WordPress on a daily basis.

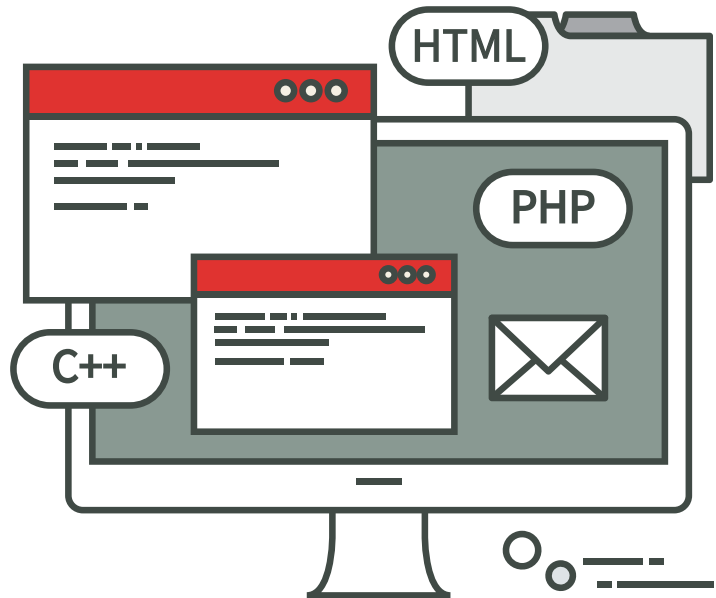


WEBSITE DESIGN: BACKGROUND

There's a reason that even the smartest business people can be intimidated by issues involving website design. It's an area that has seen dramatic changes over the years, and keeping up with those changes can be challenging. Website development itself started as a highly technical process. Businesses desiring an online presence had to employ tech-savvy staffers who could navigate the complex landscape of computer processes and languages (which were inscrutable to everyone else). Gradually, designers got involved, requiring another, more artistic layer of expertise.

In the Jurassic era of website design—we're talking the early 1990s—websites were not much more than lists of links. The formats were heavy on text, perhaps including headings, introductory paragraphs or brief explanatory sentences to accompany the links. A logo at the top might have a professional look; there might be an ad or two.

As Cameron Chapman details in her article, "The Evolution of Web Design"², table-based designs introduced website layouts into which designers could drop more interesting design elements. Websites still were text-heavy, but began to take on a more designed look with borders, photos and spots of color. In the mid to late 1990s, tools that developed into Adobe Flash and Adobe Shockwave enabled designers to create more dynamic websites with complex features and animation. Later, techniques such as cascading style sheets (CSS) not only enabled designers to lay out websites with more engaging, interactive features, but made the process quicker and easier. Just as important, websites became more attractive and more functional.



Website design continues to evolve, and so has the role of the website in an organization's business plan. The website is no longer just an electronic billboard or brochure. It's not just a way to promote your wares or introduce yourself to potential customers. It is a multifunction tool for generating business, promoting your values, increasing efficiency, expanding sales, saving time and responding to questions. Through your choices in website design, companies can facilitate all of the nuts-and-bolts tasks customers want to take care of online or on their mobile devices. And the increasingly important "responsive design" trend helps ensure that web pages look good even on the tiny screen of a smartphone.³

ENTER WORDPRESS

A number of companies now offer platforms for website development, including some that have do-it yourself features. These include names like Joomla, Drupal, Squarespace, GoDaddy, Wicks and Weebly. But the 2014 WP Engine internet population survey found that a whopping 33 percent of those queried had heard of WordPress – 1 in 3 respondents.⁴ WordPress gets no quarrel when it pronounces itself “the most popular CMS on the web, comprising over 20 percent of sites.”⁵

How did WordPress become so popular? From its first release in 2003, it aimed to be user-friendly, but that’s not the only reason. It is innovative and constantly evolving with thousands of tools and features. At this point, its prevalence in the online marketplace means that there’s a large and varied pool of people who are familiar with it. That’s a plus for a smaller business which wants to maintain its own online presence with its own staff.

Notable WordPress features include more than 40,000 plugins, which expand a website’s functions to include mobile applications and integrated link management—a structure that’s search engine-friendly, contains support for tagging posts and articles, and has automatic filters that enable standardized text. Companies can easily freshen the look of their websites by choosing from an array of different themes, it’s easy to swap in a new one.

Finally, WordPress excels at offering dependable, time-saving efficiency features. Businesses now are often trying to do more with less staff, so it helps to have a website that’s easy to set up and update. Even more important, from the customer’s point of view, WordPress helps companies create a website where everything works. According to research reported in Business News Daily, 88 percent of Americans surveyed formed negative views of brand with “buggy” websites.⁶ Annoyingly slow websites also hurt customers’ overall impression of a company’s brand. They might appreciate an artistically striking site, but they’re even more concerned with links that work and speed that’s reliable.



MORE THAN MARKETING

WordPress, with its arsenal of features makes the application a stellar resource for online marketing. A well-designed website obviously can be a vital part of a business plan to promote your products and services. But you can leverage WordPress to do more than marketing with tools that improve efficiency, serve customers and boost revenue.

Think of the **five parts of every business** as outlined by Josh Kaufman in his book, "The Personal MBA: Master the art of business."⁷

1. Value creation. Discover something that people need or want – or that they could be persuaded to want – and then create it.
2. Marketing. Attract attention to what you have created and build demand for it.
3. Sales. Turn your potential customers into paying customers.
4. Value delivery. Give your customers what you promised, and keep them satisfied.
5. Finance. Bring in money to support what you're doing and make it all worthwhile.

As Kaufman notes, marketing is only one part of business success. It's worth exploring how using WordPress can help you succeed with the other four parts. Here's how:

VALUE CREATION: You're thinking of opening a new business. What can you do to "create value" for the service you want to offer? How do you gauge the need for it and get a feel for the potential customer base? WordPress makes it easy to create a preloaded website with minimal information and using minimal design that tells people about your plans. Use social media to promote your fledgling site and see how many people check it out.

Say your planned business is a barbershop. You could offer introductory, half-price haircuts and use a WordPress plugin to let people sign up for them. Then you look at the sign-ups and see if the number is viable. Maybe you post photos of various hairstyles and use another plugin to solicit votes on which styles people like best. You engage people and stir up interest in your (potential) business.

Or, say you have an existing business and are thinking of expanding with a new service. You can use a WordPress survey tool to gauge the interest. Would people want it, use it, buy it? Would it make a difference if they got an initial discount?

Rather than calling people, sending out a mailer or going door to door, you can make your website do the work. Again, you can expand your reach by promoting your exploratory efforts on social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

MORE THAN MARKETING

SALES: When potential customers are considering whether to become paying customers, one of the things they're doing is checking out your website. It's a great opportunity to connect them to your sales staff, and WordPress can help you do that.

The Harvard Business Review reports research showing "shocking" response times of companies responding to online leads. Of those that responded within 30 days, the average response time was 42 hours. Thirty-seven percent responded within an hour, 16 percent within 24 hours, 24 percent took more than a day and 23 percent never responded at all.⁸

Why was this termed shocking? Businesses that respond within an hour of a potential customer's query were almost seven times as likely to have a meaningful interaction, and more than 60 times more likely to do so than those that waited 24 hours or more.⁹

WordPress plugins let you use your website to respond to and engage visitors, increasing your chances of converting them into customers. Some examples:

A potential customer's inquiry on your site can trigger a text message to a salesperson, so he or she can follow up promptly.

Another WordPress plugin lets you offer "live chat" on your website. Consumers love it and it is an effective way to drive sales.

Surprisingly, some businesses convey all kinds of information on their websites but fail to include a "call to action" – an effort to get a response from the website visitor. That's like demonstrating a great product for people and failing to ask whether they want to buy it.

Examples of effective call-to-action tools include opt-in buttons offering people the chance to make a lower-level commitment that eventually will lead to sales. For example, they might sign up for your newsletter, or follow you on Facebook or Twitter.

You can automatically integrate prospects into your customer relationship management software, perhaps based on information they supply when making an inquiry. This means you won't need to have someone on your staff type that information into your system – another efficient way to save time.





MORE THAN MARKETING

VALUE DELIVERY: An important truism in business is that keeping the customers you have is easier than getting new ones. Forbes cites figures from Marketing Metrics showing that it is 50 percent easier to sell to a current customer than to start from scratch and sell to a new customer. Forbes also notes that just a 5 percent increase in customer retention can increase profitability by 75 percent.¹⁰

Your website can and should be part of your strategy to keep your current customers happy, and WordPress features enable you to do that more efficiently. Some examples include:

An FAQ option lets you anticipate customers' questions and concerns and give them an easy way to find answers and solutions. And you can easily edit and add to your FAQ section to keep it fresh and responsive to any issues that come up.

Do your customers care about the people who are serving them behind the scenes? You might be surprised. Updating your site with staff bios and timely articles – for instance, photos of the weekend staffers helped build a Habitat for Humanity house or took part in a charity walk – connects you to customers and helps build relationships.

Increasingly, customers expect a one-stop-shopping experience when they come to your website. Thoughtful selection of WordPress plugins helps you meet those expectations with news tidbits, background and contact information, and secure ways to make financial transactions.

You also can use your website to expand the ways you follow up on purchases and other customer experiences. Say you're in the business of selling drones. During the purchasing process, you send the customer emails to update the order status, give information about processing and shipping, provide a tracking number and confirm delivery.

Through tools on your website, you can go even further with an automated follow-up. Did the drone arrive in good shape? Do customers have any comments? If they're flying high with the product and happy about it, great. You can automatically have them routed to an online review area and encourage them to post a comment about their experience. If they indicate that something's not right, direct them to another area, where they can connect with a staffer to assist with problem-solving.

Every organization loves positive feedback, and it can help build your customer base. But negative feedback can be useful, too. It provides an opportunity to demonstrate and possibly improve your customer service, and tells the customer that you care.

MORE THAN MARKETING

FINANCE: Making payments online is not a novelty anymore. When was the last time a 28-year-old wrote you a check? Millennials, and many older consumers as well, expect to be able to complete financial transactions online.

Collecting revenue via people's laptops and cellphones might be as simple as providing a PayPal link. Or, you can connect customers to your department that handles payments.

WordPress' Gravity forms are easier to work with than Excel, allowing you to drag and drop the fields you need. You can set up the system you want, step by step, and then link the forms to QuickBooks, which many small businesses use to manage tasks like payroll, sales and inventory. When the customer completes the payment process and hits "submit," it not only updates their account, but processes the information in Quickbooks so you have a record of it.

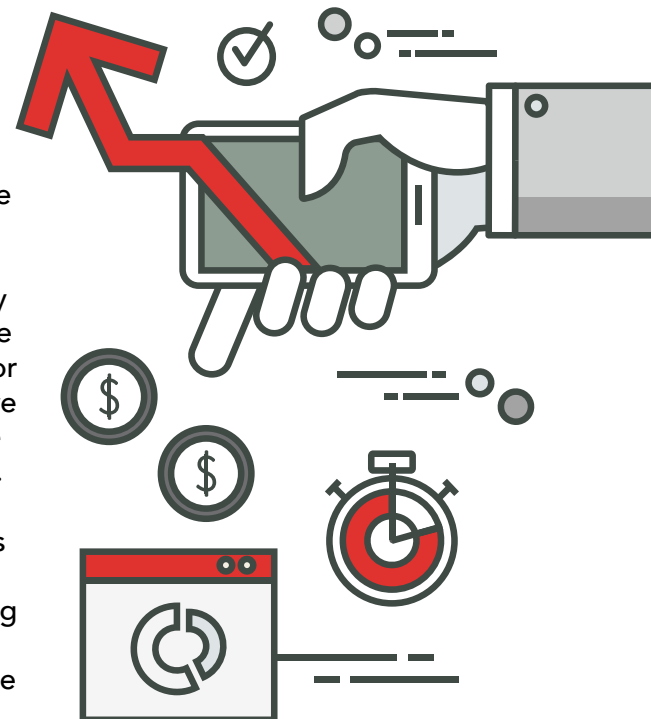
Filling orders automatically through your website also can help eliminate friction between your ordering mechanism and others also related to finance, such as inventory and distribution.

By using WordPress with Zapier, an automation app, you can automate tedious financial tasks and free up you staff to do other things. For instance, you can have it check your website for new payments every hour – or every five minutes, if you want.

WEBSITE: THE REAL WORK HORSE

An ideal business website has many innovative features. It's like having a superhero on staff. It works around the clock, saving time, improving efficiency, generating revenue and serving customers. You might think this is beyond the capabilities of your business, but think again. By making better use of WordPress, companies can do more than they thought possible. And remember, the process is much more user-friendly than it was in the past. Five or 10 years ago, for example, implementing an online invoice system would have taken tech staffers at least 80 to 100 hours. Now, someone with minimal programming expertise can do it in half a day.

Whether a company enlists some professional help or takes a DIY approach, it makes sense to take advantage of tools that can enhance every aspect of doing business. By making the most of WordPress, companies can build their business with an improved website that will grow right along with the changing marketplace.





ABOUT THE MARCOM GROUP, INCORPORATED

The Marcom Group has successfully completed projects for businesses in a wide range of sectors, from entertainment to energy to nonprofits. Its services include web design, branding and logos, print design, media and managed web hosting. TMG succeeds by translating a client's vision into results-driven marketing tools. Marcom team members pride themselves on blending wild flights of imagination with an obsession to detail and an up-to-the-minute knowledge of what works.

For more information, please call 661 489-4444 or visit us online.

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