

WordPress Cookbooks: Tips, Tricks, and Plugins

Abstract

Chapter 3 has five parts that focus on creating successful content publishing workflows, secure sites, flexible designs, enjoyable user experiences, and a full-blown social network. Each section is presented with an overview and either a list of top-notch plugins or tips and tricks for success.

Part 1: A Better Workflow

Section 1: For Administrators

Overview

Administering a site of any size and complexity is a tough project, but as the level of content increases, varieties of user roles are created, and plugins are included to increase functionality, the responsibilities of the site administrator increase exponentially. To enable the administrator to handle such extensive duty successfully while staying as stress-free as possible, multiple plugins could be employed.

The plugins discussed below increase administrative functionality in a variety of ways. WP Maintenance Mode pulls a site down temporarily while updates are being made. The Theme and Plugin Visibility Manager plugins allow site admins to limit who has access to what theme and plugin. Role Scoper and User Role Editor allow the administrator to create, edit, and limit user roles. Finally, Admin Menu Editor helps to reorganize the administrative panels and limit (or enable) access to certain settings pages based on user roles, and Adminimize lets you target specific elements, all the way down to targeted CSS IDs and classes, of all settings screens and hide them based on

particular roles. While some of the plugins may repeat certain types of tasks, it's important to note how they approach different settings and additions to the overall functionality of the system. Always test plugins and combinations of plugins to figure out which one or ones work best for your particular setup.

WP Maintenance Mode

There will be times when your site needs to go down for scheduled maintenance. Instead of having visitors see a blank white screen, using a plugin like WP Maintenance Mode makes that experience informational. WP Maintenance Mode allows you to create a styled theme for your splash page (figure 3.1), including a countdown to when the site will go back live.

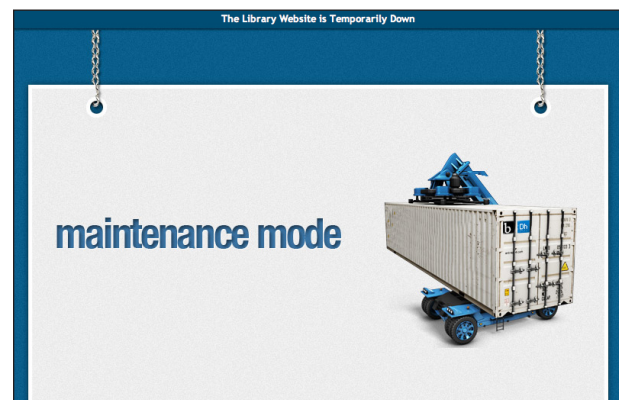


Figure 3.1

An example splash page enabled by the WP Maintenance mode plugin

WP Maintenance Mode
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-maintenance-mode>

Theme Visibility Manager

If you're managing a WordPress Multisite installation you may find yourself with multiple themes installed, especially if you're allowing any user to create a blog, as might be the case for a community site. On the same installation you might be hosting the central library website. In such a situation, you wouldn't want a community site to have access to your library's theme. Theme Visibility Manager will limit what themes are accessible by default and what themes aren't.

Theme Visibility Manager
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/theme-visibility-manager>

Plugin Visibility Manager

Much like Theme Visibility Manager, Plugin Visibility Manager limits who has access to what plugins. Site administrators need to pay special attention to the kind of access non-system administrators have to plugins, as some have amazing settings that will transform WordPress installations. Unwanted access and accidental settings changes could drastically affect how a site works.

Plugin Visibility Manager
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/plugin-visibility-manager>

Role Scoper

A highly popular program among WordPress administrators, Role Scoper enhances access to the inherent roles and capabilities built into the software by allowing administrators to change permissions on granular levels. Role Scoper also supports custom post types and taxonomies.

Role Scoper
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/role-scoper>

User Role Editor

Like a pared-down Role Scoper, User Role Editor provides a quick and simple interface for adding roles and editing built-in roles.

User Role Editor
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/user-role-editor>

Admin Menu Editor

While the user interface team does an excellent job of developing proper navigational elements in the administrative menus, sometimes the ordering of the elements doesn't make sense. Admin Menu Editor allows a site administrator to rearrange how menus are set up, create new links to menu pages, and even limit access to some administrative pages by role.

Admin Menu Editor
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/admin-menu-editor>

Adminimize

Adminimize enables the site administrator to hide any elements, based on roles. The common elements of WordPress are included, as are plugins that have added in their own settings pages and elements. Using CSS IDs and classes, the site administrator can even hide specific pieces of text and advertisements that some plugin authors include on their settings pages.

Adminimize
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/adminimize>

Section 2: For Content Creators

Overview

Providing structured forms and fields for content entry enables content creators to focus their publishing efforts on the content and not on the ambiguity that arises with unfocused user interfaces. If a staff member is supposed to be writing a piece on new acquisitions for the library, the content type should be formed to reflect the fields necessary to relay appropriate information to readers. Such information may include title, author, acquisition date, short description, rating, and a link to the material in the OPAC. Fields for this type of data entry are not inherent parts of WordPress pages and post content types; therefore, they require some additional tweaking to the system by way of plugins such as those discussed in this section or—if desired—custom programming.

The More Types, More Fields, and More Taxonomies plugins described below are written by the same crew of developers, have intuitive interfaces similar in style to WordPress built-in options, and take advantage

of the new custom post types, custom fields, and custom taxonomies features in the 3.0 release of WordPress.

More Types

As its name suggests, More Types allows for the creation of new post types. By default, WordPress includes five major post types: post, page, attachment, revisions, and navigation menus.¹ This selection is quite limited, but More Types changes this restriction to nearly innumerable choices. More Types enables library staff to create custom post types such as staff directories, database and resource lists, and specially structured feature posts.

More Types

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/more-types>

More Fields

The key to extending custom post types is in how the data entry is structured. Fields, or data entry points, help to focus content creation. More Fields provides fourteen different fields for data entry: single-line text box, multiline text box, WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) text box, select lists, radio button lists, checkboxes, file lists, color picker, number ranges, number picker, time picker, month picker, week picker, and date picker.

More Fields

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/more-fields>

More Taxonomies

WordPress uses tag and category taxonomies for its posts and links manager. And while those taxonomies may work just fine for those types of content, they may not be as tailored to the specific custom post types you've created. More Taxonomies allows you to create any number of custom tag- or category-based taxonomies for your custom post types.

More Taxonomies

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/more-taxonomies>

Section 3: For Event Publishing

Overview

There are many ways to create a calendar of events for your site, from a simple page with a list of events that are added and edited individually, to a Google

Calendar that is embedded, to a full-out events calendar and registration system. Calendar plugins abound: The WordPress Plugins Directory lists more than 200 calendar plugins.² Some handle events as regular blog posts with special custom fields to accommodate dates, times, and locations. Others handle events as custom content types, keeping them separate from news posts and allowing for more customization.

Some key features that an events calendar plugin might provide include

- creating a separate page that lists upcoming events
- assigning categories, such as Children, Teens, Adults, or Book Clubs, to events
- providing a sidebar widget with a limited number of upcoming events that can be displayed on all pages and posts
- publishing upcoming events in your news posts before the event

With these features in mind, we've selected a few options to consider.

Kalendas

If you use Google Calendar for your library's events calendar, the Kalendas plugin provides a simple and nicely formatted method for displaying events on the sidebar. A list of events can also be added to any page or post using a shortcode. Clicking on an event title provides detailed event information in a nicely formatted pop-up window. This listing includes all the information from the event description in Google Calendar, including links and maps. Settings include date-formatting options and the ability to set the maximum number of events to be displayed.

Kalendas

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/kalendas>

The Events Calendar

The Events Calendar plugin treats events as posts with custom fields to handle dates, times, and locations. Posts are displayed in your news stream when they are published and can be automatically reposted on the day of the event. By default, posts are assigned to the category Events, and the page <http://yoursite.com/category/events> will display the calendar or list of events. Check the plugin's documentation and forum for tips on how to change the category used for events.

Custom templates are included for a calendar view, a list view, and a single-event view. You can choose the calendar view or list view as your site's default, yet customers can easily switch views if they like. These

templates can also be customized. Additional features include the option to show a Google map for event locations, a sidebar widget to display upcoming events, and integration with Eventbrite for handling registration.

The Events Calendar

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/the-events-calendar>

Eventbrite

<http://eventbrite.com>

Event Espresso

Event Espresso, a robust events registration system, integrates PayPal to accept fees for paid events and also handles registration for free events. The Lite version is free, but can be used for only one event at a time. Use it to test out the basic features before you decide to upgrade to the Basic edition (\$59.95 with option for nonprofit discount). This version includes a calendar with multiple display formats, online and manual registration options, built-in reCAPTCHA to combat spam, and many more features.

Event Espresso Lite

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/advanced-events-registration>

Part 2: Safe, Sound, Tracked

Section 1: Security

Overview

It's a no-brainer that you need to keep your WordPress site secure, your database backed up, and your site optimized for speedy response times. Someone guessing your login and password can fill your site with spam in no time. Hackers can slip code into your files that creates tons of hidden links in your post. A failed server, and your database of content could be gone. Don't let any of these things happen to you. Below are some tips and tricks to help keep your site in good health.

Run the Latest Version of WordPress

Make sure you're running the latest version of WordPress. You should see a nag message at the top of your WordPress back-end dashboard if there's a new version available. The automatic upgrade features in current versions of WordPress make it really easy to keep your core software up-to-date. But first—make sure your files are backed up.

Manage Your User Accounts

To manage user accounts, be sure to do these things:

- Get rid of your site's default admin user account: It's just too easy a target for hackers. First, log in as admin, create a new user account, and assign administrator access to the new account. Then sign in with the new account and delete the original admin account.
- Set up a separate account for writing content, one that doesn't have administrator access. This will help keep the administrator credentials a bit more hidden.
- Set up individual accounts for each of your site's contributors, assigning them only the level of access they need.
- Get rid of unneeded user accounts.

Add Security Keys to Your wp-config.php File

To make it harder for hackers to break into your site, make sure your `wp-config.php` file has the security key information that was added to WordPress with version 2.6. If your file doesn't have eight lines of code that look like the examples below, use the Secret Key generating service to create unique codes.

```
define('AUTH_KEY', 'put your  
unique phrase here');
```

```
define('SECURE_AUTH_KEY', 'put  
your unique phrase here');
```

Copy and paste them into your `wp-config.php` file just before the line that reads:

```
/* That's all, stop editing!  
Happy blogging. */
```

For more information, check the WordPress Codex.

Secret Key generating service

<https://api.wordpress.org/secret-key/1.1/salt>

WordPress Codex: Editing wp-config.php

http://codex.wordpress.org/Editing_wp-config.php

Use Well-Known and Reliable Themes and Plugins

Delete plugins and themes you aren't using. Even though inactive plugins don't affect the amount of time it takes to load a page for a normal visitor, for an administrator they will slow down the plugin and theme select pages. Additionally, keeping inactive plugins and themes that

will never be used may confuse your administrative process unless you keep copious notes on why those themes and plugins are available but inactive.

Section 2: Backup and Maintenance

Overview

Keeping your WordPress secure requires not only following best practices in setting up your installation, but also including safeguards for redundancy and protections against spam. Backing up your database and installation directory regularly can be a tedious but necessary process. Employing a plugin for this process would be an excellent addition to your overall installation. The freely available and heavily touted WP-DBManager plugin is an excellent choice, but for more options consider purchasing BackupBuddy.

Spam is the bane of the open Web. It seems embedded in every kind of website and application that allows comments and other user-created content. CMSs of all kinds, WordPress included, are prone to the same spam attacks. Luckily, WordPress has two excellent allies to rely on in the war against spam: Akismet and WP-reCAPTCHA.

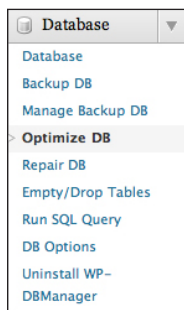


Figure 3.2
Many of the settings options WP-DBManager provides.

WP-DBManager

The WP-DBManager plugin (figure 3.2) backs up all the data tables in your WordPress database. You can run a backup on demand or schedule backups to run regularly and have the backup files e-mailed to you. If in doubt about which tables to back up, do them all. And don't forget to back up the /wp-content directory on your server too.

WP-DBManager

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-dbmanager>

BackupBuddy

BackupBuddy is a handy premium plugin for backing up your complete site, including the database, plugins, themes, and other content. It also has a feature to restore your site or migrate it to a new server. Note that this premium plugin has a cost range of \$45 to \$150.

BackupBuddy

<http://pluginbuddy.com/purchase/backupbuddy>

Akismet

Akismet (figure 3.3) catches comments that might be spam and stores them in the comments section of your dashboard so you can review them. Akismet comes with your default installation of WordPress and requires an API key from WordPress.com.

Akismet

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/akismet>

WP-reCAPTCHA

WP-reCAPTCHA employs the often-used reCAPTCHA service to stop spam. Users inputting content on your site will have to fill in a word or two of digitized text from books, text that has been turned into an image and is unreadable by spam bots.

WP-reCAPTCHA

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-recaptcha>

Section 3: Analytics

Overview

Tracking the popularity, success, and failure of your content is a necessary part of content management. By doing so, you become more knowledgeable about what is working with your content and what can be improved upon. While analytics on content is most often done in a powerful application like Google Analytics, traveling back and forth between your website and the Google Analytics' site could get a bit tiresome. Including statistical information in the administrative areas of WordPress would be preferred, and, luckily, two plugins, WordPress.com Stats and Analytics360 provide just that function.

WordPress.com Stats

The WordPress.com Stats plugin provides basic statistics for your site. It tracks page views, referring sites, keywords used to find your site, and links people click to leave your site. Like Akismet, it requires an API key from WordPress.com.

WordPress.com Stats

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/stats>

Analytics360

Providing the power of Google Analytics with the simplified administrative user interface of WordPress,

Analytics360, built by the popular e-mail marketing company MailChimp, is an amazing and enjoyable tool for tracking site analytics. Use the simple MailChimp settings page to log in to your Google Analytics account and begin to see gorgeous graphs and informative statistics indicating your popular (and not-so-popular) posts and pages.

Analytics360

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/analytics360>

Part 3: Flexible Design—Widgetize Everything

Overview

Widgets are those boxes of content that appear on the sidebars of your site. They're useful for highlighting recent news, comments, links to other resources, customized navigation menus, contact information, and so much more. And they're not just limited to the sidebar areas. Many themes now incorporate "widget areas" in the header and footer, providing much more flexibility in designing your site. By default, all the pages on your site will show the same widgets. But there are times when you'll want to have different widgets in different sections of your site. For example, a navigation widget on a teen-oriented page could include links to just the other teen-related pages, while the navigation on the main page of the site would include links to all pages on the site. The plugins discussed below will help you achieve this flexibility.

Widget Logic

The Widget Logic plugin adds to every widget a "widget logic" field that lets you specify which pages and posts that widget should appear on. The plugin uses conditional tags such as `is_home()` and `is_page('42')` to specify where each widget should appear. For more on conditional tags, see the WordPress Codex.

Widget Logic

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/widget-logic>

WordPress Codex: Conditional Tags

http://codex.wordpress.org/Conditional_Tags

Shiba Custom Widgets

The Shiba Custom Widgets plugin lets you create groups of widgets that will be displayed on different pages and posts. Using the Widget Set control panel, select the widgets you want to appear together on a particular page, post, or group of pages. To assign a set to a particular page (or post), return to the edit panel for the selected page, where you'll see a new Shiba Widget metabox. Select the widget set that will appear on that page. Child pages inherit a widget set from a parent page when that option is selected in the Widget Set > Options panel. For more information on using Shiba Custom Widgets, see the screencast "Free Your WordPress Sidebars."

Note that Shiba Custom Widgets is not accessible in the WordPress plugin repository. Therefore, you

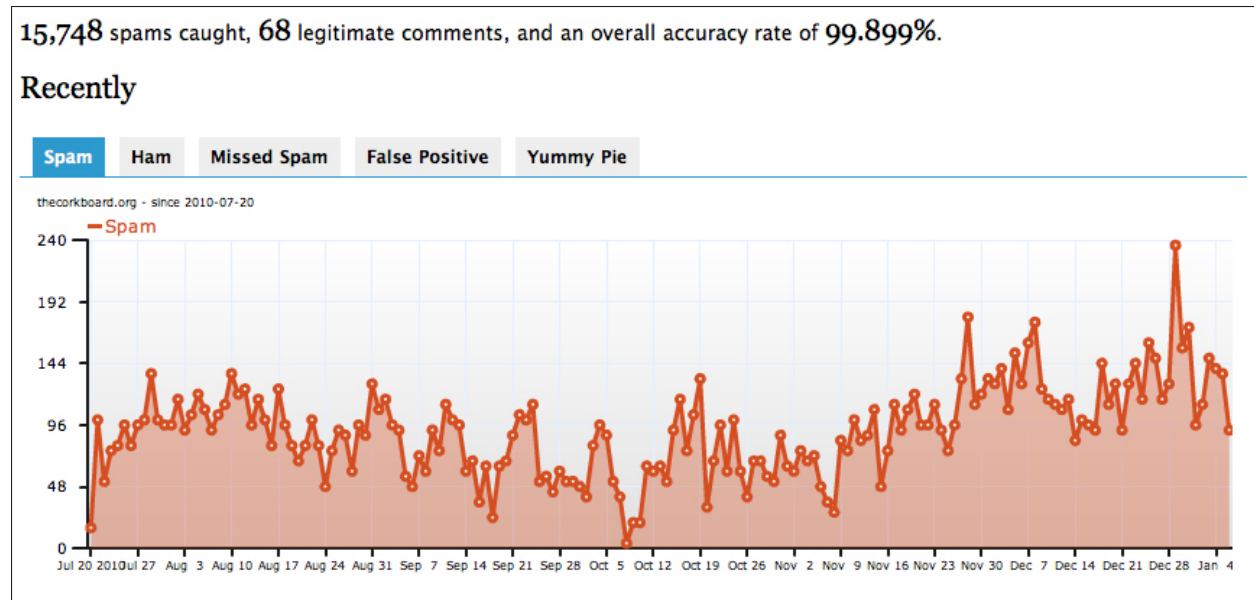


Figure 3.3

Akismet's extensive visual statistics

should exercise caution regarding the security of the plugin and the date of its most recent update.

Shiba Custom Widgets

<http://shibashake.com/wordpress-theme/wordpress-custom-widgets-plugin>

“Free Your WordPress Sidebars” screencast

<http://thecorkboard.org/free-your-wordpress-sidebars>

Text Widget

Don't overlook the incredible flexibility provided by the basic Text Widget included in WordPress. It can contain text and HTML. Have a message you want to appear in a widget area on your site? Use the Text Widget to display it. Unfortunately, there isn't a WYSIWYG editor for the Text widget. If you're an HTML maven, you can type your own HTML code to format the text. If not, just open a blank post and format your content there. When you're done, switch to the HTML tab, copy the code and paste it back into the Text Widget.

The Text Widget can also be used to display content from other Web services. The embed codes provided by other sites can be pasted into the Text Widget. This is a simple way to display a list of your recent Twitter posts, a widget for your Facebook page, a Flickr badge with your latest photos, or books posted to your Goodreads or LibraryThing account.

Part 4: Enhancing the User Experience

Section 1: Community Engagement

Overview

One of the key advantages of a WordPress site is the ease with which you can encourage communication and conversations between customers and staff, solicit feedback, and help patrons engage with staff, library content, and each other. All of this connection is made possible through standard WordPress functions, easy integration of third-party content, and a myriad of plugins to expand WordPress functionality.

Turn On Comments

The simplest way to get feedback from your customers is to ask them for it. So turn on the commenting feature for news posts and ask for opinions. Comments will be posted immediately unless you choose to review them before they appear on your site.

The important settings for comments can be found on the dashboard under Settings > Discussion.

Options include leaving comments open without review, letting comments from people who've already been approved post automatically, and holding all comments for review by an administrator. Make sure you turn on the option to have an e-mail sent to you when comments are received so you can approve them and respond quickly.

Advertise Your Feeds

RSS feeds are built right into WordPress, but it takes a bit of searching to find them and really put them to use for your site. Peruse the WordPress Codex page to find all the RSS feeds you need, use the template tags to include them in the header of your template, or take the URLs and advertise them on your site.

WordPress Codex: WordPress Feeds

http://codex.wordpress.org/WordPress_Feeds

Use Social Media

Your customers are your best spokespersons, so make it easy for them to share your news, events, and other content on Facebook, Twitter, and other social sites.

Facebook Like Button

Adding the Like button lets your readers share your content on their own Facebook page simply by clicking on the button on your site. Two options for installing:

1. Paste several lines of code into your `single.php` template. A post on WPBeginner.com provides all the details.
2. For those who'd rather not fiddle with editing the template files (it's really not that hard!), there are dozens of plugins that can perform this task for you. The Facebook Like Button plugin works well and provides a number of customization options.

WPBeginner: How to Add Facebook Like Button in WordPress

www.wpbeginner.com/wp-tutorials/how-to-add-facebook-like-button-in-wordpress

Facebook Like Button plugin

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/facebook-like-button>

ShareThis

The ShareThis widget provides your readers with a quick way to share your content with their social

networks. Select from over fifty social networks to display on your posts in a variety of styles. In addition to the icons you select, the ShareThis icon gives readers access to several dozen additional options. Usage statistics are available on the ShareThis.com site.

ShareThis widget

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/share-this>

ShareThis.com

<http://sharethis.com>

WP to Twitter

With over 370,000 downloads from the WordPress plugin repository,³ WP to Twitter can be counted on to do all the heavy lifting in getting the published content from your site to the Twittersphere. WP to Twitter has extensive settings for customizing the message that will be published at Twitter, the ability to shorten links with a Bitly account, and specific analytics tracking with Google Analytics.

WP to Twitter

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-to-twitter>

Section 2: Slick Multimedia

Overview

Want to add an eye-catching photo gallery or slideshow to your site? Embed a video created by your teens? Add a podcast series highlighting upcoming events? Embed fun games? On its own, WordPress handles media quite nicely, but with the addition of a few plugins, WordPress can be a multimedia powerhouse.

Embedding Third-Party Content

Embedding videos from YouTube, Vimeo, blip.tv and several other sites is powered by the oEmbed protocol accomplished by simply entering the URL for the video on its own line in a post or page. (Note: Be sure to turn this option on in Settings > Media > Auto-embeds.) For example:

Check out this great video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dm_x6EGIHk

See the Codex for a full list of the services that can be embedded with this method.

Embedding other third-party content, such as slide shows from Flickr, presentations from SlideShare, or games from other websites, is simply a

matter of copying the embed code from the other site and pasting it into the HTML view in your post editing box.

WordPress Codex: Embeds

<http://codex.wordpress.org/Embeds>

NextGEN Gallery

The very flexible NextGEN Gallery plugin gets better with every version release. Upload images from your computer and organize them into galleries to display in a variety of attractive formats. Additional features include editing of thumbnail images and captions.

NextGEN Gallery

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/nextgen-gallery>

WP jQuery Lightbox

A lightbox effect links thumbnails to larger images that display in an attractive overlay on the page. If there are multiple images on the page, the overlay has arrows to navigate to the next image. This effect is easily added by using WP jQuery Lightbox or another one (but only one!) of the many lightbox plugins. The plugin jQuery Lightbox is also a fine alternative.

WP jQuery Lightbox

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-jquery-lightbox>

jQuery Lightbox

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/jquery-lightbox-balupton-edition>

Blubrry PowerPress Podcasting Plugin

Blubrry PowerPress Podcasting, a full-featured podcast plugin, includes support for iTunes feeds, several styles of audio players to choose from, and a slew of advanced features. (For more information on adding your podcast feed to iTunes, see the iTunes FAQs for Podcast Makers.) To post a podcast, simply write a post about the podcast and enter the full URL for your audio file in the PowerPress dialog box below the post editing box. The podcast will be automatically incorporated into the post. While Blubrry PowerPress Podcasting does an excellent job, also consider podPress and Podcasting Plugin by TSG. Please note that audio files consume lots of server space, so carefully consider whether you'll host your files on your

WordPress server or on a commercial server. Location of the files doesn't affect how the plugin works.

Blubrry PowerPress Podcasting plugin
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/powerpress>

podPress
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/podpress>

Podcasting Plugin by TSG
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/podcasting>

iTunes: FAQs: For Podcast Makers
www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/creatorfaq.html

OpenBook Book Data

OpenBook Book Data, a wonderful plugin from John Miedema, uses ISBNs to retrieve book cover, author, title, and publisher data from the Open Library database and display them in your posts, pages, and sidebars. It includes several default display formats and allows for custom formats as well. It incorporates OpenURL resolver support to link back to your library's catalog.

OpenBook Book Data
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/openbook-book-data>

Open Library
<http://openlibrary.org>

Section 3: Mobile Plugins and Apps

Overview

The number of users accessing your library's website through mobile devices is growing and will continue to grow. We can no longer ignore the needs of these users. Fortunately, there are a number of plugins that make it very simple to offer a mobile version of your WordPress site. These plugins work by detecting what browser and device a customer is using, then sending an appropriate version of the site optimized for the browser and device.

WPtouch

WPtouch provides an extremely elegant and user-friendly mobile interface. The interface includes an easy-to-use search function and straightforward comment forms. The pages you select to include in the mobile interface appear in a drop-down menu. There's also an option to select something other than the site's homepage as the mobile default homepage,

providing an opportunity to create a special page of links and resources that would be of interest to mobile users.

WPtouch
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wptouch>

WordPress Multi Site Mobile Edition

The WordPress Multi Site Mobile Edition plugin is built to work with the Carrington Mobile theme, a tidy, easy-to-use theme. The main view includes posts listed by title, followed by an unstructured (and a bit confusing) list of all the pages in your site. This plugin works with both single site and Multisite installations.

WordPress Multi Site Mobile Edition
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wpms-mobile-edition>

Apps for Your Mobile Devices

Managing your WordPress site on the go has gotten easier with apps for a variety of mobile devices. Functionality varies by device, but they all allow you to write new posts and manage comments. Other features to look for are access to statistics and the ability to delete posts and pages, upload media, turn on comment notification, and more. Watch for new features as the apps are updated. Also check to see if there are other third-party apps available for your device that might have better features.

Devices currently supported include Android, Apple (iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch), BlackBerry, Nokia, and Windows Phone 7.⁴

Section 4: Forms

Overview

Forms may not be the most exciting part of a website, but they are workhorses. Forms can be used to get feedback from visitors to your site and to provide a way for patrons to order materials, ask reference questions, book community rooms, and much more. Discussed below are our pick of the best forms management plugins, but don't forget that you could always embed a Google form using Google Docs.

Contact Form 7

Contact Form 7 is free, simple to use, and very flexible. You can create multiple forms with a full range

of input field types. Fields can be required or not, and this plugin incorporates legible captchas, quiz-type questions, and file upload options. It offers full control over error and confirmation messages and the formatting of resulting e-mail messages. And it does all these things without an overwhelming interface.

Contact Form 7

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/contact-form-7>

Gravity Forms

If you need a bit more power behind your forms, this very popular and reasonably priced Gravity Forms plugin offers a wide array of advanced options. It creates forms that display specified fields only under certain conditions, incorporates reCAPTCHAs, sets up rules to route form input to different e-mail addresses, includes form scheduling, and has many more features.

Gravity Forms

<http://www.gravityforms.com>

Part 5: Roll Your Own Social Network

Section 1: Transforming WordPress with BuddyPress

Overview

One of WordPress's most transformative plugins, BuddyPress completely changes the user experience of a WordPress site by installing what is essentially a suite of social elements in one comprehensive plugin. Built originally in 2008 and with its first stable version released in 2009,⁵ BuddyPress mimics some of the best qualities of Facebook but gives the site administrator the opportunity to pick and choose exactly what elements should be enabled. BuddyPress is also one of the most sought-after plugins, with over 430,000 downloads.⁶

Billed as “social networking in a box,” BuddyPress enables excellent social features, such as

- activity streams that consistently update with the latest blog posts, comments, forum replies, and much more
- customizable profiles for individualizing user information
- connection building with fellow users by way of a friending feature
- private messaging for internal site communications between members

- groups with stratified privacy settings
- many more features added by over 300 plugins created to extend BuddyPress's functionality

Like WordPress, BuddyPress is flexible for the project in which it is employed. While some site creators have used BuddyPress for commercial endeavors, others, such as Michael Stephens and Kenley Neufeld (see their guest piece in chapter 4), have used it as a learning management system. One of the most successful BuddyPress projects in education is the City University of New York's (CUNY) Academic Commons (figure 3.4). The CUNY Academic Commons boasts over 1,500 members, 175 groups, and 300 blogs, all connecting faculty members in their intellectual pursuits at the university.⁷

BuddyPress

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/buddypress>

Michael Stephens's BuddyPress sites

<http://lis701.tametheweb.com>

<http://lis753.tametheweb.com>

<http://lis768.tametheweb.com>

Kenley Neufeld's BuddyPress site

<http://classes.kenleyneufeld.com>

CUNY Academic Commons

<http://commons.gc.cuny.edu>

BuddyPress Support

BuddyPress is supported by a team of developers who consistently update the plugin, add in functionality, and are dedicated to its success. Some plugins in the WordPress plugin repository cannot boast this amount of stability due to a variety of circumstances, so it is excellent to be able to note that one of the most feature-heavy plugins has real staying power and can truly be relied upon for a project.

If a library is looking to implement social features and transform its site into a community-driven online location, BuddyPress should be the plugin of choice. Its features are not bested by any other plugin or combination of plugins available. It must be noted that the extensiveness of the plugin's features does strain small servers or shared server environments. It would be best to test out BuddyPress for its scalability for particular projects. Additionally, not all themes are created with BuddyPress in mind, and therefore some cannot support BuddyPress. We suggest using the BuddyPress Template Pack plugin listed in the section below or choosing a BuddyPress-ready theme.

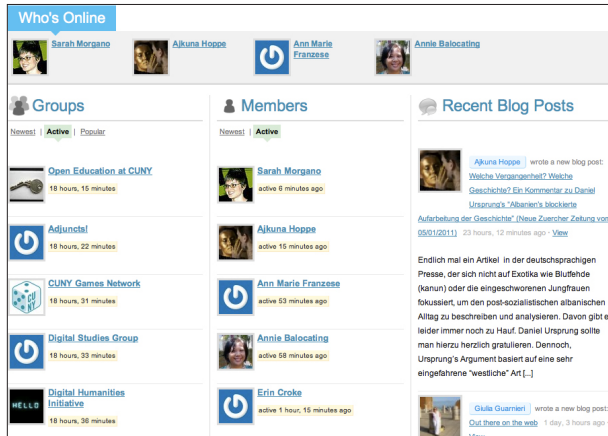


Figure 3.4
The front page of CUNY's Academic Commons, showing off the most recent activity on the site

Section 2: Feature-Rich BuddyPress Plugins

Overview

In the same fashion that plugins add features and build functionality on top of WordPress, there are plugins created specifically to do the same just for BuddyPress. As a social networking platform, the BuddyPress and WordPress connection works extremely well as is. But as users got accustomed to the general setup, they found areas where greater functionality and usability could be added. Over the past three years, plugin developers have recognized this situation and have created plugins specifically for BuddyPress.

It's difficult to sum up the following plugins in a nice, concise paragraph because there isn't much continuity between them. However, that difficulty is representative of the disparate ways plugin developers are approaching adding functionality with BuddyPress-specific plugins.

Group Documents

While it seems like a small function to add to BuddyPress, Group Documents greatly improves the group user experience by allowing attachments to specific groups. This plugin would be an excellent addition for sites using BuddyPress as an intranet.

Group Documents

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/buddypress-group-documents>

Welcome Pack

Built by Paul Gibbs, one of the core developers of BuddyPress, Welcome Pack greatly improves the user experience at the creation of a user account. As an

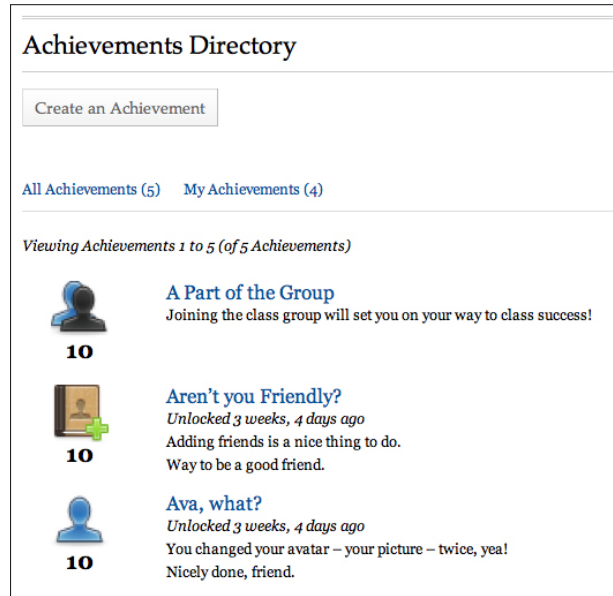


Figure 3.5
The directory of achievements available on a course website.

account is created, the user could be sent welcome messages, friendship requests, and group invitations. Site administrators can use Welcome Pack to customize generic messages sent out by BuddyPress to create a more appropriate and welcoming tone in the text.

Welcome Pack

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/welcome-pack>

Achievements for BuddyPress

Another fine plugin by Paul Gibbs, Achievements for BuddyPress was motivated by the video game achievements found in Xbox and PlayStation 3 gaming systems. Gibbs's version provides users with points and badges as they publish content and interact with a BuddyPress-enabled site (figure 3.5).

Achievements for BuddyPress

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/achievements>

BuddyPress Wiki Component

Still in its infancy yet showing a lot of potential, BuddyPress Wiki Component creates simple wiki pages in groups. Page creation can be limited to just the group administrator or open to all group members. This is another excellent plugin to consider for an intranet use of BuddyPress.

BuddyPress Wiki Component
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/bp-wiki>

BuddyPress Template Pack

BuddyPress won't work upon installation without appropriate integration into a theme. If a theme isn't BuddyPress-ready—which would be the case for a custom library theme—consider using BuddyPress Template Pack, which adds in the necessary functionality for BuddyPress to work in a theme. This plugin will require a little customization to a theme even upon installation, but it does not require knowledge of PHP.

BuddyPress Template Pack
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/bp-template-pack>

Notes

1. "Post Types," WordPress.org Codex, http://codex.wordpress.org/Post_Types (accessed Jan. 5, 2011).
2. "Plugin Directory" search for *calendar*, WordPress.org, <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/search.php?q=calendar> (accessed Feb 13, 2011).
3. "Plugin Directory: WP to Twitter: Stats," WordPress.org <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-to-twitter/stats> (accessed Feb. 13, 2011).
4. "Support: Apps for WordPress.com," Dec. 31, 2010, <http://en.support.wordpress.com/apps> (accessed Feb. 13, 2011).
5. "About BuddyPress," BuddyPress.org, <http://buddypress.org/about/story/> (accessed Jan. 6, 2011).
6. "Plugin Directory: BuddyPress," WordPress.org, <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/buddypress> (accessed Jan. 6, 2011).
7. CUNY Academic Commons Members Directory (<http://commons.gc.cuny.edu/members>), Groups Directory (<http://commons.gc.cuny.edu/groups>), and Blogs Directory (<http://commons.gc.cuny.edu/blogs>), all accessed Jan. 6, 2011.