

Plugins

Today's to-do list

Today we are going to look at some other plugins available to you, to help you back up, connect up and secure your site.

We will look at SEO plugins and e-commerce in upcoming sessions, so we won't be focusing on those today.

Learning objectives:

By the end of this session, you will

Learn how to install security and performance plugins

Understand the various plugins

Identify what maintenance needs to be done each month.

Updates?

In WordPress, unlike the hosted sites - Wix, and Squarespace etc, you are responsible for keeping all your software up to date. WordPress versions update frequently, and we need to make sure we keep on top of those updates. Depending on your hosting platform, you can get those updates done automatically. Better if you aren't going to be logging in regularly so that you are always up to date.

Why keep up to date?

Security, new features, bug fixes. All software has glitches and demons. Little loopholes here and there can be exploited by hackers. Bugs in the system can cause conflicts with other plugins and themes so it's important to keep up to date with all the latest versions, **plus if you don't you can miss out on some really cool features that get introduced in each update.**

Plugins all need updating too. Just like your WordPress version, they are regularly updated for security and added features and to make sure they work properly with each WordPress update. The more plugins you have, the more updates you will need to do. You can do automatic updates but it's not really recommended. A change in a plugin can conflict with a theme or another plugin and all of a sudden you have the white screen of doom and you don't know why.

If you are going to do a lot of plugin updates at once it's always best to do them manually, and one at a time. Update a plugin then go check your site. That way you will be able to identify where the problem lies if the dreaded white screen of doom appears.

The majority of site crashes are the result of plugin/theme/WP version conflicts.

Can I have as many plugins as I like?

Yes and no. There is no limit as to how many you can install, Plugins are great and they let us do so many things, it is worth remembering though that every plug-in you add has to be loaded at some point. A lot of them will load on page load, which means they have to be

loaded up by your browser before the page is shown. The more plugins, the more stuff there is to load. The slower your site. The worse it is for your SEO. Boooo!

When you look at themes take a look at what is going to be included. Some themes have a dozen plugins just to load the demo. Other premium themes like Enfold have everything built into the theme. No extras, nothing additional to load. It makes the site super quick with lots of inbuilt functionality.

Included as standard.

Before you choose your hosting, it's often worth looking at what is included in your set-up as standard. Providers like SiteGround are dedicated WordPress providers. Their hosting comes with daily server backups so no need for an additional backup plugin. And they have their own security and optimisation plugins that do the same job as about 6 others all combined.

So, what plugins do I need?

There are lots of plugins for pretty much everything you can imagine. From SEO to security to cost calculators, and booking systems, you can even make them snow in winter or have falling leaves in autumn. We are going to look at some of these tomorrow. **You will want to add some just to help you get a better user experience, but there are some that you will need to make sure you include for better security and performance** and that's what we are going to look at installing on our sites today.

Essentials include;

Security

Performance/Caching

Backups

GDPR/Cookies

SEO

Analytics

There are tens of thousands of plugins available, at last count it was something like 60,000 and loads do the same thing. How do you choose between them? Under each plugin, you will get three bits of information that are essential to helping you pick the right one.

Last update date - you want something that is regularly updated, it will be more secure and less likely to cause conflicts when it's installed.

Stars out of 5 - If it's got 2000 installs and only 1 star then it's probably not the one you want. You want to be looking for 5 stars for the best ones.

Number of active installs - that's how many people have it installed on their site and are actively using it. As a rule of thumb, the more active installs the better the plugin.

Let's start with backups.

Some providers, like we just mentioned do them as standard. But not everyone does, never assume! **Backups are one of those things, you don't think you need them, till you do. Just**

Imagine, you build a lovely website, you break it, not hard to be honest, and then what? Argghh, white screen of doom!

The best way to fix it is to restore a backup and put it back to where it was before you did whatever it was you did. If you don't have an automatic backup you are going to be in a bit of a flap. There are several great backup plugins that can either do routine daily/weekly/monthly backups or you can do them manually. It's always a good idea to take a backup before you do any significant updates to WordPress versions, WooCommerce versions etc. The kind of things that could possibly make a mess. If you create a backup, the mess won't happen. If you don't it will. It's sod's law.

Plugins like Updraft and Duplicator can be set to do routine backups for you and save them to various different places including Google Drive and Dropbox so they are kept externally but can be restored at the click of a button.

All-in-one Migration is great for manual backups before you do updates and is perfect if you want to take a copy of your site to move it somewhere.

Security

It's a sad fact that we can't just build a nice site and leave it there. Some sad little being has to try and force their way into where they are not welcome. So, we need some security.

Plugins like Wordfence, Sucuri and Jetpack all have good solid free features and premium paid-for options too. They are nice and easy to set up and configure.

Plugins like Jetpack do a whole host of things not just keep your site secure. It will notify you if your site is down, it can connect you to the WordPress App so you can track orders from your WooCommerce store and help keep the spam at bay.

Activity one - Let's log in and take a look.

Let's install Jetpack and get it set up

GDPR & Cookie consent

We have spoken about cookies and how important it is to have a compliant site.

Occasionally a theme will come with a built-in GDPR setup but most of the time we will need to add an extra plugin.

Activity two

Next, we want to install a GDPR plugin and set it up

Performance

We have touched on site speed and loading times and with the latest changes to Google Algorithms, it is even more important to have a high-performing and fast-loading site than ever before. There are several different plugins out there that do various jobs between the, We can optimise our images by reducing the size and compressing them. Plugins like Smush are designed to optimise the images already loaded to your site and any new ones as you upload them.

For page speed and web performance, we want to look at a caching plugin something like W3 Total Cache will optimise your site code including your CSS and Javascript.

Activity three

Let's add a caching plugin to our site and set it up.

Migration

At some point, you are probably going to have to move a website, either between hosts, from a testing server to a live one or because you are taking over a site from someone else. Migrating a site can be tricky, you need to make sure you get all the bits in the right place in the right order. One file gets left behind and the whole lot stops working so we want to use an all-in-one plugin. Something like All-in-one Migration takes a backup of the whole site, all its files and a copy of the database and presents it to us in one nice neat file. You can then upload it and restore it to any WordPress install.

Activity four

Let's all All in One Migration and set it up on our sites. At the end of the Skills Bootcamp, you will need to take a copy of your portfolio site if you want to keep it. The installs that have been provided for the course will stay active until the start of March, after that if you want to keep your portfolio site, you will need to take a copy and migrate it so let's look at how we will do that and then you know in advance.

Coming up soon to extend these skills

Tomorrow we will look at some of the other plugins available that allow you to do all kinds of cool stuff.

Don't forget

Make sure you complete today's task. Links to download a copy of today's notes and slides are at the bottom of today's session page.

Today's session page in your learner dashboard has a useful links document that will cover all the tools, resources and articles we have discussed in the session and some useful guides and articles to take you further.

Make sure you revisit your FABs and set yourself some goals specific to today's session.

Extra help

If you need any help with anything from today's session feel free to message me in the WhatsApp group. If you have any other issues or problems related to the course or the tools speak to Andrew and Irfana, they are here to help you.

Up next

See you tomorrow for more plugins.