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Intro to WordPress: ***Building and Editing a Site in*** ***WordPress***

By Lisa Li



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A Bit About Me...

Hi, I'm Lisa Li, a web developer and graphic designer in Norman, Oklahoma.

- I've been building websites and designing graphics for over 20 years
- I've been building and working with WordPress websites since around 2018
- In high school, I learned the basics of web development and graphic design and I've been doing it ever since – and that's for over 20 years!
- I graduated Southeastern Oklahoma State University in December 2023 with a bachelor's degree in Computer Science
- I started my business, Making The Impact LLC, in 2018 where I provide web development, graphic design, and marketing services
- I primarily build websites using WordPress for various small businesses, non-profits, churches, and ministries
- I have an awesome husband and teenage daughter, plus 2 cats and a dog



Introduction

Why use WordPress to build your website?

For most small business websites, I typically recommend using WordPress. Here are some of the biggest reasons:

- Most popular website platform (43% of all websites) so it has an extensive community and wide support, and it's easy to find designers and developers who can work on it
- It has the flexibility and scalability needed to build nearly any type of website
- There are literally thousands of themes and plugins available, many of which are free to use
- It receives regular updates and if a security flaw is found, it is typically quickly patched
- It is relatively easy to use, once you get the hang of it
- It is supported by most web hosting companies with quick and easy installation
- If you want to switch hosting companies, you typically can move the site without rebuilding it
- The core system has no subscription fees and it is free to install



It is by far one of the most flexible and affordable systems to use to build a website. It started out as being a platform used to build blog websites, but due to its popularity and massive community, it's been used for many years to create a wide variety of websites, big and small.

WordPress vs. Other Platforms

Despite the existence of website builders such as Wix or Squarespace, WordPress has had a serious advantage in that:

1. It can be used on just about any web hosting service.
2. The core system is free and open-source, so it doesn't require a monthly subscription to use.
3. It has a massive library of plugins and themes available.
4. It is more flexible in terms of features, customization, and control.

To put it simply, WordPress keeps you from being locked into a particular company.

Example 1: Let's say you're hosting a website with XYZ company and they decide to raise their rates significantly. If your website is built using WordPress, you can move your website to another company then cancel your plan with XYZ.

Example 2: Now let's say you use a website builder with a company called ABC and you need to add a feature to your website that your current plan doesn't support. You may have to either upgrade to a plan that offers that feature or you may need to find a different solution if their platform doesn't support it.

Example 3: Let's say ABC sends a notice that they are raising their rates. Because you built the website with their platform you can't simply move it to another company because it was built using their software. You would have to rebuild the website with another website builder, likely manually copying over the data and information to the new site.

What this all means...

With WordPress, you have freedom. You are not locked into any one particular hosting company, developer, designer, or particular setup.

You can move your website to another provider that may have better prices, service, and support. You can often add features using plugins, many of which have a free version. With WordPress page builders such as Beaver Builder, you can create an awesome website yourself and customize it to look the way you want.



The AI Revolution

Now, there are tools where you can use AI to build your website for you, creating content for you in the process and it can do it instantly. Don't like a design or the content? With a click of a button you can regenerate it.

Previously, it seemed these tools were limited to specific platforms and I was not aware of any that were designed for the WordPress platform.

That has now changed. Just recently, I discovered a tool that can automatically build a WordPress website for you using AI, very easily.

Once you create the website, you can move it to any web hosting company that supports WordPress, thus giving you the benefits of both WordPress and an AI website builder. Furthermore, the tool does all this very affordably with no costly monthly subscriptions.

The technology has advanced so far now, that web designers and developers are no longer needed to build simple websites. **You can easily do it yourself with a bit of knowledge and the help of AI.**

Whatever you would normally spend paying someone like me to help you, you will be able to spend on other things you need, saving yourself hundreds and even thousands of dollars, especially long-term. And yes, this means I'm basically being phased out of this particular line of work, thanks to AI 😭

Ok.. so you want to know how it all works right? Alright, let's get started.



What You Need

There are some things you need to build a website in WordPress:

- Domain Name
 - It is a short, memorable word, name, or phrase that ends with .com, .net, or another extension
 - It's like a virtual street name that helps people find your website
- Website Hosting
 - A website hosting plan is where your website files are stored and made accessible to the world through the Internet
 - Think of it like a virtual parcel of land with utilities in a big city
- Free SSL Certificate
 - SSL is like a lock that helps protect your property from thieves and intruders
 - Free SSL is typically sufficient for most small business websites
- WordPress
 - This is like the construction company that brings the materials and tools to assemble the framework of your website

If you buy a domain name and website hosting separately, you will likely need to change the DNS settings for the domain name. If you buy them together, the web hosting company will typically have it automatically set for you.

What is DNS? DNS is what works behind the scenes that makes it so people who type in your domain name can get to your website.

You can think of it like an old phone operator that would direct connect and direct calls using one of those old phone operator boards, or like the GPS that guides people who enter in your address to the destination, in this case your website.

How It All Works Together

Each of the components discussed play an important role in how your website is created and runs. It also effects the email accounts you use with your chosen domain name.



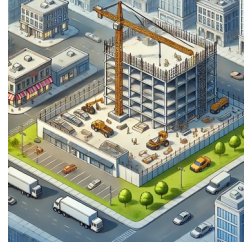
Domain Name

(it's like a street address where people will find your business)



Website Hosting

(it's like a parcel of land you build on)



Website Builders

(it's like the materials, tools, and equipment you build with)



Email Hosting

(it's like where you send and receive your mail)



DNS & Name Servers

(it's like the GPS or phone book of the Internet that runs behind the scenes)



SSL Certificate

(it's like a padlock to help protect your property)

Basic Steps to Build a Website in WordPress

While building a website with WordPress is a bit more involved than simply signing up for a service like Wix or Squarespace, it can save you a lot of money, especially if you want to build multiple websites.

To try to keep things simple, I've broken down the process into 6 key steps.

1. Choose a web hosting company

- Find a web hosting company that has the features you need, fits your budget, and has good reviews – particularly with their service, speed, support, and pricing



2. Choose a domain name registrar and buy a domain name

- Buy a short, memorable, easy to spell domain name that suits your business
- Get privacy protection, companies like Dynadot, Hover, Porkbun, and IONOS include privacy protection for free

3. Buy website hosting

- After you have a domain name, buy website hosting and enter in the domain name you purchased when you sign up

4. Connect the domain name to the website hosting

- Once your web hosting account has been setup, you will receive an email with details like the Name Servers (they typically look like ns1.arandomserver.com and ns2.arandomserver.com)
- Go to where you bought your domain name and find the settings to manage it – look for something that mentions DNS and enter in the Name Servers into the setting fields (it should say Name Servers by the fields and there should be 2 to 4 text boxes).
- Once the domain name is connected to your website hosting, if the free SSL (Let's Encrypt) doesn't set automatically, you may need to use the SSL or Let's Encrypt control to generate one. The exact way to do that will vary and depend on the hosting company you choose.

5. Install WordPress

- Many web hosts have a 1-click installer for WordPress, others have something called "Softaculous"
- Click on the installer and follow the steps to install WordPress

6. Start building your website!

- Once WordPress has been installed, you can start building your website, so login!



Domain Name & Web Hosting

Choose a web hosting company

You first need to buy a shared or WordPress hosting plan. When trying to decide which company to go with, pay attention to:

- **The resources you get**
 - Aim for 10 GB or more of space and 1GB or more of Memory (RAM)
 - Look for things that say you get unlimited databases, support for unlimited domain names, unlimited email accounts
- **Look for good reviews that were posted recently**
 - Look for recent reviews because sometimes companies get bought out or they change and their service, prices, or support change
- **Their regular prices (don't get caught up in sales)**
 - Saving some money now might cost you a lot more later when their service renews at their regular prices
- **Ways to contact their technical support**
 - Some companies have only online support, others have phone numbers you can call, some require you to submit support tickets
- **The location of their servers (where the hosting plan is located) – this can affect your website loading speed**
 - If you're in the US and your target audience is the entire country, look for a hosting plan with a location in the central US
 - If your target audience is local to where you are, look for a hosting plan that is closest to your general region

The hosting companies I typically recommend are:

- **HawkHost** – their shared hosting plans are cheap and suitable for most small business websites, plus they have recurring discount coupons you can find online to lock in long-term savings
- **Hostinger** – their features and plans are more robust than what HawkHost offers, but their regular prices are a bit higher but fair for what you get
- **SiteGround** – their platform offers a lot of features, but their prices are a bit higher, it's good for WordPress websites that use WooCommerce (online shopping cart system)

Once you've chosen a hosting company, do not buy hosting yet - you will need to purchase a domain name first. You can choose to buy a domain name from a different company or buy it from the web hosting company.



Choose a domain name

Companies like Hostinger offer a free .com domain name for the first year with certain plans or hosting terms. Be sure to pay attention to the fine print. Find out what they charge after the first year and if they include privacy protection.

From what I've noticed, hosting company deals like this are typically not worth it. They can make it more difficult to manage the domain name records if and when you need to, it can be more of a hassle transferring the domain name to a different company, and they typically don't include free privacy protection so you'd have to pay extra for that.

That being the case, I typically recommend using a domain registrar like Dynadot, Porkbun, Hover, IONOS, or another registrar that includes free privacy, typically lower prices when the domain renews, and better tools to manage it with.

The Hosting Control Panel

When you buy web hosting, you will typically have access to some kind of control panel that lets you set things up and change the settings.

Many web hosting companies use a control panel called "cPanel", but many have their own custom panel. cPanel gives you more control, typically, but it is a bit more complicated to use and might appear more overwhelming.

Control panels typically have controls for things like:

- File management (File Manager, FTP)
- Domain Management (Add-ons, Subdomains)
- Email Setup (Email accounts, Forwarding)
- Database Management (MySQL, PHPMyAdmin)
- One-Click Installers (WordPress, Joomla, etc.)
- SSL (Let's Encrypt)

I know these are probably some scary looking words, but don't worry, it's not as complicated as they sound. Here are the ones you need to pay attention to:

- **File Manager**
 - It's like using File Explorer to browse files on your computer, but this one has all your website files in it
 - It is good for emergency troubleshooting, if something you install breaks your website
- **Domains or "Add-on Domains"**
 - If you need to verify ownership of your domain name, you will add the record through the control panel here



- If you have more than one domain name, you can add them to your hosting account
- You can set them to point to your primary website or use them to build more websites on the same server (*if your hosting plan allows it*)
- **Subdomains**
 - These are domain names that are based on your primary domain name (the one you registered for your website)
 - Subdomains can be used for separate websites or applications
 - Google has different subdomain names that make it easy to access their various services. Here are some examples:
 - mail.google.com
 - drive.google.com
 - analytics.google.com
- **Email Accounts**
 - A lot of web hosting companies include the ability to host your email accounts on the same hosting as your website
 - When you access email accounts from the control panel, it should provide a way to create one or more email addresses
 - There will likely be a button to link you can click on to access the email inbox in the web browser
 - You will typically find the IMAP and POP settings you need to add the email account to your phone, computer and devices to give you the ability to send and receive emails without using a web browser directly
- **One-Click Installers or Softaculous**
 - With one-click installers, you can quickly and easily install WordPress
 - Softaculous is a program that makes it easy to install WordPress
 - When you click the installer, it will guide you through a wizard and it will setup WordPress for you
 - Once installed, you will be able to access the WordPress admin to start building your website

The WordPress Admin

Once WordPress has been installed, you can start building your website using the WordPress Admin. You simply log into the website using the admin account that was created when you installed it on your website hosting.



Note: Due to the way the WordPress admin works and how most plugins typically function, you should access the WordPress admin from a computer.

It is far easier to control and interact with the WordPress admin when you are using a computer than it is using a touchscreen device such as a phone or tablet. In some cases you may not be able to see the controls or access them if the screen is too small.

Once you are logged in, you will typically be taken straight into the Admin Dashboard.

A black bar runs along the top that will follow you on all the pages you access while you are logged in as an admin user. In the Dashboard, you will see a sidebar that runs along the left side that has a list of different tabs.

If you hover your mouse cursor over them, some will display a submenu and if you click on them, the submenu options will display beneath it inside the sidebar.

While the options on the submenu may be a bit overwhelming, there are some key ones that you need to focus, and not so much the others.

- **Dashboard:** This is the main WordPress admin dashboard page. It is what you typically see whenever you login.
- **Posts:** This is where you add articles, news updates, and blog posts to your website (if you want that kind of content on your website).
- **Media:** This is where all the images, PDFs, videos, and other files you upload will be found.
- **Pages:** The main pages of your website will be found here, such as your about, contact, services/products, home pages.
- **Appearance:** This is where you install themes and customize the appearance of your website.
- **Plugins:** This is where you can install free plugins to extend the functionality of your website and add new features. Many plugins have paid versions or upgrades you can purchase to unlock more controls and additional functionality.
- **Settings:** This is where you set things like the timezone, day of the week, enable/disable comments, permalinks, and other settings.

Important Wordpress Plugins

Once you have WordPress installed, there are some plugins I highly recommend you install and start using right away to help protect your website and to start building it.

- **Wordfence:** This is a security plugin you can install for free that helps protect your website from attacks from hackers and malware.
- **Coming Soon/Maintenance Plugin:** This is a plugin you use temporarily while you build your website. It prevents people from viewing the site before it's ready by displaying a temporary page.



- **Page Builder:** A page builder makes it easy to build and design a website by using drag and drop components. Some popular page builders for WordPress are: Beaver Builder, Elementor, Divi Builder, SiteOrigin Page Builder, and Brizy.
- **Form Plugin:** You can add a contact form to your website to make it easy for people to send you an email. There are lots of form plugins that you can add to your website for free such as: Fluent Forms, WPForms, Contact Form 7, Ninja Forms, Formidable Forms, and Everest Forms.

Plugins make it easy to add new features and extend the capabilities of your website with a few clicks. While there are lots of free plugins, you will find most are limited in their ability and will require an upgrade to unlock additional features. Upgrades are often in the form of a monthly, annual, or lifetime license. I have found that a lot of the free plugins provide enough functionality that I am able to use them without upgrading them.

How to Install a Plugin:

1. From the WordPress Admin, click on Plugins in the sidebar and then click on Add New Plugin (you can also hover your mouse cursor over Plugins and select Add New Plugin from the submenu to go there directly).
2. If you have a plugin file (a zip folder), you can click the button at the top to upload it and select the file. If you don't, then you can search the WordPress plugin directory for the name of a plugin. Click on the search field that is located on the right side of the screen and enter the name of the plugin. After you type, the results will automatically update to display any matching plugins.
3. Find the plugin you want to install and click on the Install button for it. After it installs, the button text will change to say Activate. Click on Activate to turn on the plugin. When you do, it will immediately start running and be added to the WordPress Admin sidebar (usually, but this can depend) so you can start modifying any settings it has and start using it on your website.

You will also want to install a theme on your website. The theme you use is

Troubleshooting

When working with WordPress, it's common to encounter issues related to plugins and themes. These problems can range from critical errors that take down your entire site to more subtle issues that affect functionality. Below are some common issues and solutions to help you troubleshoot and resolve them.

Common Plugin Issues and How to Fix Them

1. Critical Errors



You may encounter a "Critical Error" message on your website, where the site or certain parts of it won't load. If you encounter this issue, you will likely see a message like this:



This usually happens when a plugin conflicts with WordPress itself, another plugin, or your theme.

Solution:

◆ **Disable Plugins via WordPress Dashboard:**

1. If you can still access the WordPress dashboard, navigate to the "Plugins" section.
2. Deactivate all plugins and then reactivate them one by one, checking your site after each activation. This will help you identify the problematic plugin.

◆ **Disable Plugins via FTP or Hosting Control Panel:**

1. If you can't access the dashboard, log in to your site via FTP or your hosting control panel.
2. Navigate to the /wp-content/plugins/ directory (this is located in the root folder where all your website files are located, and it may be called "public_html", "www" or something like that)
3. Rename the folder of each plugin (e.g., change plugin-name to plugin-name_old) to deactivate them.
4. Once you've identified the problematic plugin, delete or replace it with an alternative.

2. Broken Functionality

Sometimes you may find that a feature on your website doesn't work correctly, and no error message appears. This can take the form of buttons not doing anything when clicked, some things not loading or displaying, or other issues. This is often due to a plugin conflict or a malfunctioning plugin. Sometimes, like people, plugins and/or themes don't get along with each other and it can create problems.

Solution:

◆ **Check Plugin Compatibility:**



- Ensure all your plugins are compatible with your current WordPress version and each other.
- Visit the plugin's page on WordPress.org to check compatibility and user reviews.
- ◆ **Roll Back to a Previous Version:**
 - Sometimes, the latest plugin update introduces bugs. You can roll back to a previous version using a plugin like WP Rollback.
- ◆ **Test for Conflicts:**
 - Deactivate all plugins and reactivate them one by one, as described above, to pinpoint the issue.

Common Theme Issues and How to Fix Them

1. Theme Conflicts

A newly installed or updated theme causes your site to display incorrectly or break. The theme may not be compatible with your WordPress version, your plugins, or your hosting environment.

Solution:

- ◆ **Switch to a Default Theme:**
 - If your site breaks after activating a theme, switch to a default WordPress theme like Twenty Twenty-One.
 - If the issue resolves, the problem lies with your original theme.
- ◆ **Contact Theme Support:**
 - Reach out to the theme developer's support team for assistance. They may provide a fix or update.
- ◆ **Use a Child Theme:**
 - Avoid direct theme modifications. Instead, use a child theme to make custom changes. This ensures updates to the main theme don't overwrite your changes.

2. Outdated Themes

An outdated theme may introduce security vulnerabilities or become incompatible with newer versions of WordPress and plugins.

Solution:

- ◆ **Regularly Update Your Theme:**



- Check for updates in the WordPress dashboard regularly.
 - Ensure that your theme remains compatible with the latest WordPress updates.
 - Set your themes to update automatically. You can do this from the WordPress admin in the list of themes you have installed. Click on each theme and click the link in the details section that says to enable automatic updates.
- ◆ **Consider Switching Themes:**
- If your theme is no longer maintained by the developer, consider switching to a more modern, supported theme.
 - If you use a page builder, such as Beaver Builder, the Pro version includes access to a customizable theme that they keep updated, ensuring your website stays secure and remains compatible with their page builder and the latest technology.

General Tips for Confidence and Peace of Mind

- **Back Up Regularly:** Always back up your website before making changes, updating plugins, or installing new themes. Use a reliable backup plugin like UpdraftPlus or BackupBuddy.
- **Test in a Staging Environment:** Use a staging environment to test updates and changes before applying them to your live site. Many hosting providers offer staging environments, or you can use a plugin like WP Staging.
- **Learn to Use Debug Mode:** Enable WordPress debug mode by adding `define('WP_DEBUG', true);` to your `wp-config.php` file. This can help you see error messages that are not displayed by default. You can install free plugins that can help you do this, simply do a search for “debug” and try out different plugins.
- **Set All Plugins and Themes to Auto Update:** You can avoid a lot of issues and problems by setting all of your website’s plugins and themes to auto update.
- **Less is Better:** It is typically best not have too many plugins installed, unless they are absolutely necessary. Some plugins can cause your website to run slower, so having additional plugins might contribute to resource drain slowing your website even more. So install only plugins you need.
- **Remove Plugins and Themes You Aren’t Using:** Generally speaking, you should always remove plugins and themes you aren’t using. Even if a plugin or theme isn’t active, it can create security vulnerabilities (increases the chance your website could be hacked or infected with malware).



- **Use a Caching Plugin:** Caching plugins can help speed up your website. Many web hosting companies such as HawkHost, support something call LiteSpeed Cache which helps your website load faster. This means you can install a plugin called LiteSpeed Cache and it will help your website load faster. Many web hosting companies will offer some kind of caching plugin or technology, but the specifics can vary.

Once you install a caching plugin, you will need to experiment with the settings to see what works best with your website. When you use a caching plugin, after you've made changes to the content of your website, you may need to clear the cache to ensure the changes fully take effect and to ensure an older version of the website is not displayed. You may also need to clear the cache in your web browser (typically found in the settings and type "cache" in the search bar to view the settings for it).

Note: Some cache settings can cause issues and they may not noticeable right away.

By following these steps, you can troubleshoot common WordPress issues related to plugins and themes with confidence, ensuring that your website remains functional and user-friendly.



Oh my goodness! Wow! You've reached the end!

Thank you for reading this very lengthy little book of "notes" for Websites 101!

This is honestly just the tip of the iceberg, but with this information you should be more equipped and informed so you'll be better able to make good decisions when it comes to your website. At the very least, you should have learned something, especially since I'm giving away trade secrets and the like.

If you like this information and want more, please tell people about MySmallBusinessWebsite.com so that I can bring you more brutally honest information to help you and others succeed in this crazy and chaotic world.

Oh, one more thing. Please do me a little favor.. please don't share this little note book - I don't want an angry mob of web designers bashing down my door. 😊



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Live long and prosper! 🙌