

The WordPress PLUGIN GUIDE

Transform your website into a business resource that delights customers, entices prospects, and produces measurable results!

Brought to you by WPAprentice.com

BUSINESS EDITION

The WordPress Plugin Guide

Transform your website into a business resource that delights customers, entices prospects, and produces measurable results!

WP Apprentice
A better way to learn WordPress

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGES

4-5	INTRODUCTION	16	DIGG DIGG
6	GOOGLE ANALYTICS FOR WORDPRESS	17	bbPRESS
7	WORDPRESS SEO (BY YOAST)	18	OPTIMIZEPRESS
8	WORDPRESS BUSINESS PLUGIN	19	WOOCOMMERCE
9	BUSINESS HOURS PLUGIN	20	WPTOUCH
10	THE EVENTS CALENDAR	21	AKISMET
11	VERY SIMPLE GOOGLE MAPS	22	BACKUPBUDDY
12	USERNOISE MODAL FEEDBACK	23	W3 TOTAL CACHE
13	GRAVITY FORMS	24	RELEVANSSI
14	TABLE PRESS	25	ITHEMES SECURITY (FORMERLY BETTER WP SECURITY)
15	MAILCHIMP & EASY MAILCHIMP FORMS		

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade WordPress has grown into the most popular website creation software on the planet. In fact, the most recent statistics estimate that over 23% of all websites worldwide use WordPress.

What makes WordPress so popular among web designers, business owners, and hobbyists? The answer involves several factors.

Pre-designed WordPress themes (design templates) are widely available to anyone wanting to improve the look of their website. Many of these designs are free or reasonably priced. These templates allow for nearly unlimited design possibilities, and require no coding experience whatsoever. Gone are the days of the “webmaster.” We’ve entered a new era where anyone can carve out a corner of the World Wide Web and call it their own.

But design templates aren’t the only reason for WordPress’s massive popularity. An abundance of free plugins allow users to easily add nearly any imaginable feature to their websites.

What are plugins exactly?

You can think of a plugin as a mini-program that adds new features to your website. Plugins allow you to display multimedia content, collect payments, and connect to social networks. And that's just a small sample of the things plugins can do. Plugins expand on the capabilities built into WordPress, and they're easy to install and use.

If there's one problem with plugins it's that there are too many of them. The official WordPress plugin directory lists over 33,000 plugins, which is nothing short of mind-boggling. With so many plugins to choose from it's nearly impossible to find the *best* plugin for any given feature. Searching for the right plugin can easily consume hours of your day, leaving you exhausted, confused, and ready to throw in the towel.

This guide will help you cut through the clutter and zero-in on the plugins that improve your website. These are plugins that help you do business online — whether you're providing online support for your customers, generating leads, selling merchandise, or driving traffic to your physical location.

INTRODUCTION *Continued*

What you won't find in this guide are plugins that add unnecessary features, slow your site down, or annoy your visitors.

You also won't find a list of redundant plugins that provide similar functionality. If you're anything like me, you're not interested in having half a dozen plugins that barely get the job done. No, you want the best plugin. One that can have a significant impact on your business. That's what this guide offers you.

A NOTE ABOUT PREMIUM PLUGINS

Most of the plugins featured in this guide are available for free from the WordPress plugin directory. Many of them offer a paid upgrade for access to additional features and tech support. In all cases I've found that the free versions are perfectly functional and provide the desired features.

A few recommended plugins are available only in a premium edition (BackupBuddy and Gravity Forms). In these cases the plugins are recommended because I really do believe they are the best available solution and are worth the small investment. However, whenever possible I also try to recommend a free alternative.

Whether you're new on the WordPress scene, or consider yourself a seasoned professional, having an inventory of powerful plugins is akin to having a toolbox full of top-of-the-line business-building tools. I'm excited to share with you the plugins that I've discovered to be the best of the best and I look forward to hearing how you'll put them to work for you. Ready to get started? Let's dive into the WordPress Plugin Guide!

Kirk Biglione

WPApprentice.com

1 GOOGLE ANALYTICS FOR WORDPRESS

PLUGIN TYPE

Website Analytics

WHEN TO USE

Always. For any type of website.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/google-analytics-for-wordpress/>

COST

Free

The Google Analytics service helps website owners monitor traffic to their web pages and provides valuable insight into what visitors are doing as they browse the site. This plugin simplifies the basic setup and unlocks some advanced features that provide even more insight into how people are using your website.

Once Google Analytics is active on your site you'll have access to a huge trove of data that can help you improve the quality of your site and track your return on investment for your marketing and advertising campaigns.

Among other things Google Analytics will help you:

- Identify traffic patterns: what days and times is your site the busiest?
- Understand how visitors are using your website. What content is the most popular and what path do users follow through your site?
- Discover where your visitors are coming from.
- Identify pages where visitors leave your site.
- Track the effectiveness of your online marketing campaigns.

Because this plugin gives such valuable insights into visitor behavior and tendencies, setting up Google Analytics should be one of the first tasks on every site owner's to-do list. Every day you wait, you lose access to valuable historic data that provides perspective on how your site is being used over time.

USAGE NOTES

Before using this plugin you'll need to setup a free Google Analytics account at <http://www.google.com/analytics/>. Once your account is active the plugin connects to your Google account and inserts the Google data collection script on every page of your website.

2

WORDPRESS SEO (BY YOAST)

PLUGIN TYPE

Marketing

WHEN TO USE

Always. For any type of website.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wordpress-seo/>

COST

Free for the basic plugin.

Ranking on the first page of Google search results for your target keywords is the Holy Grail for anyone who owns a business website. The Yoast SEO plugin won't guarantee you a first page ranking, but it will eliminate many of the most common technical problems that prevent websites from ranking well.

The Yoast SEO plugin gives you control over which pages Google indexes, as well as the title and Meta description of each page. But what does that mean exactly? It means that you have more control over what people see when your pages turn up in search engines.

The plugin also provides some basic SEO advice. Enter your target keyword or phrase for any post or page and the plugin uses an SEO checklist to identify page elements that need work. For example, it will calculate how frequently the keyword appears in the page's text, the estimated readability of your prose, whether or not you've used headers and sub-headers etc. It will then give you a stoplight grade (green, yellow, or red) to indicate how strong each page's SEO is before it is published. It's SEO made fool-proof.

The plugin also generates the XML site maps that Google and other search engines use to more effectively index the content on your site, which eliminates the need for a dedicated site map plugin.

Though the basic plugin is free, a premium version is available from \$89. The premium version adds a redirect manager, comprehensive video tutorials, and deeper integration with Google Webmaster Tools. Yoast also offers additional premium modules for Video sitemaps and Local SEO. Unless you're an SEO expert in need of the more advanced tools, I recommend sticking with the free version of the Yoast SEO plugin – I think you'll be surprised at just how much it can help.

3

WORDPRESS BUSINESS PLUGIN

PLUGIN TYPE

Business content

WHEN TO USE

When you need to publish frequently asked questions, testimonials, and employee bios.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/business/>

COST

Free

The WordPress Business Plugin helps you streamline the process of entering standard content that appears on nearly every business website, including testimonials, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and team member bios.

Best of all, this plugin makes it easy to present that content to your users in a visually appealing layout without having to know anything at all about HTML. For example, Team Bios can be presented in a multi-column format with photos neatly positioned above each bio. And frequently asked questions are presented in an expandable format. Clicking on any question expands the page to reveal the answer.

Each type of content can be organized, grouped by category, and displayed in the colors and design that you select within the settings page of your WordPress dashboard. Businesses across the board can benefit from having this professionally polished design, without having to learn the messy details of HTML coding.

USAGE NOTES

Once the plugin is successfully installed and activated, new content types will show up in the left sidebar menu of the WordPress admin area. These new menu items let you click directly on them to add things like team bios, FAQs etc. Once the content is created, simply copy the WordPress shortcode and place it on any page or post. For example: After entering some questions and answers into the FAQ module, just use the shortcode [faq] on any post or page to display your content.

Adding polished content and fine-tuning the design couldn't be easier!

4

BUSINESS HOURS PLUGIN

PLUGIN TYPE

Business content

WHEN TO USE

When you have a physical location and you need to publish your business hours.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/business-hours-plugin/>

COST

Free

Does your business have a brick and mortar location? If so, there's a good chance most of your website visitors are looking for your business hours or hours of operation. This plugin simplifies the process of entering your business hours and displaying them on your website in a neatly formatted table.

Simply upload and activate the plugin, then enter your daily hours into a simple input form that can be found within your WordPress dashboard. You can even specify holidays and special occasions that may be exceptions to your regular hours of operations.

The plugin includes a widget that allows you to display your hours in any WordPress widget area.

Business hours are one of the most common bits of information that visitors look for on local business websites. This plugins will help you meet your customers expectations with a minimal amount of effort.

5

THE EVENTS CALENDAR

PLUGIN TYPE

Scheduling

WHEN TO USE

When you need to maintain an organized list of upcoming events.

DOWNLOAD LINK

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

COST

Free for basic version.
From \$65 for pro update.

If your business hosts events, workshops, or meetings of any kind, you'll want to add a calendar to your website.

While there's no shortage of WordPress calendar plugins, The Events Calendar has set itself apart from the pack and is widely considered to be one of the best plugins for displaying event information on your WordPress website.

It is designed to be comprehensive, flexible, and easy to use. Adding a new event to your calendar is quick and easy. The plugin automatically saves venues for re-use across events and you even have the option to include a Google Map for each location.

This plugin makes publishing calendars on your website a snap and you even have a choice of a traditional grid view or a list view. There's also a Calendar widget so you can display upcoming dates in any WordPress sidebar.

6

VERY SIMPLE GOOGLE MAPS

PLUGIN TYPE

Maps

WHEN TO USE

When you need a map to help customers find your business.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/very-simple-google-maps/>

COST

Free

If your business has one or more physical locations, including a map on your website will help your web visitors find their way to your shop's front door. This plugin makes it easy to add a customized Google Map to any page on your site.

Very Simple Google Map could not be easier to use. While other mapping plugins offer more features, all of the extra bells and whistles tend to make them overly complex. This plugin does just one thing and it does it very well: creates a map for a single address. Unless you have multiple storefronts, that's probably all you need out of map plugin.

USAGE NOTES

This plugin is so simple that it's tempting to think it doesn't do anything at all. Don't go looking for an admin menu option because you won't find one. Once the plugin is activated just add the map shortcode to any post or page and your Google map will be displayed. For example: `[vsgmap address="101 N Main Street, Pasadena, CA 91101"]`

Once the page is published, the map will appear. It couldn't be any easier.

7

USERNOISE MODAL FEEDBACK

PLUGIN TYPE

User Feedback

WHEN TO USE

When you want to give your visitors an opportunity to provide feedback on your website.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/usernoise/>

COST

Free. The pro features adds a few features for \$11.

Any business owner will tell you that the best way to improve your business is to listen to your customer's feedback, and the same goes for improving your website. This plugin makes it as easy as possible for your customers to leave feedback from any page of your site.

The plugin positions a small feedback tab on your site. When a visitor clicks on the tab a comment form is displayed in an overlay on the page where your visitors can leave their comment, and even choose a category for the type of comment.

Comments are forwarded to an email address of your choosing and a copy is saved in the WordPress admin area for you to review at your convenience. Whether you're soliciting feedback regarding your site or your business as a whole, this simple feedback form allows you to stay in touch with your clients without ever having to lift a finger.

8

GRAVITY FORMS

PLUGIN TYPE

Data collection

WHEN TO USE

When you need to collect data from your website users.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<http://www.gravityforms.com/>

COST

From \$39 for a single website. Advanced add-ons are available only with the \$199 Developers Edition.

Whether you need to set up a simple contact form or a complex job application, Gravity Forms will help you build and publish an online form quickly and easily.

Web form creation has always been a complex and time consuming process, wrought with frustration for non-programmers. For small business owners, creating a web form usually means hiring a programmer and paying hundreds, or even thousands of dollars. Ouch!

But this is why plugins are so great, they allow anyone to add complex functionality to a website with minimal effort. I've found that Gravity Forms is the best at building a wide variety of web forms. This plugin makes form creation downright easy by reducing it to a simple drag-and-drop process.

Use Gravity Forms to create:

- Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Quizzes
- User registration
- Online payment forms
- Multi-step forms

USAGE NOTES

Gravity Forms is by far the easiest form building plugin for WordPress. However, the price can be cost prohibitive for some small businesses. If you just need a simple contact form take a look at Contact Form 7. It's not quite as easy as Gravity Forms, but for a simple form it gets the job done.

9

TABLE PRESS

PLUGIN TYPE

Utility

WHEN TO USE

When you need to display a table of data on your website.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/tablepress/>

COST

Free

Sometimes a simple table is the best way to display data in a visual, easily comprehensible way. Unfortunately adding a table to your website is anything but simple. In fact, it's enough to make even experienced HTML gurus cringe.

Fortunately TablePress makes the act of creating and managing tables about as easy as it can be, and the best part is that you don't need to know a lick of HTML to add perfectly formatted tables to your posts or pages. There's even a widget so you can post tables in any sidebar location.

And if you want to get really fancy, TablePress lets you create tables with features such as sorting, pagination, filtering, and more. If anything TablePress makes creating tables too easy. You might just find yourself creating gratuitous tables just because you can.

10

MAILCHIMP & EASY MAILCHIMP FORMS

PLUGIN TYPE

Marketing

WHEN TO USE

When you want to create an email newsletter to keep in touch with customers and prospects.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/yikes-inc-easy-mailchimp-extender/>

COST

Easy MailChimp Forms – Free
MailChimp – Free for up to 2,000 subscribers

Despite the hype surrounding social media, email is still the most effective form of online marketing. A regular email newsletter, full of high value content, is the best way to keep in touch with customers and prospects.

Because email is so important, we recommend that you use a hosted email marketing service. Doing so will improve the deliverability of your messages, ensuring they aren't mistakenly marked as SPAM. Hosted email services also give your readers more control over their subscription options.

For businesses just getting started with an email newsletter we recommend MailChimp. It's easy to setup and - best of all - you can build a list of up to 2,000 subscribers before a monthly hosting fee kicks in.

Once your MailChimp account is created you'll need an easy way for your customers to sign-up for your newsletter. That's where Easy MailChimp Forms comes in. The plugin allows you to painlessly add MailChimp sign-up forms to your website. Besides sign-up forms, the plugin also lets you track subscription activity with interactive reports.

The combination of a free MailChimp account and the Easy MailChimp Forms plugin will get your email newsletter off the ground quickly and affordably.

11

DIGG DIGG

PLUGIN TYPE

Social Media Sharing

WHEN TO USE

When you want visitors to share content on your site.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/digg-digg/>

COST

Free

Chances are you've seen the Digg Digg plugin in action on popular sites around the web. You may have even wondered, "How can I do that on my site?"

Digg Digg is an all-in-one solution for the most common types of social media sharing. This plugin places social media sharing buttons on your posts. Unlike other social sharing plugins, Digg Digg is optimized for speed and won't slow down your website.

Digg Digg includes buttons for all the major social networks. The plugin includes a wealth of settings that allow you to control the position of sharing buttons and how they function. You can even position a sharing bar to float alongside your posts.

Digg Digg is a powerful tool that lets your visitors share your content as much as their hearts desire.

PLUGIN TYPE 

Message Board

WHEN TO USE 

When you want to provide customer support in an interactive forum on your website.

DOWNLOAD LINK 

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/bbpress/>

COST 

Free

Are you looking for a way to provide customer support on your website? A message board may be just the solution you need.

Message boards (sometimes called forums) enable interactive discussions organized by categories and topics. This is a great way to answer questions posted by customers.

The plugin takes some of the pressure off of your support team by providing customers with access to an archive of past questions. Just keep in mind that it's still important to have staff involved in the answering online questions as well.

The bbPress plugin makes setting up a message board as easy as installing and activating a WordPress plugin. Unlike many other message board programs, bbPress is fast and easy to use. And it's designed to integrate with WordPress, so it should work well with most themes and plugins.

13 OPTIMIZEPRESS

PLUGIN TYPE

Marketing

WHEN TO USE

When you need a conversion optimized landing page for a product, service, or event.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<http://www.optimizepress.com/>

COST

From \$97. Landing page services like lead pages charge \$297 per year and up.

There's an art to building landing pages that inspire your visitors to take action. A landing page has to be compelling in order to persuade visitors to sign up for a webinar, subscribe to your mailing list, or buy your new product.

OptimizePress Plugin was created to help you build landing pages that get results. The templates are designed by online conversion experts, people who have studied exactly what it takes to spur visitors into taking action. Use OptimizePress to promote product launches, book releases, live events, and webinars.

With a flexible layout builder, OptimizePress allows you to fine tune your landing pages by adding from a large collection of pre-defined page elements. OptimizePress pages are even mobile responsive, so your pages will look great no matter what device your visitors are using to browse your website.

USAGE NOTES

OptimizePress is both a theme and a plugin. If you're happy with your WordPress theme, use the plugin version of OptimizePress. You'll be able to create unique landing pages without disturbing any part of your existing theme design.

However, if you're in the early stages of building your website and you're looking for a flexible theme with a marketing emphasis, then OptimizePress might be just what you're looking for.

The purchase price includes both the plugin and theme versions of OptimizePress.

14

WOOCOMMERCE

PLUGIN TYPE

E-commerce

WHEN TO USE

When you want to sell anything directly from your website.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/woocommerce/>

COST

Free for basic e-commerce functionality. Additional features available as extensions from the WooThemes store.

Whether you're selling physical products or digital downloads, WooCommerce turns your WordPress website into an online store.

The plugin allows you to build an online store, track inventory, calculate sales tax and shipping charges, and accept payments online. You'll have complete control over how your products are organized and displayed on your site.

Though WooCommerce is compatible with most WordPress themes, you'll also find dozens of themes designed to work specifically with WooCommerce on the WooThemes website.

PLUGIN TYPE 

Mobile

WHEN TO USE 

When your WordPress theme is not mobile-ready and you can't easily change to a theme that is.

DOWNLOAD LINK 

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wptouch/>

COST 

Free. From \$49 for premium version.

Mobile Internet usage is on the rise and website owners that don't adapt will soon find that their site resembles a ghost town.

Every day more of your customers are visiting your website on their smartphones and tablets. If your site isn't mobile-friendly those customers will find another site that is.

The best solution to the mobile challenge is to use a responsive WordPress theme. Responsive themes are carefully designed to look and work well on any and all screen sizes.

Unfortunately, not all WordPress themes are responsive and it's not always possible to change to a theme that is. That's where WPTouch comes in. WPTouch instantly turns your non-responsive website into a mobile-friendly site.

You can even set the plugin to prompt mobile visitors to save an icon on their home screen, so they can launch your website like a mobile app.

USAGE NOTES

WPTouch is a neat solution to a thorny problem, but I recommend that you consider this to be a temporary answer until you can switch to a responsive theme.

16

AKISMET

PLUGIN TYPE

Comment control

WHEN TO USE

Whenever comments are enabled on your WordPress site.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/akismet/>

COST

Free for personal use. \$5 per month for business websites.

Visitor comments are all well and good, but SPAM is an unfortunate fact of life on the web. If you allow comments on your website you will be overrun by SPAM in no time. Fortunately the Akismet plugin eliminates undesirable comments.

Once activated, Akismet scans new comments looking for signs of SPAM. When Akismet finds a match it tags the comment and hides it from your site. Akismet saves you from major headaches of having to weed through hundreds, if not thousands, of comments in order to identify and remove SPAM.

You should activate Akismet immediately after installing WordPress. We've seen many websites overrun with SPAM because the site owner neglected to use this plugin in a timely manner.

USAGE NOTES

Akismet is installed by default, but you'll need an activation code before the plugin starts fighting the good fight. Go to [Akismet.com](https://akismet.com) to get your free activation code and start building up your SPAM defenses now.

17

BACKUPBUDDY

PLUGIN TYPE

Security

WHEN TO USE

Always, to protect your website from accidental loss due to system failure or hacking.

DOWNLOAD LINK

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

COST

Starting at \$80 for up to two sites.

Given the considerable time and financial investment that goes into building a website, your site is simply too important to leave to chance. At some point, something bad is bound to happen and you can't always depend on your web host to have a current backup ready to go when you need one.

Unfortunately manual backups are time consuming and prone to error. WordPress is a complex system and there are several different pieces that need to be backed up regularly.

BackupBuddy automates the process of backing up your WordPress website and moving the backup file to a secure location for safe keeping.

The plugin includes a restoration script so that you can easily restore your backup and rebuild your site in just a matter of minutes. That also makes this a great tool for migrating your site from one location to another, should you ever decide to move to a different web hosting company, for instance.

I've looked at many free options and none are quite as easy to use or automated as BackupBuddy. After the plugin is installed a wizard guides you through the process of scheduling regular backups. Once that's done you can rest easy, knowing that your site is being regularly backed up and protected from harm.

18

W3 TOTAL CACHE

PLUGIN TYPE

Utility

WHEN TO USE

Almost always, in order to improve the speed of your website.

DOWNLOAD LINK

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/w3-total-cache/>

COST

Free. The plugin author offers professional installation and configuration for \$150.

The longer it takes for your website to load the less likely users are to stick around. In fact, recent studies by Google reveal that even a fraction of a second delay can cause visitors to move on to another website.

W3 Total Cache makes your website load faster by pre-building bits of your site before they're needed (a process known as caching). This plugin gives you control over several layers of caching. If that sounds overwhelming to you, simply leave the plugin in its default settings and your site will still get the pick-me-up that it needs. The end result is faster page load times and happier users.

Take note, there's evidence that the speed of your website can also influence your site's search rankings. Google knows that web users hate slow websites, so they're less likely to recommend sites that might frustrate their users.

PLUGIN TYPE 

Utility

WHEN TO USE 

When you want to provide an improved search experience for your website visitors.

DOWNLOAD LINK 

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/relevanssi/>

COST 

Free for basic features. Premium version from \$39 adds a few additional features and guaranteed support.

There are a lot of things we love about WordPress, but the on-site search functionality is not one of them. If you run a large website that's loaded up with lots of content, there's a pretty good chance your visitors use your site's search box to find what they're looking for. And the awful truth is, those visitors are likely not happy with the search results your site is returning.

With Relevanssi, WordPress search works more like a real search engine. Here are just a few of the features Relevanssi adds to your site:

- Results sorted by relevance to the search phrase
- Quoted search phrases
- Highlight search terms
- Google-style "Did you mean" suggestions when users mistypes a search phrase

PLUGIN TYPE 

Security

WHEN TO USE 

Always to increase website security.

DOWNLOAD LINK <http://wordpress.org/plugins/better-wp-security/>**COST** 

Free for the basic version.
Pro version from \$80 for up to 2 sites, which includes advanced security features like two factor authentication, user logging, and malware scanning.

Unfortunately, the Internet isn't a safe place. Hackers are constantly scanning the web, searching for sites that can be easily compromised and used as a platform for their next attack.

Don't think your site is immune because you run a small company and don't have many visitors. Hackers care about one thing: getting access to as many sites as possible, regardless of their popularity.

iThemes Security closes the door on hackers by adding several layer of security to your WordPress website. The plugin simplifies the process of securing your site with a one-click setup process. After setup, the plugin provides you with an easy to understand assessment of your site's security.

USAGE NOTES

If you aren't using an SSL certificate on your website be careful not to enable the feature that requires secure login. You'll find yourself unable to login to your own website if you do.

WP Apprentice

A better way to learn WordPress



1443 E. Washington Boulevard
Suite 208
Pasadena, CA 91104
www.WPApprentice.com