



WP Buffs

8 Ways To Do Professional WordPress Website Maintenance Yourself



INTRODUCTION



Back in the 1990's, and for the first half of the 2000's, websites were a "set-it-and-forget-it" proposition. You built it using HTML and CSS, you added content and then you launched it to the world. WordPress website maintenance didn't even exist to worry about.

What happened after that? You let it sit there and do its thing. Most people weren't worried about **keeping their websites 99.9% secure** or **achieving loading times under 1 second**.

Back then, websites were much simpler. They served as online brochures instead of having them in print.



Today, websites are much more complex. If you use them well, they can be marketing machines that help you get new leads and customers. But because they are more complex, it takes more work to maintain them.

The list of WordPress website maintenance chores may seem endless. However, if you read on, you will learn about the ones that are the most necessary and why. You'll also learn how WordPress makes most of it easy with plugins.

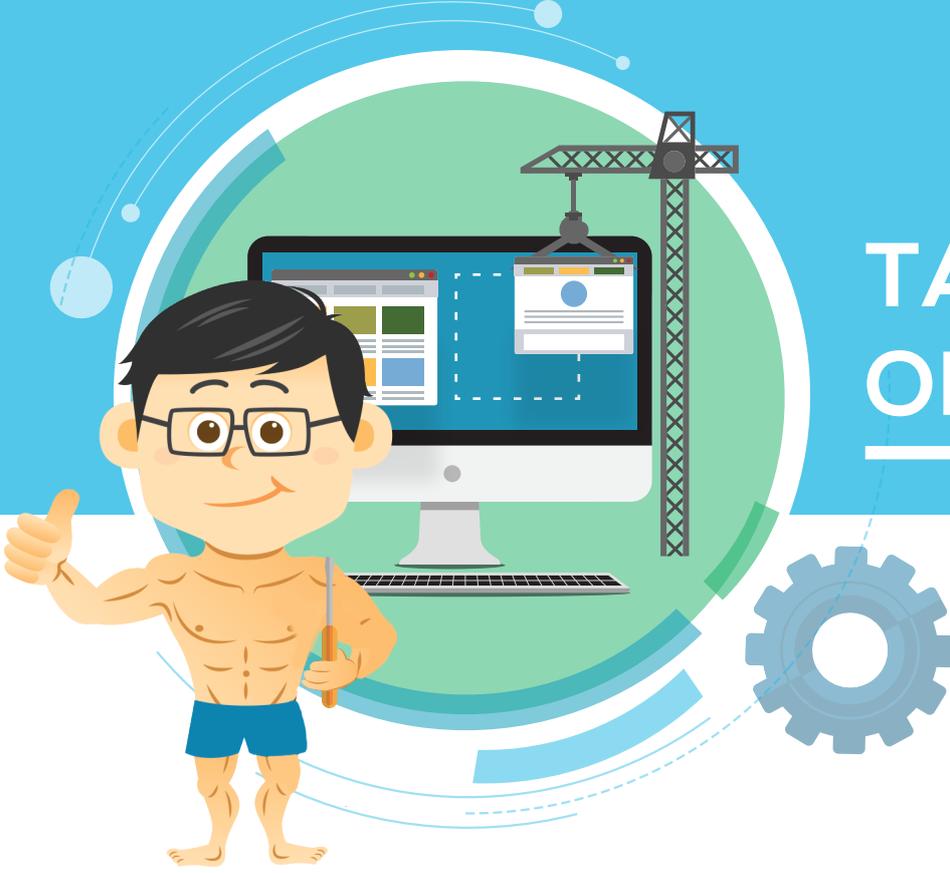


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Back Up Your Website

This is the most important piece of website maintenance you can do.

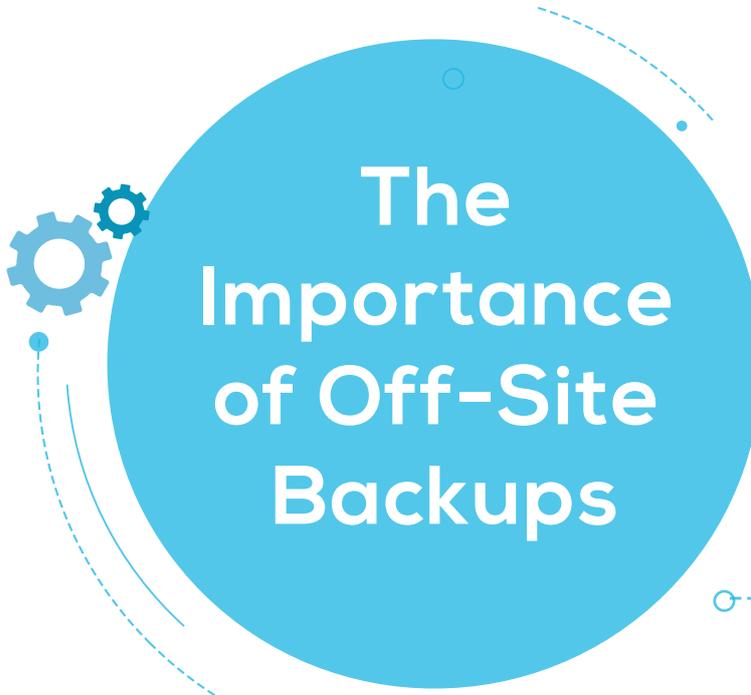
If something goes wrong (with technology, it inevitably does), your website can either become:

- Slightly messed up
- Irreparably broken
- Gone in an instant

So what can you do in each one of these cases?

If you backed up your website, then you can simply **restore it from the most recent backup.**

You don't have to be a computer genius to back up your website. WordPress has a wealth of options to let you do this. There are many free options that let you easily manually back up and restore your site anytime. Most plugins with scheduled automated backups cost money, but I recently discovered that there's an exception to that rule. Read on to find out what it is.



The Importance of Off-Site Backups

Most options will allow you to store the backup of your website on your hosting platform's server. It makes it quick and easy to fetch your backup.

But what if your website host goes down?

If their systems are down, and you need to restore your site, then you won't have access to that backup. Or worst-case scenario, they may even lose your backup.

While it is not likely that most **major hosts with robust infrastructures** will lose your website backups, it is not impossible either. Worst-case scenarios can happen.



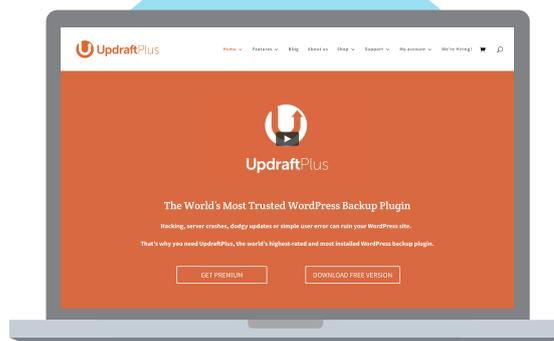
That's why, if you are a smart and diligent website owner, you will have an off-site backup available to you. You can store it in Dropbox, Google Drive, or any other platform available to you.

Recommended WordPress Backup Plugins

If you need to restore your site from a backup, the process for this is one-click as well.

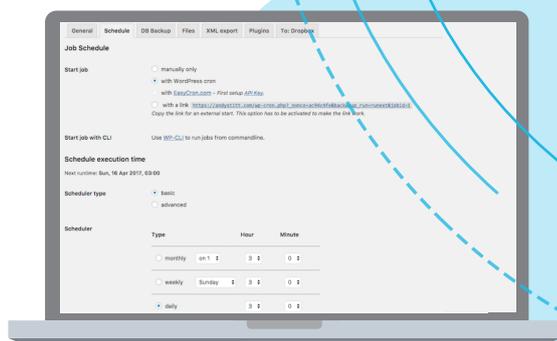
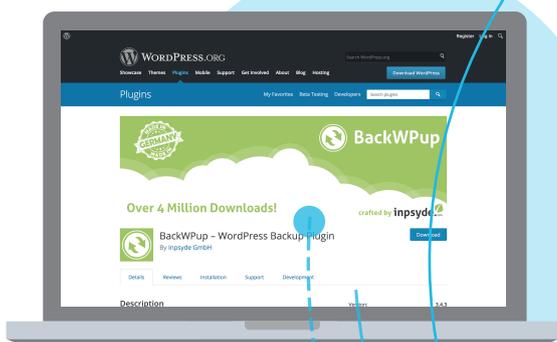
You don't have to go through the arduous process of importing a database file, uploading files via FTP, etc. One click and it's done.

I have used **UpdraftPlus** many times on many sites and highly recommend it. The free version allows you to do a one-click backup at any time, and it allows for off-site backups to Dropbox, Google Drive, and other utilities.



I currently use **BackWPup** with great success. The main thing that attracted to me to it is that it has a **MainWP** extension. I use MainWP to maintain my own sites and client sites, and I can easily back up all sites from my main dashboard using BackWPup.

The other big advantage to BackWPup is that in the free version, you can schedule automated backups either on a monthly, weekly, daily, or hourly basis. For most websites, daily or weekly should suffice. It depends on how often you update content on your website.



Regularly Update WordPress Core, Your Theme, and Your Plugins



The common misconception among website owners is that once your website is built, you can set it and forget it. You can just let it sit and linger forever without having to touch it.

If you're using a service that does all the software updating on the back-end for you, then you may never have to touch it.

However, if you're reading this article, then most likely you're using a self-hosted WordPress install and therefore will have to touch it at some point!



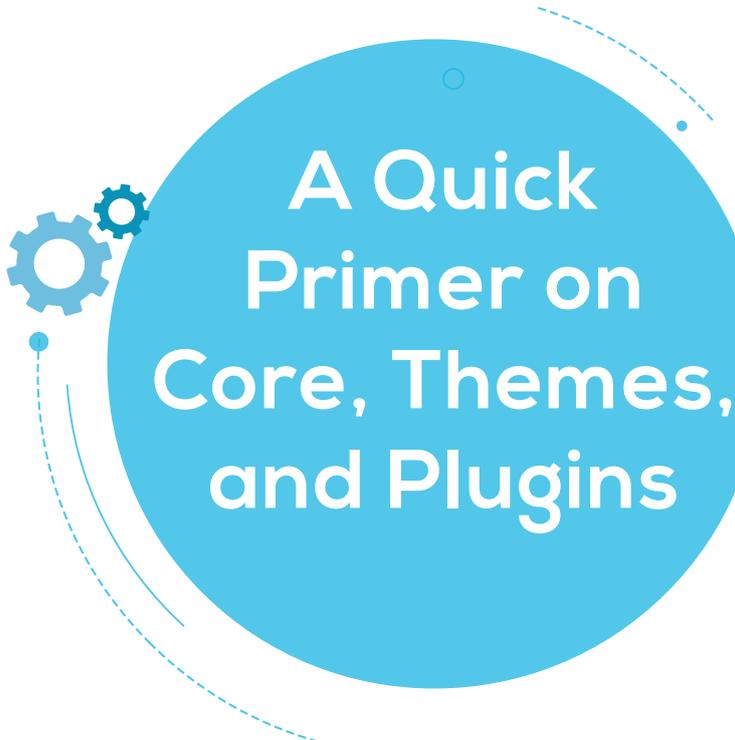
Why Do I Have to Do Updates?

WordPress is under constant development. New features are being added. Bugs are being fixed. Security holes are being plugged.

This means that the code upon which WordPress is built is constantly being updated.

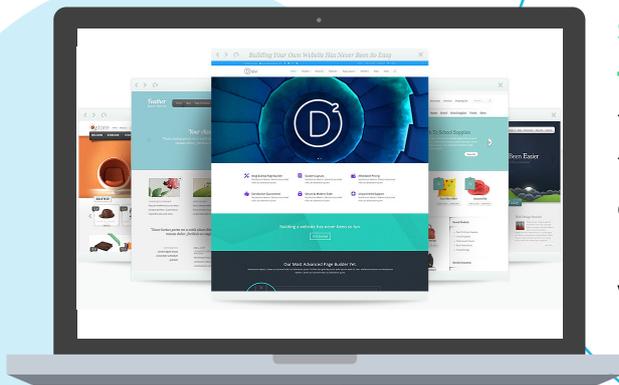
Therefore, when WordPress is being updated, all of its component parts, including themes and plugins, need to be updated too.





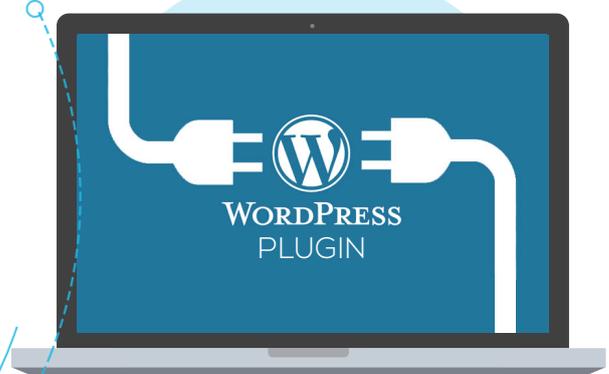
A Quick Primer on Core, Themes, and Plugins

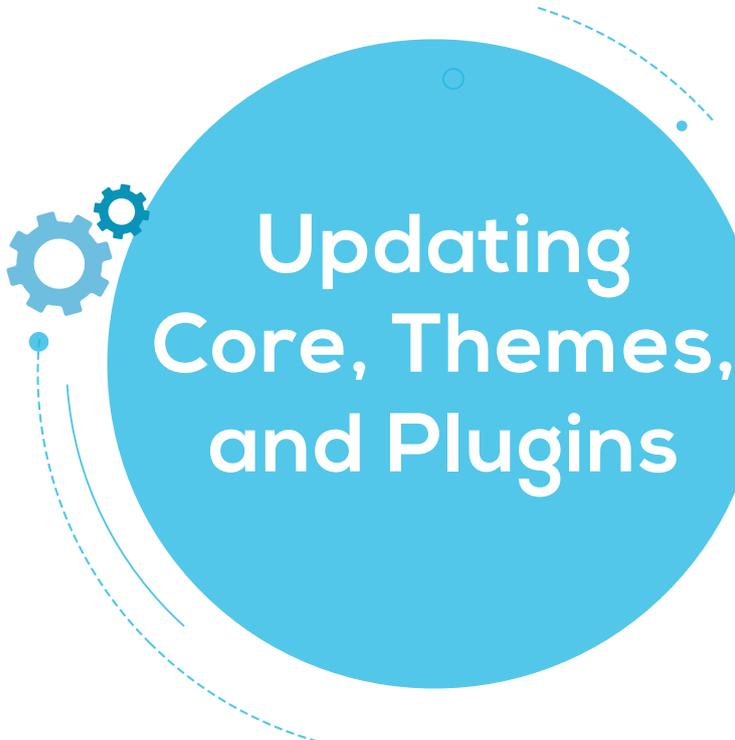
WordPress core is just that. It is the core set of files that make WordPress work as it does. It is built on a series of thousands of files that all work together in concert to bring you the WordPress experience.



Every single WordPress site needs to have a theme. A WordPress theme is a series of files that determine the look and feel of your website. It is essentially the website's design.

WordPress plugins add features and functionality to your website. WordPress can only do so much out of the box. However, it is built to be easily built upon. That's why there are thousands of WordPress plugins that allow you to make it do whatever you want.





Updating Core, Themes, and Plugins

Whenever there is an update available for core, a theme, or plugin that you're using, you should make that update.



If there is a security update, then you should do it sooner than later. Security updates plug holes that are discovered and make your website less vulnerable to hackers and other evil-doers.

If you have multiple components to update at the same time, then do those updates in the following order:

First plugins
(your smallest component)

Then your theme
(your medium-sized component)

Then core
(your largest component)

But Wait, Before You Make Those Updates

- If you simply update multiple components, there could be trouble. Sometimes plugins conflict with each other and cause your website to break. Sometimes developers ship updates with bugs in them, only to discover them later.

That's why, before you make any updates, back up your website. If you read the previous section of this article, you already know exactly how to do that!



If something goes wrong, then you can simply restore the backed up version of your website and then investigate what the problem could've been.

Optimize Your Database

Or in English:
keep your
WordPress
database clean
of extra junk.

WordPress is a database-driven website content management system. That means that all of the content of your site, including the content of your blog posts, pages, and even the name of your website, are all stored in a database.



The longer the database doesn't get cleaned up, the more junk accumulates, and the more your website will slow down.

Proactively cleaning the junk out of your database will help keep your website healthy and fast.

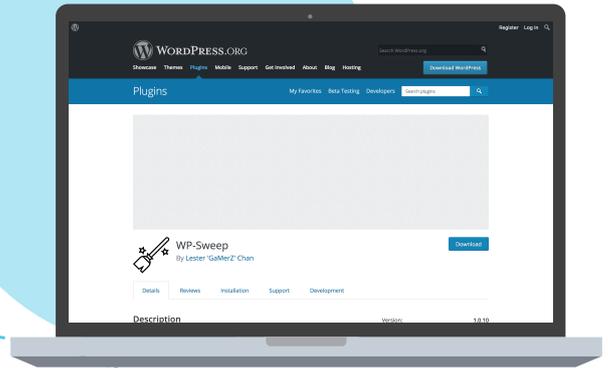
Over time, your database can become bloated and full of extra junk.

Examples include:

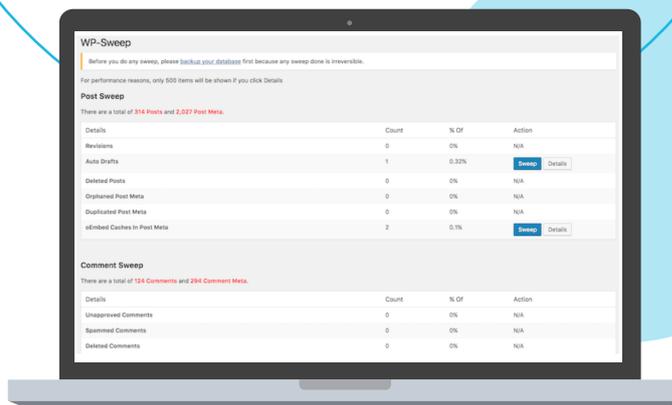
- Post revisions: if you hit "Save Draft", "Publish" or "Update" multiple times over the life of your site, a new revision is saved to the database. This adds up over time.
- Deleted posts
- Unapproved or spam comments
- Unused categories and tags

Optimizing Your Database with WP-Sweep

I recently discovered **WP-Sweep**. This is a gem of a plugin, and boy, does it make optimizing your database super easy!



It shows you exactly what extras you have in your database and what can be cleaned up, including revisions, auto-drafts, deleted comments, and unused terms (categories, tags, etc.). It also warns you not to clean out your unused terms if you have any draft posts, since those terms may apply to your drafts.



Protect Your Website with a Security Plugin

Remember when certain cars in the 1990's used to say "protected by Viper, stand back!"? Well, your website should be protected as well by a Viper-equivalent.

Unless you are paying for fully managed WordPress hosting, your website host will most likely not cover all of your security needs. Thankfully, free and low-cost plugins and services make it easy to secure your website.

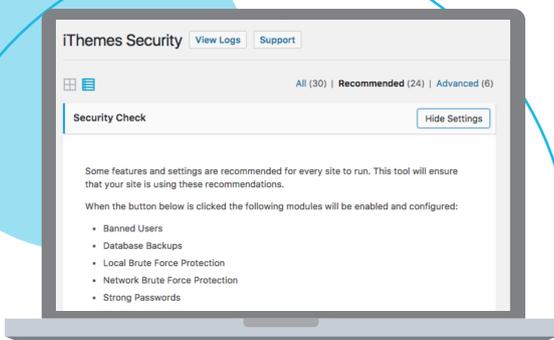


You might be thinking "I don't have a very big audience for my website. Why would anyone want to hack me?" These days, no website is too small to be hacked. It's not necessarily about disrupting your services because hackers have something against you.

Sometimes hackers just need a vehicle to carry out whatever they're trying to do. If your website is vulnerable, and they can get in it and use it as that vehicle, then they will. You don't have to have a BuzzFeed-size audience to have that happen.

Recommended WordPress Security Plugins

It also shows you good security practices and helps you carry them out. This includes changing your login URL to something other than /wp-admin/ as well disabling PHP code in uploads (in case someone tries to sneak in malicious code that way).



Overall, it's a great educational tool.

If you're looking for more security advice, check out [WordPress Security – 19+ Steps to Lock Down Your Site.](#)

I have used **iThemes Security** and have been very happy with it. iThemes Security does an overall security check that finds immediate resolvable issues and shows you how to fix them.



Wordfence has a somewhat simpler interface but gives basic overall protection and provides a free Web Application Firewall (WAF). The WAF is a layer of protection for your server to prevent malicious things from happening. It can be a bit tricky to install if you're not extremely tech-savvy. However, if you can get it work, it's well worthwhile.



Moderate and Clear Out Your Comments

If you **allow comments on your posts**, then make sure you don't have anything outstanding in the queue.

If you moderate all comments coming in, make sure your queue is clear.

If you have any deleted comments, make sure your trash is emptied. The previously mentioned WP-Sweep can help you get rid of deleted comments permanently.

Of course, there are always the dreaded spam comments. If you don't proactively put systems in place to keep them under control, then you could end up with hundreds of them.

Instead of moderating them and marking them as spam one comment at a time, you can use **Akismet**. It automatically removes spam comments for you. You will never even see them or have to deal with them.



Search Engine Maintenance Work

One of the best long-term methods of having people find your website is through search engines like Google and Bing.

Paying for ads on search engines and social media are good short-term ways to acquire lots of site visitors at once. However, people finding you through organic (as in not paid for) search results is a good long-term method of acquiring new visitors.

However, it isn't just a matter of people finding you in the search results and then coming to your website. It doesn't happen that easily. It requires proactive work.

The process is called search engine optimization, or SEO. WordPress plugins can help you grab the low-hanging fruit and do the easy part. These plugins will not help you with keyword research and other more complex strategies that take time to come to fruition. Just the easy part.

Recommended Search Engine Optimization Tools and Plugins

YOAST SEO FOR SEARCH ENGINE METADATA

I have used **Yoast SEO** on all of my sites and highly recommend it. There is a free version and paid version. The free version is quite robust in what it allows you to do.

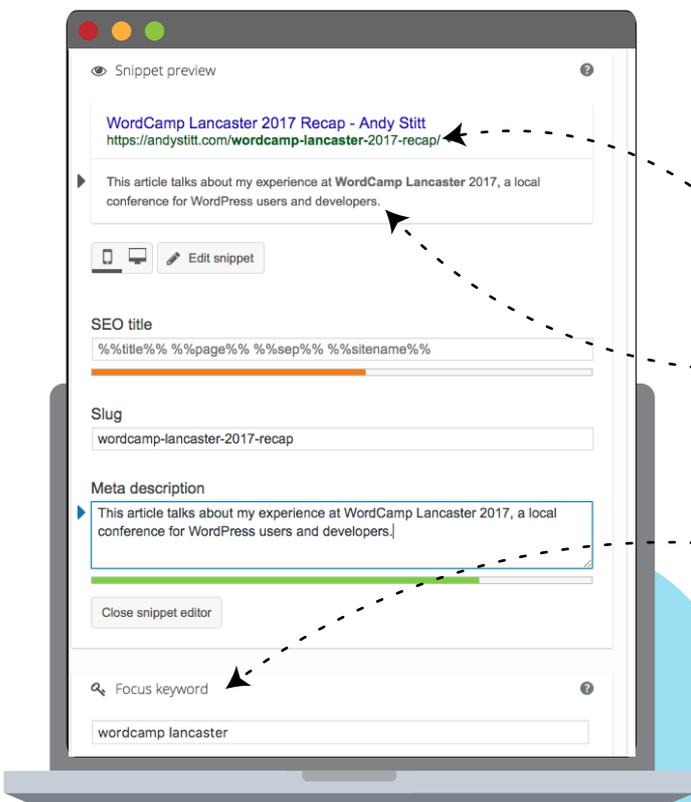


For each one of your blog posts and website pages, Yoast SEO allows you to fill in the following search engine metadata:

Title – this is the title of the page that shows up in the search result.

Description – this is the one-to-two sentence description that shows up right below the title in the search result.

Focus keyword – this allows you to pick a particular search-term to focus on. Yoast then has automated measurement tools that tell you if you're using the search-term in your title, page copy, etc.

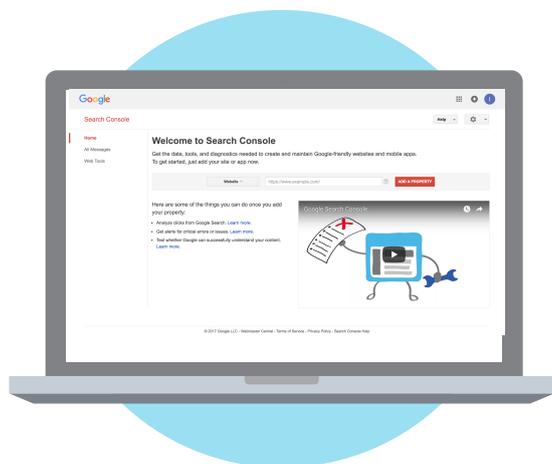


SEO COPYWRITING

Writing good copy is essential to the success of your SEO campaign. For more help there, check out **SEO Copywriting: How One Guy Wrote 12,000 Words in a Day**



GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE FOR PROACTIVE WEBSITE INDEXING

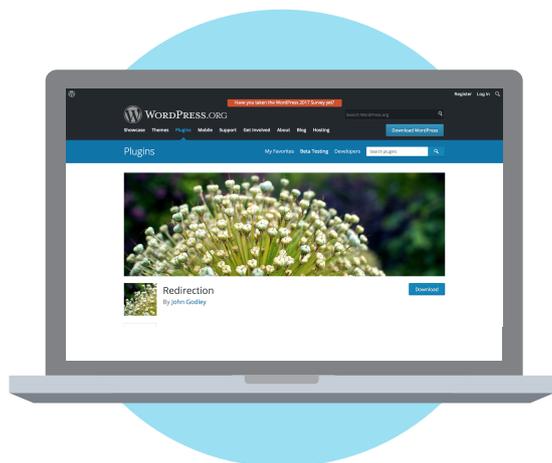


The greatest SEO tool you can use is not even a WordPress plugin. It is **Google Search Console**. You can actually get hooked up to it using Yoast SEO.

Google Search Console allows you to submit your website to Google so that it gets crawled, indexed, and then displayed in Google's search results.

Google would likely have found your website anyway without much work on your part. However, the Search Console allows you some more advanced features as well as the ability to proactively submit your website and have Google crawl it.

404 RESULTS IN GOOGLE AND RESOLVING THEM WITH 301 REDIRECTS



One incredibly useful feature of Google Search Console is the ability for it to show you 404 results. A 404 is when someone tries to go to a URL on your website and it doesn't exist.

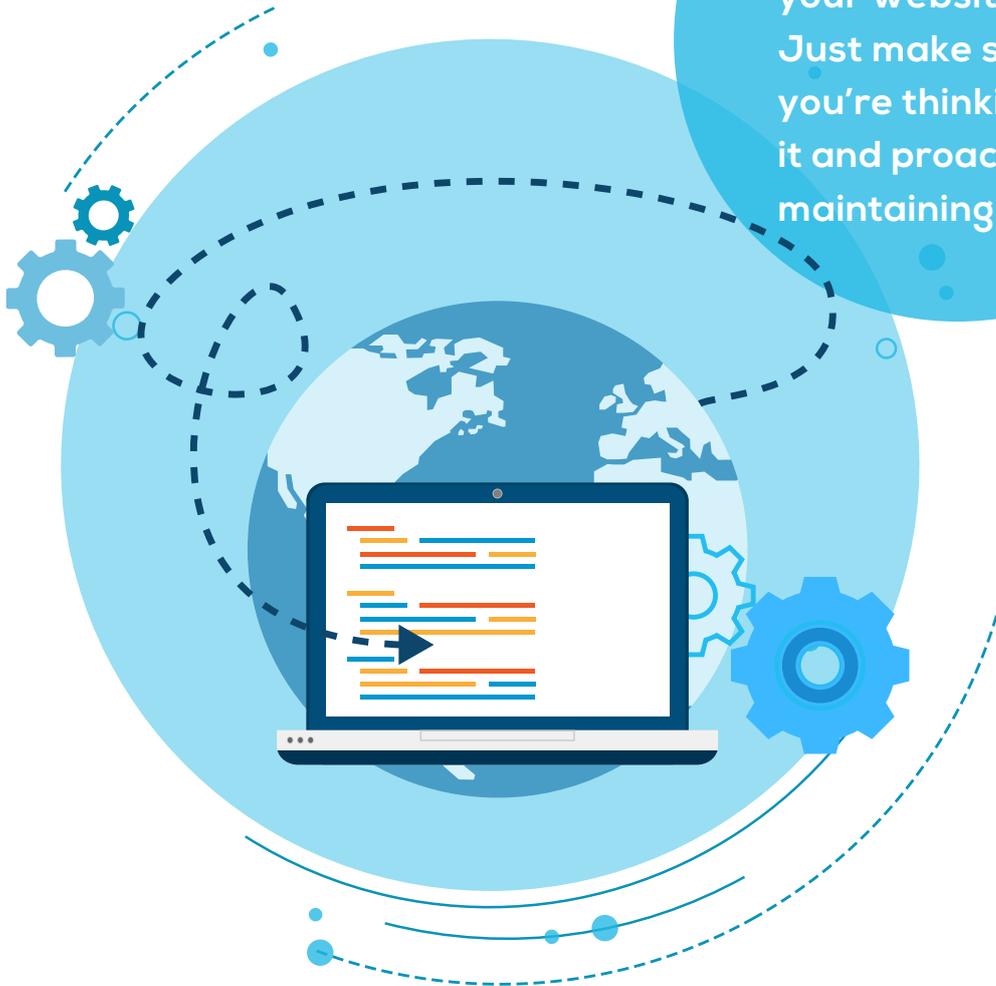
If Google had previously indexed your website, and some of those pages are no longer there, then it'll show up as a 404. If you leave a 404 in Google unresolved, then it'll affect your search ranking.

The way to fix this up is to **implement 301 redirects**. If the page Google can't find has a new URL, then simply redirect it to that URL. If it doesn't, then redirect it to the homepage or the page that's most closely relevant content-wise.

Thankfully, you don't have to be a technology genius to implement 301 redirects. You can do that through the **Redirection plugin**.

07 Maintaining Your Website Content

No fancy plugins as far as maintaining your website content. Just make sure you're thinking about it and proactively maintaining it.



Is there any content on your website that's no longer relevant? Any blog posts that just don't fit your current website?

Can you delete them while being assured that nobody would miss them?

Conversely, do you have any outdated content that needs updating? If you write about technology, then the answer is most likely yes. Even if you don't, subject matter and the knowledge base around it evolves over time.

Take a spin through some of your old content and see if it could use some freshening up.



Finally, do you have any non-evergreen content that you can make evergreen?

Evergreen content is content that will always be relevant. For example, teaching your website visitors how to do something is evergreen. Giving them a recap of a time-based happening, such as an event, is not evergreen.



In five years, people won't care about an event recap from five years prior. However, they will still want to learn about that thing that you teach them. Therefore, the five-year-old article where you teach them how to do something may need updating, but it is still relevant and therefore evergreen.

Maintaining Good Website Speed

You should regularly run speed tests on your website to see how fast it loads. Speed test programs will also tell you where you can make improvements to speed up your website.

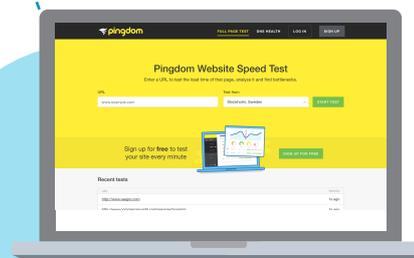


While some of these improvements will need to be made by somebody technical, there are plenty of non-technical changes you can make to speed up your website without the help of a developer.

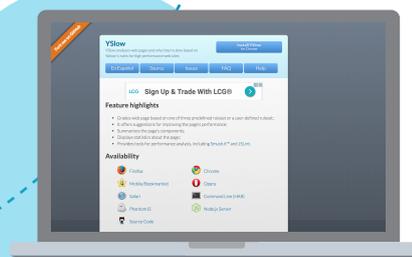
Running these tests regularly is incredibly important. Most of the time, people run it at the beginning, implement its recommendations, and then forget about it.

However, as the months go by, you'll be adding new content, images, plugins, and other elements to your WordPress website. The bigger it gets, **the slower it gets.**

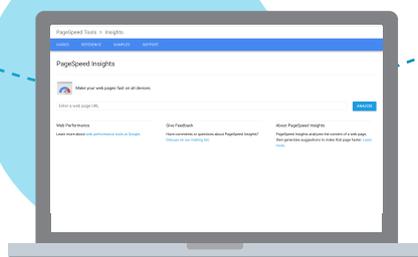
There are three tools you can use to run speed tests:



Pingdom



YSlow

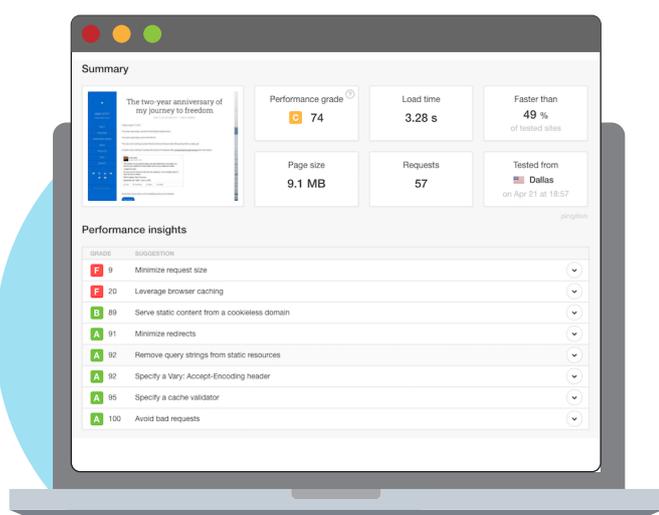


Google PageSpeed Insights

These speed tests will give you letter grades in certain areas (A for excellent and F for not-so-excellent) and concrete recommendations for improvement.

These recommendations include:

- Minimizing HTTP requests, which requires some technical chops
- Utilizing a content delivery network (CDN)
- Minifying your CSS, which can be done easily with plugins and online tools



Run these speed tests once a quarter, and it'll help you make sure that your website loads quickly. A slow-loading website = lost visitors = lost revenue.

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