On-Air Locally, Online Globally: Evaluating WordPress Options for a Consumer Health Radio Show Website

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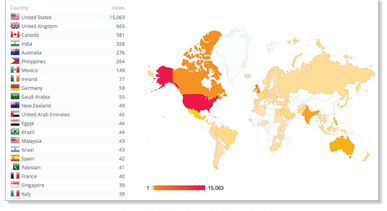
Objective

To evaluate WordPress.org as a possible replacement for WordPress.com for hosting the blog (http://yourhealthradio.org*) used as the website for YOUR HEALTH®, a consumer health radio show.

Following a successful year of using WordPress.com, the library sought to determine whether WordPress.org might offer significant advantages in design flexibility, mobile browsing experience, or ability to capture site statistics and user search behavior.

YOUR HEALTH® Radio blog (WordPress.com)



Global reach of YOUR HEALTH® Radio blog

About YOUR HEALTH® Radio

- Produced and hosted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of Family Medicine
- UNC's HSL collaborates with the show's producers on:
  - Website design and functionality
  - Evaluation of site statistics
  - Provision of consumer health resources for the website
- Airs weekly on local AM and FM radio
- Website now receives an average of nearly 2,000 views per month
- Site has received over 35,000 views since its inception in June 2010
- The site has been viewed in over 125 countries since February 2012

* Note: The current YOUR HEALTH blog is a WordPress.com blog even though it has a .org address.

Methods and Design

HSL database and Web searches were used to identify features of WordPress.org that might improve the design and functionality of the radio show's blog/website. After first evaluating and selecting a web-hosting service for setting up a test WordPress.org site, themes and plugins were tested to assess ease of use, cost, and any improvements to or loss of functionality in comparison with the current WordPress.com blog.

Demo WordPress.org blog with *Weaver* theme

WordPress	.com	.org
Free software?	Yes	Yes
Free hosting?	Yes	No
Ability to upload custom themes or edit CSS?	No*	Yes
Ability to install plugins?	No	Yes
Automatic backups?	Yes	No
Automatic maintenance?	Yes	No
Need to purchase space upgrades?	Yes	No

*Unless upgrade is purchased

WordPress.com vs. WordPress.org

Results

We identified several useful features of WordPress.org, including a larger selection of blog themes and the ability to download plugins to customize the website.

Hosting

Several hosting companies were evaluated. A variety of different hosting options are available depending on the amount of space needed and the amount of traffic the site receives. The major considerations for this project were cost, security, and technical support.

Themes

Themes allow you to quickly customize the design (such as layout and colors) of your site. WordPress.org provides more themes than WordPress.com, and allows greater customization of themes.

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Plugins

Plugins are small programs that enhance WordPress.org functionality. Thousands are available; most are free to download.

Plugin examples include:

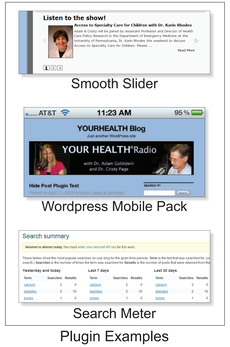
Google Analytics: captures additional statistics not available from WordPress.com, such as geographic data down to the city level, and data about the user's behavior on the site.

Smooth Slider: Places a rotating display of posts at the top of your site. We suggested this plugin as a way to highlight recent shows.

WordPress Mobile Pack: Provides options for the mobile version of your site. Can automatically display the mobile version of your site when a mobile device is detected.

SearchMeter: provides information about searches entered in the Site search box, which assists in indexing and helps identify topics of interest.

Relevanssi: enhances functionality of the search box, sorts search results by relevancy, highlights search terms, and allows customization of how the site is indexed and searched.



Smooth Slider

Wordpress Mobile Pack

Search Meter

Plugin Examples

Costs

WordPress.org requires that you provide your own hosting or purchase hosting from a vendor. Wordpress.com includes free hosting, but you may need to pay for upgrades, depending on the features desired. The costs of WordPress.com and WordPress.org were fairly comparable for our site.

Conclusions

We found multiple advantages to using WordPress.org for this project. Wordpress.org offers greater flexibility, but puts more responsibilty into the hands of the blogger. It also requires somewhat more expertise and typically more time for administration and maintenance.

Presented with results of our evaluation, the show's hosts and producer expressed interest in converting to WordPress.org. Together, we are considering logistical considerations such as budgeting and personnel in order to determine the feasibility of making the transition to WordPress.org.