

Essential Free Plug-Ins for Your WordPress Blog



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Introduction

WordPress is one of the most popular blogging platforms available.

Actually, that statement doesn't quite do WordPress justice. How about this?

From Wikipedia.org:

“WordPress was first released in May 2003 by Matt Mullenweg. As of September 2009, it was being used by *202 million websites* worldwide.”

Now that's growth.

So, what makes WordPress so popular?

- It is free. (Go to WordPress.org to learn more.)
- It offers significant functionality right out of the box.
- It's easy to manage yourself.
- There are online tutorials and communities where you can learn more about WordPress without having to figure it out on your own.
- It's also easy to find service providers who are experienced with WordPress when you need additional customization or personalization of your blog.
- Another very compelling reason to use WordPress is that search engines like Google.com and Bing.com love WordPress and rapidly index posts and pages on a WordPress site.
- The wide availability of plug-ins can make WordPress do more than you or I could ever imagine.

As a result, WordPress is an extremely popular choice for small business owners and entrepreneurs and it's my personal recommendation to anyone considering putting up their own website or blog.

Recommendation!

By the way, ReliableWebs.com will install your WordPress blog free for their hosting customers. So, if you're hesitant to do it yourself or would like a blog that's preloaded with PLR content, then check them out.

WordPress coupled with plug-ins (which we'll be teaching about in this report) is a winning combination for bloggers. The two working together will increase the robustness of your site and allow it to do pretty much anything you can imagine short of brewing you a fresh cup of coffee.

There are literally thousands of plug-ins for almost any purpose you can think of - including playing audio, integrating your blog with your social media, tracking your statistics, backing up your site and more! Plug-ins allow the individual user to tailor their website to their specific needs without having to pay a programmer or purchase expensive add-ons.

The rest of this report will provide more information on what a plug-in is, how to choose and install a good plug-in as well as introduce you to a variety of free plug-ins essential to your WordPress site function and management.

What Are Plug-Ins and What Can They Do For Me?

A plug-in is a small program, or combination of programs, that sits on top of your WordPress installation and increases the functionality of your website in some way. (Translation: Plug-ins allow your blog to have more features and to do more than it could when you first installed it.) Most plug-ins are written in the PHP scripting language and add an additional feature or function to your website.

Plug-ins integrate seamlessly with WordPress so there's no messing with your WordPress code. That's another great thing about plug-ins. They don't actually affect your original WordPress install. They reside separately and just interact with WordPress.

How did plug-ins get “invented”?

The development of plug-ins came about by programmers who wanted to increase the function of WordPress without having to alter the code within WordPress itself. Basically, programmers said “I wish WordPress could do this extra thing” – and then created plug-ins to make it happen. Of course other developers got excited by this and it spread. More and more developers jumped on board and created these small add-ons to the WordPress code and now WordPress can do more than the original creators ever dreamed it could simply due to these little plug-ins.

The vast majority of plug-ins are free and therefore it is important to understand that they do not come with technical support services. When choosing a plug-in, it is wise to evaluate the following:

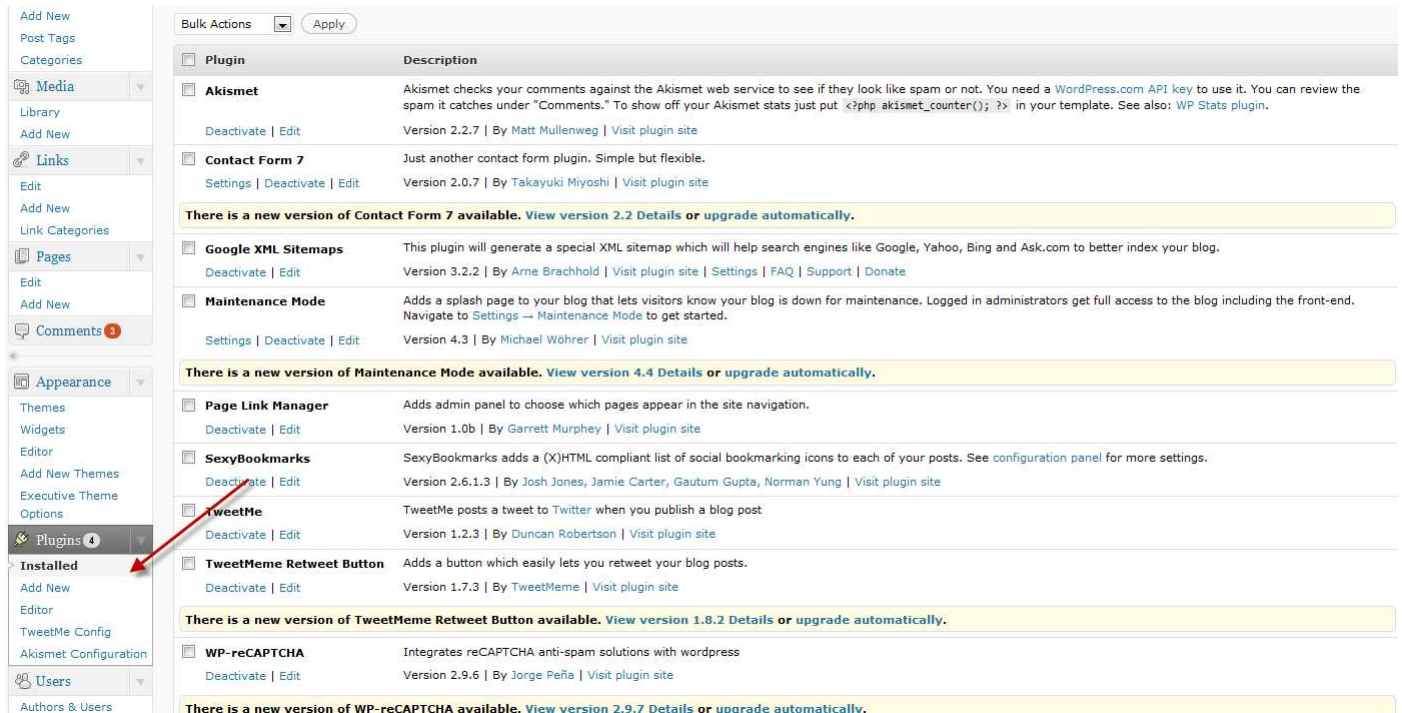
- How long it has been since that plug-in was updated.
- Whether the plug-in homepage still exists.
- If people seeking support on the plug-in have received answers to their questions.
- The overall tone of the discussions on the plug-in download page.

I'll share some additional criteria on the next page.

There is a plug-in for virtually anything you want to accomplish in WordPress. If you want to monitor your visitor statistics, increase interaction with your visitors, add a photo gallery, automatically back up your database or anything else you have a desire to do with your site, you can most likely find a plug-in to use, and like we said, most of them are free.

Finding and Installing Plug-Ins Is Easy

Finding and installing the plug-in that you need is easy. Within WordPress, you can search for, review and install the plug-in of your choice in just a few clicks. The image below displays how you can add a new plug-in to your site from your WordPress Dashboard.



In your dashboard, find “Plugins”. Click on the "Add New*" link and it will take you to a new window where you can search for a plug-in either by name or by keyword.

After you have entered your search terms, WordPress will display a list of plug-ins for you to choose from. When you click on "Install" an additional window will appear that provides important statistics about the plug-in.

There are several things you should consider before telling WordPress to install the plug-in, including:

- 1) User ratings. User ratings are important to consider because they are feedback from bloggers who have actually used the plug-in.
- 2) Is the plug-in compatible with your current version of WordPress?
- 3) How long has it been since it was updated? The most popular and most widely used plug-ins will be updated frequently. These are also plug-ins that the developer is invested in and you will have the most luck getting help with if you need it.
- 4) How many times has it been downloaded? Obviously, the more times it has been downloaded and the more stars it has, the better the community likes the plug-in.

By far, plug-ins are a wonderful tool for you to use with your site. However as with anything, you should spend some time evaluating the plug-in. In rare instances, installing a plug-in can have negative effects on the rest of your site. So it is always in your best interest to backup your WordPress site before installing any new plug-ins.

**If the 'Add new' function gives you any trouble or if your search doesn't turn up the exact plugin that you're looking for – you may have to use Google to locate the plugin's download page and FTP it into your 'plugins' folder within Wordpress.*

Plug-Ins to Help You Prevent a Blog Disaster

As mentioned, plug-ins are available for every function you can imagine for your blog including backing up and protecting your site.

Back Up Your Blog Automatically

Imagine the devastation of having months or years of posts on your blog and losing it all to a hacker or a server crash. No worries, there's a WordPress plug-in to the rescue! The combination of these two plug-ins will protect you in the event of a blog disaster.

[WordPress BackUp](#) is an essential plug-in for all bloggers and blog administrators. This plug-in automatically backs up your theme, plug-ins and uploads file. You can schedule the frequency of the backups and have the files zipped and emailed to an address you designate. This plug-in should be considered a "required" plug-in for all bloggers.

[WP-DBManager](#) allows you to automatically schedule the back up your WordPress database. This plug-in can backup, repair, restore and fix your database. It too should be considered a "required" plug-in.

Don't let this worry you too much. Wordpress is a very stable platform so in general, these plug-ins serve to protect you in the event of a rare problem. However, having regular backups of your blog can save you many headaches and a lot of stress if the rare problem occurred.

Plug-Ins that Help Your Site Run Faster and Smarter

Plug-ins are almost like having your own personal set of tricks for your website. They allow you to easily and quickly manage many tasks on your website therefore saving you time, helping you retain your hair (since you won't be pulling it out anymore), and being a happier person all around. (You think I'm giving plug-ins too much credit? Nah. They're that good.)

Are you expecting a huge surge of traffic? There's a plug-in that will help speed up your site. Do you have a lot of links on your site? Manually checking those could take forever and is likely to fall to the bottom of your priority list. And then there are those nasty spammers. Even our blogs are not exempt from spam! Clever plug-in developers have even created an automatic spam detector for your comments.

Here are a few of the best plug-ins to help with these functions.

[Wordpress Super Cache](#) - This plug-in helps increase the speed of your WordPress blog. The programming behind this plug-in is probably more complicated than any of us want to know about. All you need to know is that creates static html pages of your website and displays them more quickly than if your site had to call up the PHP scripting each time. So, when you hit the front page of Digg or other sites and expect a HUGE surge of traffic, be sure Super Cache is turned on so that your new visitors can see your great content rapidly.

I want to point out that this plugin is not needed for your average blog – unless you're getting thousands of visitors a day it's probably overkill.

If you use Super Cache and want to make changes to your blog, you'll want to deactivate the plug in while your testing or you won't see your changes.

[Redirection](#) - This plug-in creates 301 redirects for you if you change the permalink or slug of the post. Without Redirection, if you change the name of your post then any inbound links will be broken. Redirection however will automatically create a redirect for you. This is an incredibly helpful plug-in to have if you decide to change the name of your posts to increase your search engine optimization or if you started out posting to your blog using the WordPress default permalinks.

[Broken Link Checker](#) - Broken links are frustrating for you and the user. This terrific little plug-in will check each of the links of your site and let you know which ones need to be repaired. You can schedule it to run at a set frequency to keep your site at its best.

[Askimet](#) - Askimet is a standard plug-in that comes with your Wordpress blog. Askimet is essentially the equivalent of your spam checker for email. It monitors your comments and automatically labels spam comments and moves them to a spam folder or automatically deletes them depending on your preference.

There is nothing that turns a visitor off from reading your content and becoming a loyal visitor than a slow site filled with broken links and spam. These plug-ins will help your site run faster and put your best foot forward with your readers.

Who, When, Where? Plug-Ins to Track and Analyze Your Blog Statistics

The word "statistics" is one of those words and topics that tends to make people's eyes glaze over or causes a quick change in conversations. However, whether you are blogging for your business or whether blogging is your business, tracking and knowing your visitor statistics is important to helping you optimize your website for greatest profits.

Fortunately, there are ingenious plug-in developers who have made gathering our blog statistics and statistical analysis of our traffic easier for everyone. It's painless now.

[Google Analytics for Wordpress](#) is a plug-in that integrates WordPress and Google Analytics seamlessly and easily.

[WP-Stats-Dashboard](#) - Graphs are displayed so you can easily detect trends and see how your site is doing. This plug-in will add a graph to your dashboard so you can see your statistical trends immediately upon logging on.

[WordPress Download Monitor](#) - Do you give away a lot of eBooks or have downloadable transcripts on your site? In either case, this plug-in will help you keep track of what has been downloaded. While this plug-in may not be considered "essential" for all bloggers, if you have a giveaway on your site, it is helpful to track clicks and downloads.

Few people are crazy about statistics but they give us important insight about who our visitors are, what they are reading, and what they like and don't like. With this information we can tailor our content to our market best. That means more profit.

How Social Is Your Blog? Plug-Ins That Put the "Social" in Your Blog

Another very compelling reason to use WordPress is its ability to integrate with social media and social bookmarking. Obviously this also equals more traffic and exposure. If you are even the least bit involved in social media and social bookmarking, you understand the value of utilizing a plug-in that will automatically broadcast your content or make it easy for your visitors to share your most recent posts on social networking sites.

From “share this” buttons that display at the top or bottom of your post to plug-ins that *automatically* tweet when you publish a new blog post, there are plug-ins suitable for all social media and social bookmarking sites. Whether you prefer Facebook and Twitter or you concentrate your efforts on social bookmarking sites like StumbleUpon and Digg, there is a plug-in for you. These plug-ins make it incredibly easy and simple for your readers to share your content and increase your overall exposure.

[Tweetme](#) - This simple plug-in will automatically tweet the title of your blog post with the web link. Once downloaded and installed, you virtually never have to touch it again.

[TweetMeMe](#) - You have probably seen this little button at the top or bottom of blog posts. When clicked on, the button will automatically create a re-tweet of your blog post. So for instance, let's say your Twitter name is @invisiblebob. When a visitor clicks on the TweetMeMe button, a tweet will be sent out saying RT @invisiblebob "his newest blog post title." This makes it very easy for visitors to share valuable content with their followers and increase your visibility.

[Sociable](#) - This highly popular plug-in gives the user more than 100 social media and social bookmarking sites to choose and the ability to order them according to individual preference. A very simple and easy to use plug-in which will allow your readers to share your content with virtually any site they are active on.

[Sexy Bookmarks](#) - This plug-in adds a bar at the bottom of your posts that allows you to choose what social bookmarking and social media sites you want to include. The image below shows you how this displays on your site.

As your visitor's mouse rolls over each icon it pops-up and readers can click on it and post your content to that site.



The easier it is for someone to share your content with the world, the more they will. These social plug-ins are easy to install and easy to use. They are a must for all WordPress blogs.

Maximizing Your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) with WordPress Plug-Ins

As mentioned earlier, Google loves WordPress and ranks and indexes WordPress sites and posts highly and rapidly. As a result, by simply using a WordPress platform you are boosting your overall SEO efforts. However, there are many plug-ins that will help increase your page ranking and overall SEO results even more.

From sitemaps to tag clouds to meta robots, as with all things WordPress there are a multitude of plug-ins to choose from. Here are some of the most popular plug-ins for your WordPress site.

[All in One SEO Pack](#) – This is an essential plug-in for all things related to search engine optimization and your blog. The “All in One SEO” plug-in allows you to customize every post and page on your WordPress site to include the keywords that are most relevant to that individual post or page. It is easy to use and has a one-click installation. While it takes some time at the beginning to set up the plug-in for your exact keywords, this plug-in is robust and powerful.

[Google XML Sitemaps](#) - Sitemaps make it easy for search engines to crawl and index your site. This automatic sitemap generator creates a sitemap that is compliant with search engine requirements and can be updated in one click. This plug-in is helpful for increasing and maintaining your search engine page ranking.

[Simple Tags](#) - This simple plug-in analyzes your post content and help you choose good tags by making suggestions.

[SEO Tag Cloud Widget](#) - This little plug-in is a gem for bloggers who love tag clouds. Prior to the development of this plug-in, tag clouds provided no SEO value whatsoever as they were unreadable by search engines. This plug-in creates an search engine friendly version of a tag cloud.

This is only a very brief overview of the plug-ins available for search engine optimization. There are numerous plug-ins to choose from but don't get overzealous. Some plug-ins can actually work against one another. So choose a few that you want to use on your site, fill out all the fields and add custom tags, keywords and titles for each post.

Please note: A very common mistake that bloggers make is to think that just installing the SEO plug-ins is enough and after that they don't have to do anything. This is not true and leads to very poor results. In order for the plug-ins to work for you and your blog, you have to take the time to populate the fields and make use of the plug-in each time you post a new page or post.

Essential Plug-Ins: Audio and Video

Audio and video content has become incredibly popular on all websites, especially WordPress sites. Adding audio and videos to your WordPress website has never been easier than today with a wide variety of plug-ins for bloggers to choose from. Plug-ins support all video formats and there is almost an endless choice of audio players as well.

A few of the more popular and easy-to-use audio and video plug-ins are:

[Audio Player](#) – This is an extremely user-friendly and highly popular audio player for WordPress. All you do is enter a short string of code and the url address and it will automatically insert a player into your post or page for you.

[PodPress](#) – Podpress is an extremely popular plug-in that adds a lot of features to host a podcast on WordPress. It can automatically create feeds and gives a preview of the podcast in iTunes. You have control of the look and location of the player within your post.

[Smart YouTube](#) - This plug-in is designed to easily and quickly embed your YouTube videos into your WordPress blog and RSS feed. It is extremely simple to use and a very popular plug-in. If you post any videos on your blog from YouTube, this is essential.

Adding audio and video to your WordPress site is a fantastic way to draw in readers and generate connections with your audience. Readers love to hear your voice and see your face as well. Plug-ins make it extremely easy to create this level of interaction and connection with your blog visitors.

A Picture Speaks A Thousand Words! Plug-ins for Photo Sharing

Images are a very important part of your blog whether you use them in posts, on the home page or display them in a gallery. Photos often grab a person's attention well before they have even read the first title on your page. Developers know this and have created many wonderful plug-ins to make the process of uploading and displaying photos simple and easy.

Here are a few essential plug-ins that will help you display your photos and grab your readers attention without spending hours sizing and re-sizing photos.

[WP Photo Album](#) - This simple and easy plug-in allows you to quickly create a gallery to display your photos. This plug-in will display your photos professionally on your blog and give you the flexibility to move them as well as adjust thumbnails and full view of your photos.

[jQuery Image Lazy Load WP](#) - This plug-in helps reduce the load on your website by not loading pictures below the fold or further down the page until the visitor scrolls down the page. As a result, images on the top load quicker and it reduces the wait time for visitors. While this may not seem like a big deal, it will be to your readers who have a slow internet connections or are using mobile devices.

[Featured Content Gallery](#) - This plug-in allows you to display photos on your homepage that are linked to specific posts. The idea behind it is that the photos grab attention and causes the reader to click on the image. The plug-in can accommodate multiple photos and has customizable settings which allows the blog owner to control which posts are displayed, for how long, how the photos slide or fade in and out. This is an extremely popular plug-in that at first has a steep learning curve but then once you get the hang of it, it will quickly become a favorite feature of your site.

[Photo Dropper](#) – If you don't have an image and really wish you had one, you can use this plugin to search photos from Flickr that have been given creative commons licensing. You can use any of the images that come up so long as you keep the photo credit links at the bottom of your post.

Adding and displaying photographs and images is often an area of frustration for bloggers. These plug-ins make the process easier and creates a way to elegantly display your favorite photos and images while creating a better experience for your blog readers.

Additional Plug-Ins Worth Mentioning

As you can see by now, there is a plug-in for almost anything you want to do. Plug-ins really should not be overlooked or underestimated. In fact, the WordPress plug-in directory is a blogger's best friend because it can save a lot of time and energy. A simple search can reveal dozens of choices for plug-ins that will not only enhance your blog, but solve problems, and prevent issues from happening in the first place.

Here are some additional plug-ins that are helpful to your blog management and design but didn't fit into one of the categories shared previously.

[What would Seth Godin do?](#) – This plugin lets you greet visitors with a message based on whether they are a new visitor or a long time fan.

[My Page Order](#) - With this simple drag and drop plug-in you can quickly and easily organize the order of your pages and subpages in your site navigation.

[Page Exclude](#) - This plug-in allows you to hide a page from the main site navigation. For instance, if you wanted to direct a certain group of readers to a special offer page but not reveal it to all of your readers, you can choose to exclude a specific page from the main navigation as well as from Google.

[WP Contact 7](#) - Need a contact page on your website? This plug-in allows you to create forms for your readers to complete and automatically emails the data from the populated fields to you. The form can be very basic to very complex, depending on your needs. This plug-in is an easy way for readers to contact you without exposing your email address.

[Cforms](#) – A much richer contact form with some cool features like image upload.

[WP-Invoice](#) – This plugin is super cool for freelancers who don't use a shopping cart. You can create invoices, send them to users and provide them with an easy way to pay via PayPal.

[Yet Another Related Posts Plugin](#) – Lets you display a list of blog posts based on your rules for similarity. This keeps your visitors clicking around on your site.

[Crosslinker](#) – You set up a list of specific keywords and the pages you want them to link to. Anytime you use one of those words in a post, the link will automatically be created. Great for helping you build inner links.

These three plug-ins are generally found on almost all bloggers "essential plug-ins" list because of the added functionality they provide and the ease of use.

Conclusion

There is virtually no end to the possibilities that plug-ins offer WordPress bloggers and site administrators. If you need your site to do something that it doesn't, don't panic. Simply head over to the plug-in directory and do a quick keyword search. You are bound to find a multitude of choices that will do just what you are looking for.

There is no denying that plug-ins can and do expand the function, features, and fun of WordPress. It is important to remember, though, when installing a free plug-in that generally, there is little technical support provided. Plug-in developers create these plug-ins to increase the functionality of their own site in many cases and then share them with other WordPress users. As a result, it is important to do your homework and spend some time researching the plug-ins that you install to your site.

The plug-ins mentioned in this report have been used by thousands of WordPress bloggers across the world and have been carefully scrutinized before being included in here. That being said however, it is always a prudent and smart policy to backup your blog and blog database before installing new plug-ins, especially when installing multiple plug-ins. Losing site posts and functionality is frustrating and is unnecessary if you simply take the few minutes it requires to secure your site.

WordPress provides entrepreneurs and small business owners with an amazing opportunity to build and personalize a blog easily and quickly that is powerful and unique. We hope you now understand the availability and power of free plug-ins to personalize (and enjoy) your blog even more.

Need help?

Freshnets can help you with any Wordpress tweaks or plugin installations you need, just shout out anytime.

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