

THE EDGE

Essential WordPress Plugins

We use WordPress as the driving force behind virtually all our sites because it's simple to setup, it's easy to use, it's fully customizable, and it has an absolute ton of ready made themes and plugins available to change your site from a simple blog thru to a fully functional shop-front to sell your goods and services.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of plugins out there, both free options and paid options, which can in their own way help you tweak and change your WordPress installation into exactly what you want.

Now, because we set up so many different sites for either testing or running as niche businesses we've been developing a simple distribution platform that allows us to do one-click installs and have our WordPress sites automatically configured for optimal performance.

As part of this new tool we've integrated the plugins we find ourselves installing on each of our WordPress sites as our 'base install' before we add any extras into the mix for the individual sites, so what we've done is put them into this handy report so that you can see what we use day-in day-out as part of all of our sites.

There are of course more plugins which offer similar functionality to the ones we've chosen to include here, but these are the ones which we've found work for us consistently well over our network of sites, which is why they've made the final cut.

We've split them into four sections: SEO; Utilities; Accessibility & Site Layout; and Sharing & Social Media.

SEO Plugins

PubSubHubBub

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/pubsubhubbub/>



PubSubHubBub is an open protocol created by Google which pings any new content you create to various hubs around the internet, and as a result it increases the speed at which your content gets indexed and ranked by the search engines.

We've found that using the in-built pinging function of WordPress (which is automatically setup and included in the standard WordPress installation) along with the PubSubHubBub plugin means that our content gets indexed in the search engine literally minutes after it's been published (sometimes in less than a minute after publishing).

The great thing about this free plugin and protocol is that it means we're no longer having to pay monthly subscriptions to pinging services that also provide lower level social bookmarking facilities to get our content recognized by the search engines, which is saving us money as well as time and effort of using the other services.

You can find out more about PubSubHubBub from Google here: <http://code.google.com/p/pubsubhubbub/>

SEO Ultimate

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/seo-ultimate/>



We've used a few different SEO plugins in the past, and have previously been fans of both *All In One SEO Pack* and also *HeadSpace2*, but the one we've found ourselves using more recently has been SEO Ultimate.

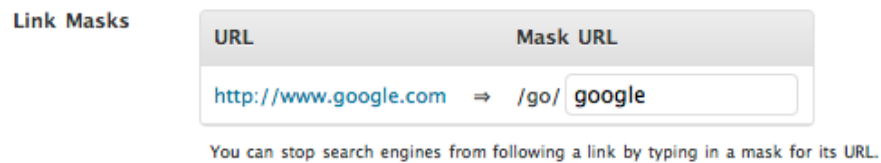
The reason we like SEO Ultimate is that it has all the whistles and bells of both All In One SEO and HeadSpace2, but it also has a range of other cool features built in on top.

For example, we developed the linkDaemon plugin a couple of years ago inside Immediate Edge as a WordPress plugin which automatically converts keywords in your posts into

hyperlinks to relevant pages and posts on your site (or to links offsite if required). SEO Ultimate have their own version baked into their plugin called 'Deeplink Juggernaut' which provides the same functionality.

There's also a nifty feature which masks links in your posts / pages and essentially replaces the *Pretty Links* plugin.

SEO Ultimate will scan your post for any links, and then display them in a box on your post editor page where you can add in a mask for the link:



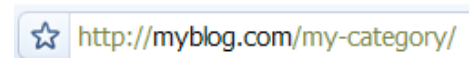
What will happen now is the link won't show as <http://www.google.com> but will now show as <http://www.yourdomain.com/go/google>

SEO Ultimate also includes the *AddThis* and *ShareThis* buttons, so that saves you installing these separately to help with sharing your content, and also includes a Linkbox inserter to include a box below each post for people to copy a quick link to share your post.

There are far too many features in SEO Ultimate to discuss in this overview report, it really is a powerhouse which will fully optimize your WordPress site.

WP No Category Base

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-no-category-base/>



This deceptively simple plugin does a really important job - it basically removes the word 'category' from your URLs so that the keyword rich category tags get closer to the beginning of the URL.

For example, the URL for a category might look like this:

```
http://www.MyPetStore.com/category/Bunny-Rabbits
```

Installing the plugin changes it so that it removes the extra level of 'category' and it becomes:

```
http://www.MyPetStore.com/Bunny-Rabbits
```

It also does a 301 redirect from the older URL to the newer one if you decide to install it on an existing blog, so it's not just for new sites and you can get the benefit on existing sites as well.

As I said, it's a relatively simple tweak, but an important one when you're trying to get every ounce of SEO benefit against the competition, small changes can make big differences once they're all added up.

Google XML Sitemaps with Multisite Support

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/google-xml-sitemaps-with-multisite-support/>



The original *Google XML Sitemaps* plugin has always been a must have for our WordPress sites as it easily and quickly generated XML sitemaps, and then all we needed to do was log into Google Webmaster Tools and submit the sitemap address to point Google in the right direction.

The new upgrade to *Google XML Sitemaps with Multisite Support* has taken the original plugin and added in a notification system so that it automatically pings Google with the sitemap address, and has also added in pings to Bing and Ask.com (you can add Yahoo if you enter your app ID).

The other upgrade on the plugin is that it now handles the multisite feature which is inbuilt to WordPress 3.0 and above, so that the plugin creates separate XML sitemaps for each site rather than just one master sitemap.

W3 Total Cache

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



Cache plugins basically speed up your site and optimize performance by caching pages, images, media etc. and then serving them quickly to the user rather than calling them each time a page is loaded.

Again, there are others which we've used previously and liked (including *WP Super Cache*), but the one we've found which has started edging out the others is W3 Total Cache when it comes to overall site performance and optimization.

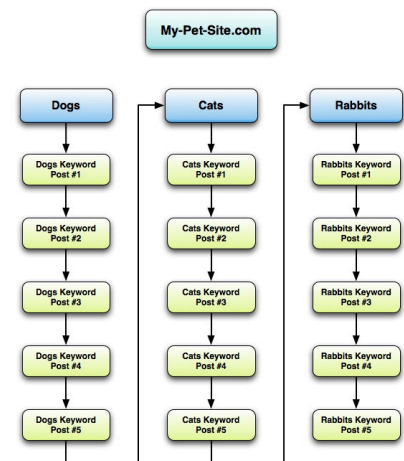
There's not really much else to say apart from that it will speed up your site and optimize it automatically, so install it and activate it and you're good to go.

WordPress Silo Plugin

<http://www.WordPressSiloPlugin.com>

OK, first of all here's a disclaimer: this is one of our plugins and it's a paid option, however, that's not why it's in this report.

The WordPress Silo Plugin is here on it's own SEO merits, and we've been telling people about the importance of the silo structure in your site architecture even before we launched the WP Silo plugin in beta way back in 2009.



Rather than me tell you why your site structure is important and discuss the benefits of the silo structure, you can read it over at the SEOMoz blog here: <http://www.seomoz.org/blog/site-architecture-for-seo>

The WP Silo Plugin automatically and dynamically changes the linking structure of your site and orders them into a silo structure, which is not easy using a database drive system like WordPress, and as a bonus to the plugin we also include the linkDaemon plugin which helps with cross-linking to other relevant pages on your site to maximize the internal linking.

RSS Bomber

<http://www.RSSBomber.com>



Again, here's a disclaimer: the RSS Bomber is one of our plugins and it is a paid option, but as with the WP Silo Plugin it's in the report on it's own merits.

A standard WordPress blog comes with two RSS feeds, one for the main content and one for the comments.

Submitting your main site RSS feed to various RSS Directories and RSS Aggregators can send extra traffic to your site and also give you extra positions in the search results. This is because when you submit your RSS feed it get's put on it's own page or in a list at the RSS Directory / Aggregator which the search engines then crawl and index.

The problem is that once you've submitted your RSS feed to the RSS Directory / Aggregator then you're all done, you can't submit it again and it's a one-shot strategy.

What the RSS Bomber does is automatically create individual RSS feeds for every single blog post and page on your site, so that instead of only having a single RSS feed to submit you now have hundreds to submit, and thus grabbing a ton of extra places in the search results and driving extra traffic back to your site.

Utilities Plugins

Akismet

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/akismet/>



If you're using the in-built WordPress comments function on your site then this is the de-facto plugin you should have installed to combat spam.

You need to grab an API key from Akismet to use the service, but it's completely free and you can sign up to get your API key at this link: <http://akismet.com/wordpress/>

There's not much to say about this plugin, you just install it, add your API key and it quietly works in the background to stop spam flooding into your comments.

Ultimate Google Analytics



<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/ultimate-google-analytics/>

Another simple yet effective plugin. Just activate it, add in your Google Analytics ID into the box and click on the *'Update Options'* button and you're done.

Account ID	<input type="text" value="UA-XXXXXX-X"/>
Enter your Google Analytics account ID. Google Analytics supplies you with a snippet of JavaScript to put on your webpage. In this JavaScript you can see your account ID in a format like UA-999999-9. There is no need to actually include this JavaScript yourself on any page. That is all handled by Ultimate Google Analytics.	

This plugin will automatically add the Analytics code onto all the pages on your site and have full tracking enabled.

WP-DB-Backup

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wp-db-backup/>



One of the biggest mistakes people make is in thinking that everything's going to be all fine and dandy, and that their site is bullet-proof and secure.

Sorry to tell you this, but it's not. Sites crash, servers die, human error can result in essential functions being deleted, and your site can easily slip off the web never to be seen again.

The WP-DB-Backup plugin is another essential installation which you can set to automatically backup all of your database tables on a regular basis, then if the worst does happen and you find that your site has blown up you can restore it from one of your most recent backups.

I can tell you from personal experience, don't make the mistake of not having a backup. I had to learn the hard way that restoring sites with little or no backups can be a costly mistake, and considering you can make this happen with a couple of clicks it's really a no-brainer.

ThemeFuse Maintenance Mode

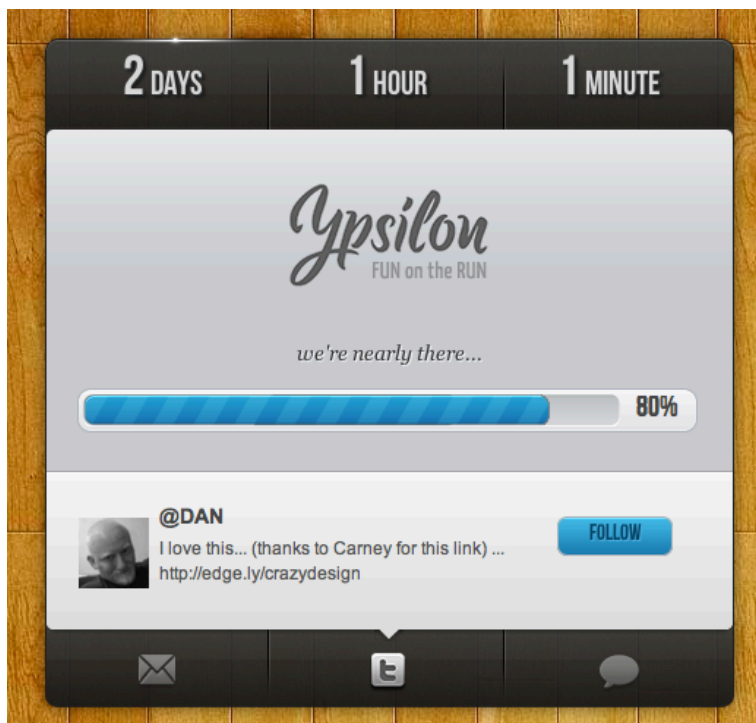
<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/themefuse-maintenance-mode/>



Maintenance Mode plugins basically disable access to your site while you make changes behind the scenes, and again there are a ton of different ones out there.

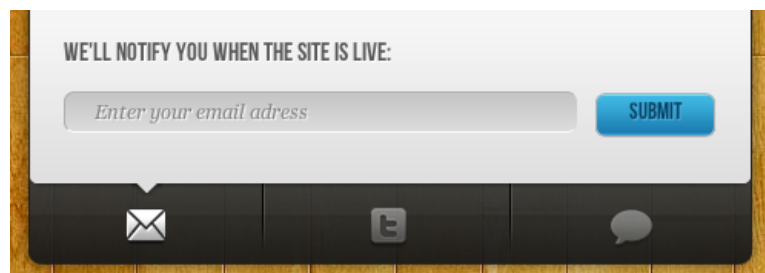
Now, there's two reason I really like the ThemeFuse Maintenance Mode plugin. The first is that it's more pretty than quite a few out there (which tend to be text based), and you can also upload your own images and logos to make it fit with your own brand. It even has a countdown timer you can set.

The second (and more important for me) is that you can enter your Twitter username so that people can choose to follow you, and it also has an email opt-in built in so that people can leave their email address to be notified of changes.



<< Here's the Twitter option...

...and here's the email option >>



Accessibility & Site Layout

WPtouch

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wptouch/>



Quite frankly, we've been using WPtouch from the first day it came out.

It's simple and easy, it has a nice feel for the user and makes WordPress sites easy to read and use, and although it started out just as an iPhone ready solution it also now supports a range of handheld devices.

We've tried other mobile themed plugins, but always find ourselves coming back to WPtouch as we just like the look and feel of it.

Sharing & Social Media Plugins

Facebook Comments for WordPress

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/facebook-comments-for-wordpress/>



If you've not already integrated Facebook onto your site then this one plugin will get you right in the game, and seriously, we've been covering the rise of Facebook for well over 3 years and it's becoming the behemoth of the net.

Although it's called *Facebook Comments for WordPress* it actually also incorporates the Like button as well, so it covers two very important functions which you really should have on your site.

The plugin is also compliant with the very latest changes which happened to FB comments recently, and works like a dream.

Topsy Retweet Button

<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/topsy/>



This is another of those plugins which we've been using for it seems like forever, and it's another simple one to set up and configure which will result in people being able to share your content and drive traffic back to your site.

So there you have it, those are our base install plugins which we use across all our sites to give us the most solid foundation to start from.

There are of course extra plugins we use on an individual basis depending on the focus of each site, but the base install list is our core set we rely on as the backbone of our WordPress sites.

However, what we try to do with all of our sites is install the very minimum of plugins and a lightweight theme so that our sites load quickly and switching between pages and posts are fast for the user.

Remember that each plugin you install will result in a load on your server and consume resources, so don't just add plugins because it might make something look a bit more 'flashy'.

Ask yourself if you really need the plugin and whether it meets a need for the user, if it doesn't then don't install it, just start out with the base install plugins listed in this guide and then only add what is absolutely necessary to drive your site and business.