ROCKABLE*

# WordPress

## for Mere Mortals

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# INTRODUCTION

# Why Use WordPress?

Hello. You're reading this book for one of four reasons.

Either you've been told by your boss to look at how you can go about starting a blog on a minimal budget.

Or, for some reason or another, perhaps redundancy from your normal job or just opportunism, you've decided to strike out on your own.

Or, you're working at a business that is looking to get friendly with customers, and you want to know if WordPress can help you do that.

Or, maybe you're just curious about what WordPress is and how you can make the most of it.

It doesn't matter which of those reasons you're reading for, you've come to the right place.

I did my first installation of WordPress six years ago when it was a lot more primitive than the powerful beast that powers literally millions of websites today — including dozens upon dozens that I've set up or helped other people get off the ground.

In that time, WordPress has changed a lot, and there's a team of developers who are making WordPress so much easier to use while also making it increasingly powerful.

WordPress is so powerful, in fact, that even the UK Prime Minister's blog is powered on the platform. "Number 10" apparently saw that the potential to organise lots of rapidly changing content was all to be found in the 2000+ files that make up a WordPress site.

That might seem like quite a lot of files and perhaps a little bit scary if you've never so much as formatted text using HTML or CSS (don't worry… we'll teach you everything you need to know about

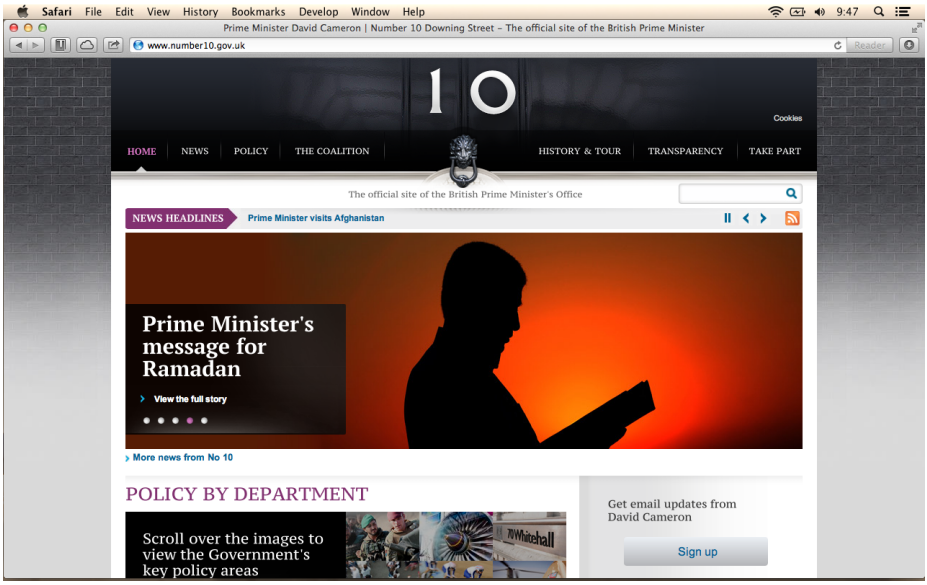


*Fig. 0.1 — Prime Minister's Blog*

those two scary-looking acronyms to use WordPress — which is not much, by the way.)

The good news is that even if you fancy yourself as a bit of a coding Rambo, you'll probably only ever edit code in about a maximum of 20 of those files.

Even better news is that you could happily use WordPress without ever writing a line of code.

That's why WordPress is so powerful — you can do **anything** you want to and that's why you should be using WordPress over any other blogging platform.

From my very earliest days of using WordPress when I couldn't really write any code, right up until today when I write articles about how to perform powerful magic with the Codex (again, that's a word we'll tell you all about later), I have rarely felt out of my depth with using this very safe platform. I have never found a

single idea that I couldn't make happen using those 20 files that I mentioned earlier.

## For the Rest of This Book

This book is straightforward, much like WordPress itself. Some of the chapters will be very, very short, and others will be long. If you find that you're losing the will to live at any point because you can't understand something, feel free to just skip the chapter.

Where there's a part that you really should read, I've marked it with a special "Required Reading" note.

We'll start with one of the most common confusions that WordPress causes for people: what's the difference between WordPress.com and WordPress.org? We'll show you why journalists should always be using WordPress.org and then show you how you can go about doing it yourself. We'll talk about some of the things you need to do to set up a domain name and web hosting.

After that, we'll have a chat about what WordPress calls "themes." This is WordPress' way of quickly and easily changing the way that your site looks. We'll take a look at some really great news and magazine themes and also some basic principles of how to go about modifying the theme you use if you'd like to.

After that, we'll go through probably the most important part of WordPress for most people: writing articles and using media. We'll show you how to edit posts and pages, and by the time we're finished with those two chapters, you'll be able to tell the difference between them, embed video, pictures, Storify and other animals blindfolded and with your hands tied behind your back (… as long as you can still type and use the mouse with your hands behind your back).

Then, we're going to go through some principles of content management — or, in plain English, organizing your website's archives.

In the last third of the book, we'll fork off and go in two directions.

First, we'll explore some advanced principles such as how to use Custom Fields and how to make your website automatically resize images to fit into your template.

Second, we'll take a look at how to supercharge your site with plugins, and we'll explore the plugins of the world to see what's available for you.

After that, you'll be a WordPress champion on your way to take on the gods at Mount Olympus… or… you know… just publish your opinions if that's your kind of thing.

If you have any questions throughout your reading of this book, you can tweet me on @iammarcthomas and I'll zoom in on a cloud, play you sweet musics and solve your WordPress problems while I'm at it.

Read on, young explorer!
*Marc*

http://thatisjustawesome.com

# Setting Up a Self-Hosted Site

Welcome to Chapter One, where we'll walk through exactly what you need to do to get your WordPress site up and running on your super swish .com domain name.

If there's one criticism that we can't help but make when we're talking about WordPress, it's the fact that there are two versions of it with almost exactly the same name, which can be really confusing for average Joe.

So, let's clear this up quickly and then move on. I don't know all of the details surrounding the origins of WordPress, but at some point the principal founder of the WordPress platform (Matt Mullenweg — @photomatt) decided to release two different iterations of WordPress.

The first is hosted by WordPress themselves. We often call this WordPress**.com**, and you can start a blog there in a matter of seconds. Because it's hosted by WordPress, you can't edit the code very much (even when you pay for their extra features) and you can't upload your own theme if you fancy that. WordPress.com is great for people who are flexible about their blog's appearance and want to get simple blog posts out to a small audience.

On the other hand, WordPress**.org** is self-hosted which means you have 100% control over everything to do with your site. WordPress.org is for people who want to do much more than just publish straightforward content. It's for people who want a content management system that could rival that of any major news organization in the world — or equally, for people who just want to be able to tell their customers what time their delicatessen opens, sell tickets for concerts or put details of their stamp collection out into the world.

For the rest of this book, we will be describing WordPress.org — the self-hosted option, because we're power users and we want full control over all of the various facets of our website.

When people ask me to build them a website, they've often got some really confused ideas about the kinds of things that they're going to need to pay for.

## Hosting — a hard drive on the Internet

Most are confused about where the files for the site will be.

Every website is "hosted" on a web hosting service. There are lots of different kinds of hosts, but unless you're going to be getting hundreds of thousands of page views daily, you'll probably only ever need a basic shared host.

But what is a host?

Simple. Imagine you're writing a document on your computer. When you're done, you need somewhere to save it, right? Well, the host is just like an online hard drive. It's where all of the files you need people to see on the Internet will sit.

Generally, a web host will not be more than $15 monthly, and you can find a host for as low as $1 monthly. However, just like any other product or service, you get what you pay for!

Many times, people cause themselves a lot of problems by skimping out on their hosting bill. As powerful as it is, WordPress still relies on certain other technologies.

All good web hosts will be able to support WordPress very easily, and some of them will even offer a one-click installation process for WordPress, which makes setting up your site much easier. Breathe!

I can personally vouch for the quality of service offered by **Media-Temple**, but there are lots of other good hosting providers that I have worked with in the past.

If you go to WordPress.org in your browser, you'll see that they've compiled a list of a few of their recommendations for good hosts. You can't go wrong if you pick one of these.

## Your First Domain Name Dot Com

If you're going to carry on with this book, you'll also need to buy a domain name for your project.

There are no websites without a domain name. It's like a house without a name or a number — no-one can find them… including the postman.

You need the Internet to know exactly where to send visitors when they type in the name of your site. For example, when people type http://plastik.me or http://thatisjustawesome.com into the browser, they're calling on the sites chosen domain name. You'll need to choose a domain for your own site.

Buying a domain name is not as hard as it seems, nor is it as expensive as it's made out to be.

Despite many people not trusting GoDaddy's business practices or ethical concerns (any large business will have a few naysayers and negative reviews), I have never had any problem using their services.

Domain names usually cost about $12 for a year, although there are discounts for buying multiple years at once.

I suggest not using the domain registration service that comes with most hosting providers, as it can sometimes prove problematic if you ever try to change web hosts in the future. Keeping separate accounts for your domains and your hosting needs will allow you to change either service more easily.

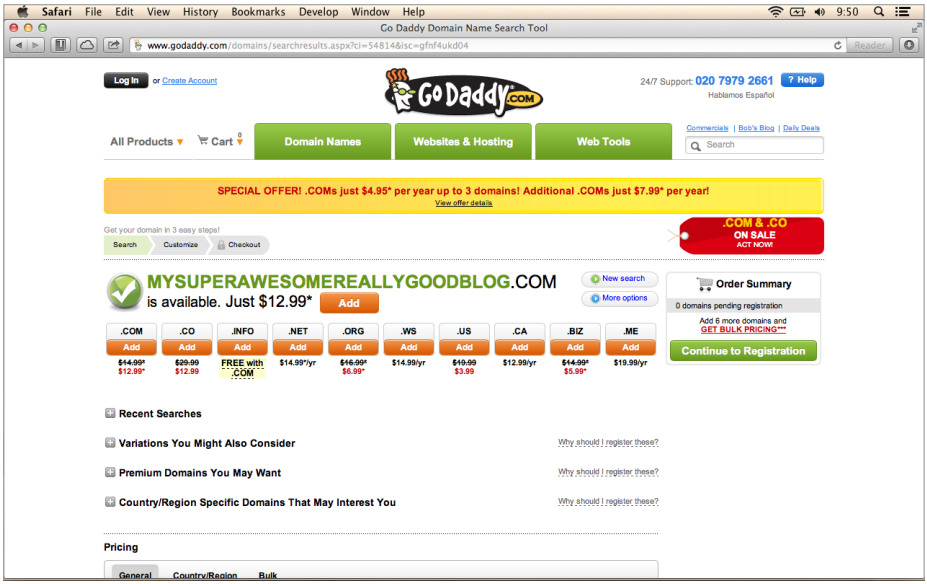


*Fig. 1.1 — GoDaddy domain purchase screen.*

# Now put your domain and your hosting together

Pretty soon you're going to be able to complete a super easy installation of WordPress, but before that, you're going to have to wait 24 hours, I'm afraid.

The wait is 24 hours because that's usually how long it takes for a "domain propagation" which is a fancypants way of saying that it takes 24 hours for your host and your domain name to get friendly and agree that they'll work together to serve your content to your visitors.

When you sign up to your webhost, they'll send you an e-mail with a bunch of detailed information in it. Within that e-mail will be two "nameservers," which you'll need to copy and paste into your domain's settings to complete the aforementioned *prima nocta* (wedding night) between your domain name and your hosting company.

Fortunately, this is pretty easy. All you do is log in to your domain name provider (**GoDaddy** is really easy), select your domain name from within your account, and then select "Set Nameservers" or a similar option if that one's not available. Once you're on that page, you need to copy and paste in the two nameservers which will probably look like web addresses like this: `ns1.yourwebhost.com` and `ns2.yourwebhost.com` — you don't need an "http://" or a "www." in front of them. Then just click "Update" and take the rest of the day off!

Some web hosts (like MediaTemple) will require one extra step where you have to log in and "Add domain to account," but this is really easy, so don't worry. Just search your web hosts' help pages if you get stuck at this point in the process.

## Here's one I made earlier.

So, after you've waited 24 hours for the papier maché to dry… uh… I mean for the domain to propagate, you'll be good to go.

Many good web hosts will offer a service called Fantastico or "One Click Installation," which makes it beyond easy to install WordPress on your hosting account.

If you skimped out on web hosting, you might have to do some legwork and configure a database yourself.

We'll look through what you should do in both instances now. Follow the section that applies to your situation.

### If you went with an expensive host like MediaTemple

Congratulations! You have chosen well. Here, all you need to do is select the domain name you want to use from your admin panel (or cPanel, as some hosts call it) on your host and select "one click installation" or Fantastico.

Then, select WordPress and fill in all the fields that it asks for. If it offers you the choice to fill in some information about databases, don't freak out, but do remember the following things:

1. If you've already installed WordPress on your web host, you'll need to just add a little bit extra to your database name to differentiate between databases on the host,
2. But for most of you, just clicking proceed or submit will do just fine.

At this point, you've got your first WordPress.org site up and running. Good job!

Just one more thing. You'll need an FTP client at some point so that you can upload your theme later on in the book. It's best to have a chat about it now, so you'll be ready to go when the time comes.

Once you've picked out, downloaded and installed an FTP client, the next step is to open up that e-mail that your web host sent you when you bought the account. It will have details for an FTP host within it. Just copy and paste the server, port, username and password into your FTP client — as the process is different for each server and each FTP client, you'll have to fiddle about on your own here, but it's not at all hard to work out.

Then click "Connect" or the equivalent button and wait for your computer to open an FTP connection to your web host.

**ROCK* TIP**

**What is FTP?** *FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol, and it is what is used to move files from your computer to your web host. If you're on a Mac, I suggest you use Transmit by Panic (Fig. 1-2) which is, quite frankly, a wonder of technology. The options for PC users are endless but you just need to pick one. We call it an FTP client but we could also call it an FTP app, application, program, thing, doodah or basically anything you want. So you're familiar with the jargon in the future, we'll refer to it as a client — but feel free to make up your own name for it in your head.*

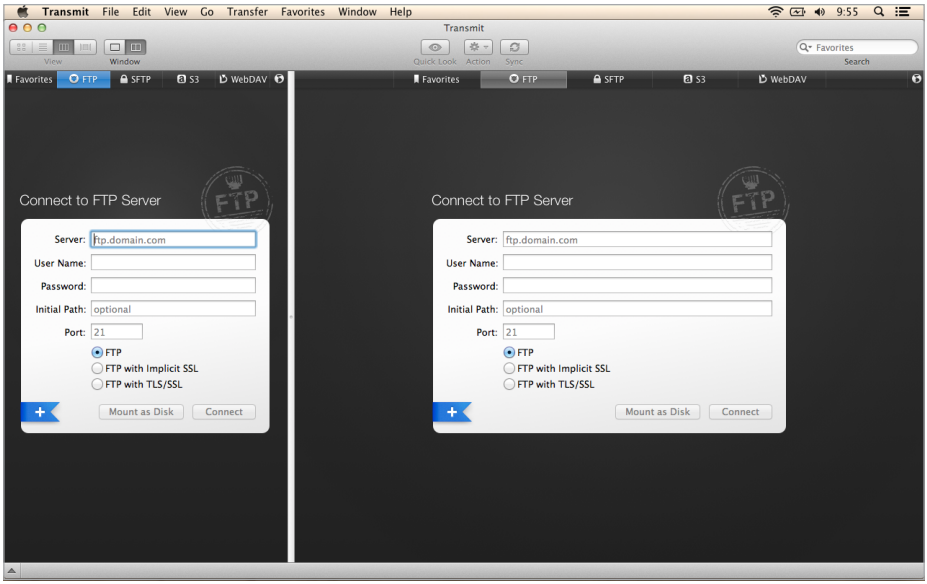


*Fig. 1.2 — Transmit by Panic.*

You'll see a few things here but you should look for a folder that is called either **`www`** or **`domains`**. Find the **`wp-content`** folder and then the **`themes`** subfolder. Here's where you'll upload your chosen WordPress theme; we'll cover that process in the next chapter.

If you've managed that, go ahead and grab yourself a lovely coffee or peppermint tea to congratulate yourself. Join us in the next chapter where we'll be picking up at that themes folder.

## If you skimped out on your hosting, start here

If for some reason you couldn't afford to use a host like MediaTemple or you just didn't fancy it, not to worry. We'll have you up and running with WordPress with their famous five minute installation.

As I already wrote, for the people who chose a more expensive host that has Fantastico and one-click installations, start by choosing and downloading an FTP client. Enter the login details for your website sent by your webhost into your FTP client's preferences. Then click "Connect" (or the equivalent) and you're in!

You'll see a few directories here, but you should look for a folder that is called either **www** or **domains**.

At this point, hop over to WordPress.org and download WordPress using the big "Download" button on their homepage (Fig. 1-3).

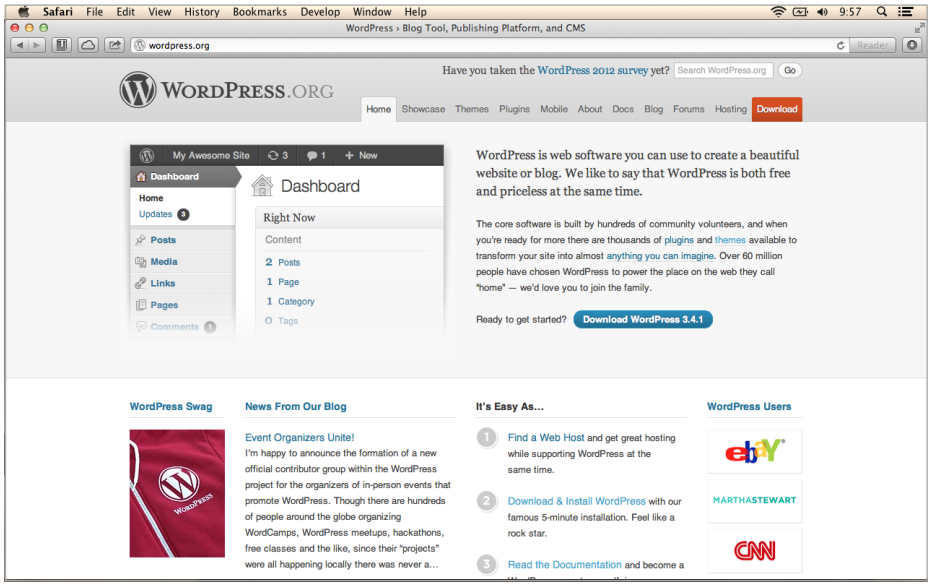


*Fig. 1.3 — WordPress.org Home.*

When the file has downloaded to your computer, find it and put all of the contents (but not the compressed file itself; you'll have to unzip the download) into the **www** folder (or the **yourdomain.com** folder) within your FTP account.

Because there are, as we mentioned earlier, a little over 2000 files in that folder, go put the kettle on and leave the files to upload while you make the tea. This should only take a few minutes if you've got a fast connection — probably about the time it takes to download an album from iTunes.

Before you can continue with the installation, you need to get your database sorted out. The database is the beating heart of your WordPress site and holds all of the content within its dark corners.

You'll only ever need a simple database setup process and then some copying and pasting though; you'll probably never actually look inside the database.

Go ahead and open your admin panel or cPanel on your host using the instructions that they sent you in the e-mail. Once again, as each host's way of doing things is slightly different, this section is only a guide and you might have to try fiddling about yourself.

Look for an icon which says *phpMyAdmin* or something similar. Click it and add a new database. Give it a name and remember the name.

That's all you need to do to set up a database.

Now that your files have uploaded, type in your domain name and a screen should appear that will guide you through the installation process for WordPress. One of the steps will ask for your database name, username and password. The database name is the one you just created, while the username and password will probably have been sent to you when you bought your hosting space. Most hosts will include them in the e-mail with your nameservers that you used earlier to transfer your domain name. Remember?

Once that's done, you're up and running. Enter your domain name into the browser again and you'll see the default WordPress theme and a sample post.

Congratulations. Enjoy that cup of tea that you just made.

**ROCK* TIP**

*If you run into trouble at this stage, contact your web host. They're usually very good at supplying support. Although they won't help you out with WordPress at all — they probably will help you find your database password and username.*

## Chapter Summary

So, in this chapter, we've taken a look at the difference between the two WordPress services and decided that we're going to

choose the self-hosted option. We've also looked at how to set up a web host with a domain name and then how to install WordPress.

In the next chapter, we'll have a look at **themes**, which we can use to make our WordPress installation look as good as Zeus and run like Hermes.

# About The Author

Marc Thomas is a journalist from Cardiff, UK. He works freelance for many publications writing about design, culture and publishing. He publishes Plastik Magazine (UK) and magazines for institutions and organisations with his business Plastik Content (http://plastikcontent.me).

You can find him on Twitter at @iammarcthomas or on his personal blog at http://thatisjustawesome.com.

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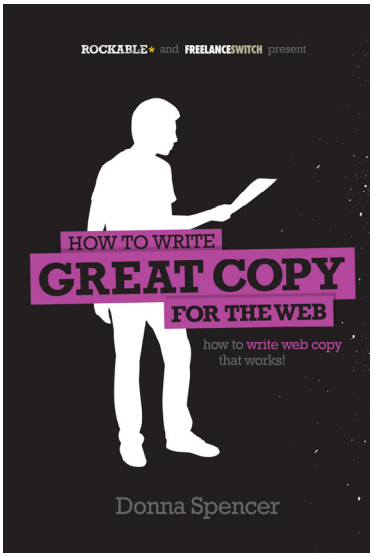


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