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Lisa Sabin-Wilson

WordPress Agency Owner

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5th Edition

by Lisa Sabin-Wilson

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Introduction

WordPress is the most popular online content management software on the planet. Between the hosted service at `WordPress.com` and the self-hosted software available at `WordPress.org`, millions of bloggers use WordPress, and to date, WordPress powers over 45 percent of the Internet. That's impressive! With WordPress, you can truly tailor a website to your own tastes and needs.

With no cost for using the benefits of the WordPress platform to publish content on the web, WordPress is as priceless as it is free. WordPress makes writing, editing, and publishing content on the Internet a delightful, fun, and relatively painless experience, whether you're a publisher, a business owner, a designer, a developer, or a hobbyist blogger.

About This Book

The fact that WordPress is free and accessible to all, however, doesn't make it inherently easy for everyone to use. For some people, the technologies, terminology, and coding practices are a little intimidating or downright daunting. That's where this book comes in. *WordPress All-in-One For Dummies,* 5th Edition, eases any trepidation about using WordPress. With a little research, knowledge, and time, you'll soon have a website that suits your needs and gives your readers an exciting experience that keeps them coming back for more.

WordPress All-in-One For Dummies is a complete guide to WordPress that covers the basics: installing and configuring the software, using the Dashboard, publishing content, utilizing the site and block editor, and using plugins. Additionally, this book provides advanced information about security, the WordPress tools, the Multisite features, and search engine optimization (SEO).

Foolish Assumptions

I make some inescapable assumptions about you and your knowledge, including the following:

- You're comfortable using a computer, mouse, and keyboard.
- You have a good understanding of how to access the Internet, use email, and use a web browser to access webpages.
- You have a basic understanding of what a website is; perhaps you already maintain your own.
- You want to use WordPress for your online publishing, or you want to use the various WordPress features to improve your online publishing.

If you consider yourself an advanced user of WordPress, or if your friends refer to you as an all-knowing WordPress guru, chances are good that you'll find some of the information in this book elementary. Although this book is aimed toward beginner users, intermediate and advanced users will also find useful information. There's something here for everyone.

Icons Used in This Book

The little pictures in the margins of the book emphasize a point to remember, a danger to be aware of, or information that you may find helpful. This book uses the following icons:

TIP

Tips are little bits of information that you may find useful — procedures that aren't necessarily obvious to a casual user or beginner.

WARNING

When your mother warned you, "Don't touch that pan; it's hot!" but you touched it anyway, you discovered the meaning of "Ouch!" I use this icon for situations like that one. You may very well touch the hot pan, but you can't say that I didn't warn you!

TECHNICAL STUFF

All geeky stuff goes here. I use this icon when talking about technical information. You can skip it, but I think that you'll find some great nuggets of information next to these icons. You may even surprise yourself by enjoying them. Be careful — you may turn into a geek overnight!

REMEMBER

When you see this icon, brand the text next to it into your brain so that you remember whatever it was that I thought you should remember.

Beyond the Book

On the web, you can find some extra content that's not in this book. Go online to find

- The Cheat Sheet for this book is at `www.dummies.com/cheatsheet`. In the Search field, type **WordPress All-in-One For Dummies Cheat Sheet** to find the Cheat Sheet for this book.
- Updates to this book, if any, are at `www.dummies.com`. Search for the book's title to find the associated updates.

Where to Go from Here

From here, you can go anywhere you please! *WordPress All-in-One For Dummies* is designed so that you can read any or all of the minibooks between the front and back covers, depending on what topics interest you.

- Book 1 is a great place to get a good introduction to the world of WordPress if you've never used it before and want to find out more.
- Book 2 gives you insight into the programming techniques and terminology involved in running a WordPress website — information that's extremely helpful when you move forward to the other minibooks.
- Book 3 is a good place to jump in and start exploring the WordPress Dashboard, with all of the different settings available for you to start making your website unique and tailored to your needs.
- Book 4 digs into using the block editor in order to create posts and pages, and gives you good information on working with media within your content (images, video, audio, and documents).
- Book 5 takes you through some great information about using tracking tools, such as Google Analytics, to understand how visitors are using your website, as well as some important SEO information and tools you can use to improve your search engine presence.

- Book 6 gives you an understanding of finding and installing WordPress themes, as well as information about block themes, the site editor, and block patterns, and how you can use those tools to customize the look of your site.
- Book 7 introduces you to WordPress plugins, and how to find and install them in order to extend and increase the features and functionality of WordPress.
- Book 8 introduces you to the Multisite feature in WordPress, and how you can set it up and use it to run multiple websites with just one installation of the WordPress software.

Above all else, have fun with the information contained within these pages! Read the minibooks on topics you think you already know; you might just come across something new. Then dig into the minibooks on topics that you want to know more about.

1 Understanding WordPress Basics

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Discovering content publishing
- Publishing and archiving content
- Interacting through comments
- Using WordPress as a content management tool to create different types of sites

Chapter 1
Exploring Basic WordPress Concepts

Blogging gives regular, nontechnical Internet users the ability to publish content on the World Wide Web quickly and easily. Consequently, blogging became extremely popular very quickly, to the point that it's now considered to be mainstream. In some circles, blogging is even considered to be passé, as it has given way to publishing all types of content freely and easily with WordPress. Regular Internet users are blogging, and Fortune 500 businesses, news organizations, and educational institutions are using WordPress to publish content on the web. Today, more than 45 percent of all sites on the web have WordPress behind them.

Although you can choose among several software platforms for publishing web content, for many content publishers, WordPress has the best combination of options. WordPress is unique in that it offers a variety of ways to run your website. WordPress successfully emerged as a favored blogging platform and expanded to a full-featured content management system (CMS) that includes all the tools and features you need to publish an entire website on your own without a whole lot of technical expertise or understanding.

In this chapter, I introduce you to such content basics as publishing and archiving content, interacting with readers through comments, and providing ways for readers to access your content through social media sharing. This chapter also helps you sort out the differences between a blog and a website, and introduces how WordPress, as a CMS, can help you build an entire website. Finally, I show you some websites that you can build with the WordPress platform.

Discovering Blogging

A *blog* is a fabulous tool for publishing your diary of thoughts and ideas. A blog also serves as an excellent tool for business, editorial journalism, news, and entertainment. Here are some ways that people use blogs:

- **Personal:** You're considered to be a personal blogger if you use your blog mainly to discuss topics related to you or your life: your family, your cats, your children, or your interests (such as technology, books, music, politics, sports, art, or photography). I maintain my own personal blog at `https://lisasabin-wilson.com`.
- **Business:** Blogs are very effective tools for promotion and marketing, and business blogs usually offer helpful information to readers and consumers, such as sales events and product reviews. Business blogs also let readers provide feedback and ideas, which can help a company improve its services. I run a global WordPress design and development agency called WebDevStudios, and we maintain an active business blog at `https://webdevstudios.com/blog`.
- **Media/journalism:** Popular news outlets such as Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN are using blogs on their websites to provide information on current events, politics, and news on regional, national, and international levels. *Variety* magazine hosts its entire website on WordPress at `https://variety.com`.
- **Government:** Governments use blogs to post news and updates to the web quickly and to integrate social media tools as a means of interacting with their citizens and representatives. In the United States, the White House is using WordPress to power its official website at `https://whitehouse.gov`, where the executive branch of the government provides policy statements and updates on the economy, national security, the budget, immigration, and other topics. (See Figure 1-1.)

- **Citizen journalism:** Citizens are using blogs with the intention of keeping the media and politicians in check by fact-checking news stories and exposing inconsistencies. Major cable news programs interview many of these bloggers because the mainstream media recognize the importance of the citizen voice that has emerged via blogs. An example of citizen journalism is The Lincoln Project at `https://lincolnproject.us/latest-news/`.
- **Professional:** Professional blogs typically generate revenue and provide a source of monetary income for the owner through avenues such as advertising or paid membership subscriptions. Check out Darren Rowse's ProBlogger blog at `https://problogger.com/blog/`. Rowse is considered the grandfather of professional blogging.

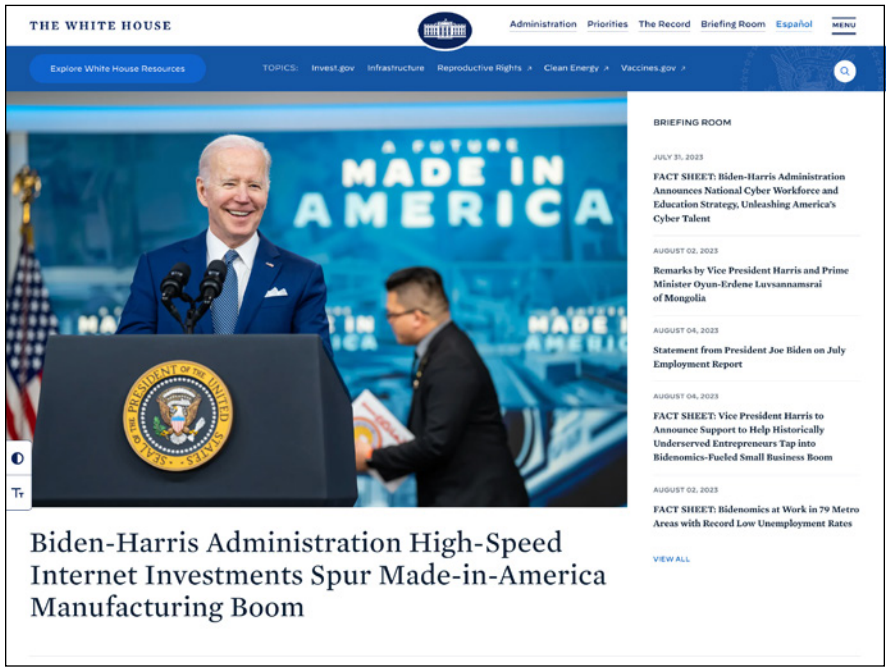

FIGURE 1-1: The official White House website is powered by WordPress.

The websites and blogs I provide in this list run on the WordPress platform. A wide variety of organizations and individuals choose WordPress to run their blogs and websites because of its popularity, ease of use, and large and active development community.

Understanding WordPress Technologies

The WordPress software is a personal publishing system that uses a PHP-and-MySQL platform, which provides everything you need to create your blog and publish your content dynamically without having to program the pages yourself. In short, with this platform, all your content is stored in a MySQL database in your hosting account.

TECHNICAL STUFF

PHP (which stands for *PHP Hypertext Preprocessor*) is a server-side scripting language for creating dynamic webpages. When a visitor opens a page built in PHP, the server processes the PHP commands and then sends the results to the visitor's browser. MySQL is an open-source relational database management system (RDBMS) that uses Structured Query Language (SQL), the most popular language for adding, accessing, and processing data in a database. If all that sounds like Greek to you, think of MySQL as being a big filing cabinet where all the content on your website is stored.

REMEMBER

Keep in mind that PHP and MySQL are the technologies that the WordPress software is built on, but that doesn't mean you need experience in these languages to use it. Anyone with any level of experience can easily use WordPress without knowing anything about PHP or MySQL.

Every time a visitor goes to your website to read your content, they make a request that's sent to your server. The PHP programming language receives that request, obtains the requested information from the MySQL database, and then presents the requested information to your visitor through their web browser.

TIP

Book 2, Chapter 1 gives you more in-depth information about the PHP and MySQL requirements you need to run WordPress.

Archiving your publishing history

Content, as it applies to the data that's stored in the MySQL database, refers to your website's posts, pages, comments, and options that you set up in the WordPress Dashboard or the control/administration panel of the WordPress software, where you manage your site settings and content. (See Book 3, Chapter 2.)

WordPress maintains chronological and categorized archives of your publishing history automatically. This archiving process happens with every post you publish to your blog. WordPress uses PHP and MySQL technology to organize what you publish so that you and your readers can access the information by date, category, author, tag, and so on. When you publish content on your WordPress site, you can file a post in any category you specify; a nifty archiving system allows you

and your readers to find posts in specific categories. The archives page of my blog (`https://lisasabin-wilson.com/archives`), for example, contains a Category section, where you find a list of categories I created for my blog posts. Clicking the Music/Books link below the Categories heading takes you to a listing of posts on that topic. (See Figure 1-2.)

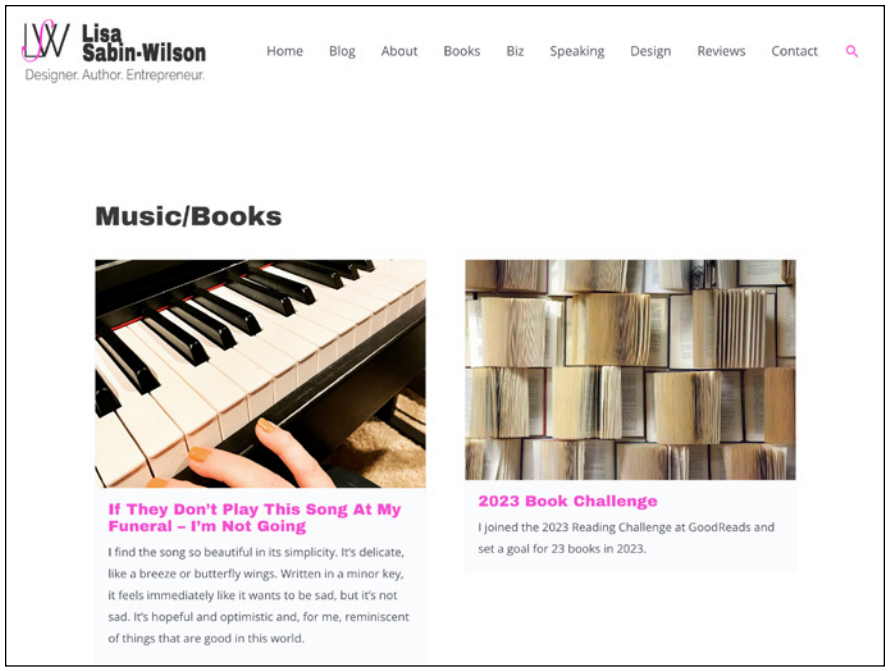

FIGURE 1-2: A page with posts in the Music/Books category.

WordPress lets you create as many categories as you want for filing your content. Some sites have just one category, and others have up to 1,800 categories. When it comes to organizing your content, WordPress is all about personal preference. On the other hand, using WordPress categories is your choice. You don't have to use the category feature if you'd rather not.

TIP

When you look for a hosting service, keep an eye out for hosts that provide daily backups of your site so that your content won't be lost if a hard drive fails or someone makes a foolish mistake. Web hosting providers that offer daily backups as part of their services can save the day by restoring your site to a previous form.

REMEMBER

The theme (design) you choose for your site — whether it's the default theme, one that you create, or one that you custom-design — isn't part of the content. Those files are part of the file system and aren't stored in the database. Therefore, it's a good idea to create a backup of any theme files you're using. See Book 6 for further information on WordPress theme management.

Interacting with your readers through comments

An exciting aspect of publishing content with WordPress is receiving feedback from your readers after you publish to your site. Receiving feedback, or *comments*, is akin to having a guestbook on your site. People can leave notes for you that publish to your site, and you can respond and engage your readers in conversation. (See Figure 1-3.) These notes can expand the thoughts and ideas you present in your content by giving your readers the opportunity to add their two cents' worth.

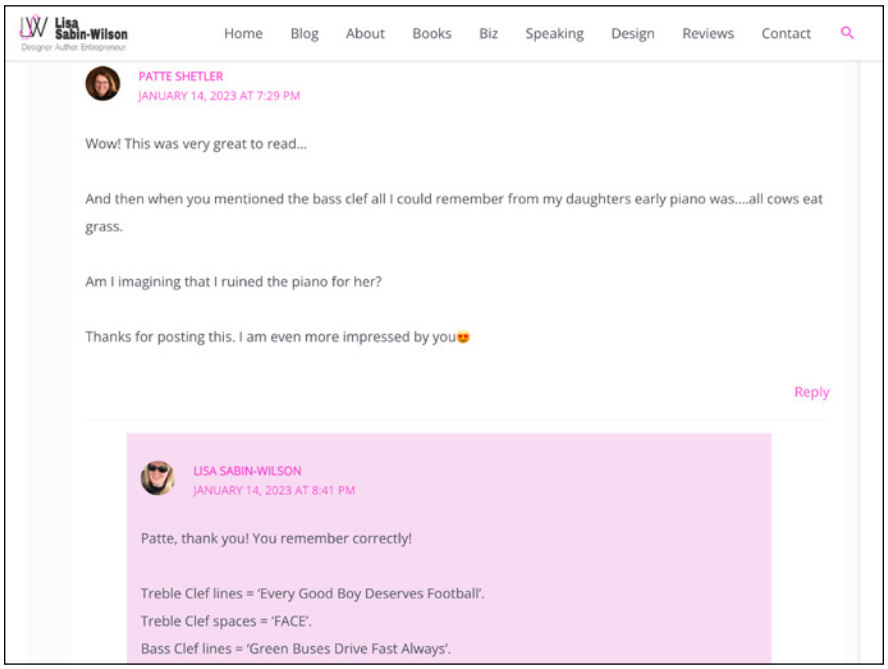

FIGURE 1-3: Blog comments and responses.

REMEMBER

The WordPress Dashboard gives you full administrative control over who can leave comments. Additionally, if someone leaves a comment with questionable content, you can edit the comment or delete it. You're also free to not allow comments on your site. (See Book 3, Chapter 4 for more information.)

Feeding your readers

RSS stands for *Really Simple Syndication.* An *RSS feed* is a standard feature that blog readers have come to expect. So what is RSS, really?

RSS is written to the web server in XML (Extensible Markup Language) as a small, compact file that can be read by RSS readers (as I outline in Table 1-1). Think of an RSS feed as a syndicated, or distributable, auto-updating "what's new" list for your website.

TABLE 1-1 Popular RSS Feed Readers

Reader	Source	Description
Feedly	`http://feedly.com`	RSS aggregator for websites that publish an RSS feed. It compiles published stories from various user-chosen sources and allows the Feedly user to organize the stories and share the content with others.
MailChimp	`https://mailchimp.com`	MailChimp is an email newsletter service. It has an RSS-to-email service that enables you to send your recently published content to your readers via an email subscription service.
dlvr.it	`https://dlvrit.com`	Use RSS to autopost to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and other social media sites.

Facebook is now called Meta, and as of this writing, Twitter is being rebranded as X. More name changes may be in the works. But because most readers will recognize Facebook and Twitter by those names, I've used them throughout this book.

Tools such as feed readers and email newsletter services can use the RSS feed from your website to consume the data and aggregate it into a syndicated list of content published on your website. Website owners allow RSS to be published to allow these tools to consume and then distribute the data in an effort to expand the reach of their publications.

Table 1-1 lists some popular tools that use RSS feeds to distribute content from websites.

For your readers to stay up to date with the latest and greatest content you post, they can subscribe to your RSS feed. WordPress RSS feeds are autodiscovered by the various feed readers. The reader need only enter your site's URL, and the program automatically finds your RSS feed.

WordPress has RSS feeds in several formats. Because the feeds are built into the software platform, you don't need to do anything to provide your readers an RSS feed of your content.

Tracking back

The best way to understand *trackbacks* is to think of them as comments, except for one thing: Trackbacks are comments left on your site by other sites, not by people. Sounds perfectly reasonable, doesn't it? After all, why wouldn't inanimate objects want to participate in your discussion?

Actually, maybe it's not so crazy after all. A trackback happens when you make a post on your site, and within the content of that post, you provide a link to a post made by another author on a different site. When you publish that post, your site sends a sort of electronic memo to the site you linked to. That site receives the memo and posts an acknowledgment of receipt in the form of a comment to the post that you linked to on the site. The information contained within the trackback includes a link back to the post on your site that contains the link to the other site — along with the date and time, as well as a short excerpt of your post. Trackbacks are displayed within the comments section of the individual posts.

The memo is sent via a *network ping* (a tool used to test, or verify, whether a link is reachable across the Internet) from your site to the site you link to. This process works as long as both sites support trackback protocol. Almost all major CMSes support the trackback protocol.

REMEMBER

Sending a trackback to a site is a nice way of telling the author that you like the information they presented in their post. Most authors appreciate trackbacks to their posts from other content publishers.

Dealing with comment and trackback spam

The absolute bane of publishing content on the Internet is comment and trackback spam. Ugh. When blogging became the "it" thing on the Internet, spammers saw an opportunity. If you've ever received spam in your email program, you know what I mean. For content publishers, the concept is similar and just as frustrating.

Spammers fill content with open comments with their links but not with any relevant conversation or interaction in the comments. The reason is simple: Websites receive higher rankings in the major search engines if they have multiple links coming in from other sites, like trackbacks. Enter software like WordPress, with comment and trackback technologies, and these sites become prime breeding grounds for millions of spammers.