

WordPress Usability Testing

By Alison DePollo, Jonathan Kelly, and Jason Tyler

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WordPress was originally released in 2003 as an open-source blogging program. Today, WordPress blogs are everywhere on the web. Good or bad, it is not just the standard that other blogging programs are compared against. WordPress is a versatile open-source content management program (<https://wordpress.org/about/>).

Every month on WordPress, over 400 million people are viewing more than 17 billion pages, and users are or creating nearly 65 million new posts (<http://en.wordpress.com/stats/>). Globally, over 70% of the traffic is generated in English (<http://en.wordpress.com/stats/>). Locally, more than 90% the departments at the University of Tennessee have a department blog or have a teacher with a personal or class blog.[1]

‘Big Business’ has embraced WordPress as a Content Management System (CMS) (<http://vip.wordpress.com/clients/>) and (<http://vip.wordpress.com/2013/10/22/why-big-brands-love-wordpress/>). In fact, use of WordPress solely as a CMS has been gradually rising in popularity across the board. As of 2014, 69% of WordPress sites were only used as a CMS. Use of WordPress as a blog platform has dropped from 31% in 2011 to 20% in 2014. (<http://wpstatistics.com/>)

For viewers looking at website content, blogs created on WordPress have a high level of visual consistency. This makes it simple and quick for readers to interface with a variety of topic information. However, because of the rigid formatting, WordPress sites have been described as “boring”.[2] As newer platforms for online expression such as Instagram and Pinterest have come on the scene, WordPress has been put in a position to compete for new, younger users while trying to maintain a level of consistency for those who started their WordPress blogs back

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in 2003. Newer platforms can start with a clean slate, and are free to use the latest conventions of web interfaces.

For new bloggers, today's WordPress is quite a chore to navigate and generally difficult to figure out (as we'll see in our usability results). In comparison to some of the other, newer, online web creation tools like Wix for example "the learning curve for WordPress is definitely a lot steeper"[3]. The look of the WordPress interface has changed over the years however the structure administrative navigation seems to have been added, rather than intelligently redesigned for 2014.[4]

Creating a new post provides us another example of an 'added on' interface design decision. There are no fewer than two separate and different 'new post' authoring screens. The more standard post screen can be opened from the interface 'Dashboard' content/creation menu, whereas the second 'new post' link is at the top of the page. The latter opens a very basic new post page providing few posting options, the former opens a new post page with all the available controls and options in view.

One possible explanation for this redundancy is that the site is trying to please two very different kinds of users: those who are very familiar with the program and want a lot of control over their design, and those who want to be able to post quickly and without a lot of fuss. In any event, only one of our usability testers (Tester) located both post pages she spent a few minutes trying to find the purpose for the different post pages, not finding a purpose apart from the limited options, our Tester eventually moved on. Our testing agent did note that the Tester in question used the full new post page for the remainder of the testing.

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Based on the interface I would say that the current WordPress is intended for people that already know how to use the program. As with users of Adobe's Photoshop, power users who know where to look for things can navigate WordPress without issues. However, as our usability testing suggests, novices may find the interface intimidating and confusing. While WordPress' steep learning curve may have been shrugged off in its early days, modern users expect more hand holding in from their software. The greatest individual factor or ability that a 2014 WordPress user would need to possess is persistence.

A WordPress content manager would be concerned with the task of posting new content, managing the digital assets, category/tag categorization, page layout and social media networking. Thus, WordPress offers a number of good features that will be of use to bloggers. Creating a new post is just a start. Bloggers also have the ability to:

- Customize how posts are organized via categories or tags
- Change how posts are displayed via one of the 2700 themes
[\(http://www.wordpress.org/themes/](http://www.wordpress.org/themes/)
- Look at page view demographics
- Access data about user persistence and demographics

Additionally, all WordPress users have the ability to link their favorite social media account to WordPress. For example, if the users linked their Twitter account to their WordPress account then WordPress will post a tweet when a new WordPress post is published. WordPress offers free blog hosting and free themes, but if you also host your own WordPress blog/CMS, then and only then can you can customize the whole site theme, add plugins, and even open a

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shop or sell ad space to monetize your site. The number of features that WordPress offers are numerous and at times overwhelming.

Our usability test was designed to have the Testers perform some basic tasks in WordPress. These include logging in, creating new posts, inserting pictures, adding hyperlinks, adjusting the layout, categorizing posts, choosing a theme, and editing the site header and subheading. Lastly, we asked our Testers to turn the “submit comments” option off. Testers were instructed to perform these tasks one at a time, and each task was timed. If there were any comments along the way, these were recorded. The test for each of the Testers was identical. The list of tasks as it was given to the Testers is included at the end of the paper.

The tasks chosen ranged from very basic to slightly advanced. Logging in, creating and editing a post are about as simple as you can get in WordPress. Inserting pictures and hyperlinks, while slightly more advanced, are still very common in all but the most simplistic blogs and websites.

Changing the site theme and categorizing posts provides a way that bloggers can display and arrange their content. While neither is required it is the way to differentiate and organized the site content. In WordPress categories can be used as the navigation feature of the site (as opposed to creating pages), so some familiarity with the topic would seem to be a requirement for putting together any decent WordPress site or Blog.

Finally, Testers were asked to turn off the post comments. While it may sound simple enough, it is the most advanced question on the test and necessity because “[c]omment spam is a fact of life if you have a [WordPress] blog” (http://codex.wordpress.org/Combating_Comment_Spam). The location of this setting is buried.

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Further, the option is titled “Allow people to post comments on new articles.” As if that were not enough, in order to save your selection, bloggers need to click the save button that is tucked away well below the fold of the page. This made the “turn off comments” portion of the test highly irritating to the Testers.

While the initial thought with this approach was to collect hard data about using the program (say, by getting an average time it takes to complete certain tasks for the first time), the more useful results came from comments from the Testers.

Here are some of the comments and common issues that Testers faced:

- Testers were frustrated that things weren’t “where they are supposed to be.” For example, my second Tester expected the login to be at the top and very visible, “like it usually is!”
- Another Tester remarked “You find things by hunting and pecking. When you need to find something else it is a little easier only because you did all that hunting and pecking to find something else.”
- At the 25 minute mark the Tester found the correct page, but due to the language the WordPress used the tester was ultimately unable to turn off the comments. At 30 minute mark the Tester gave up.

This is not a surprise, as, since we were looking at how to complete a low cost test, three Testers is a very limited pool of data. What was evident through simple observation was that WordPress does not hold your hand through any process. Even when our Testers were successful at completing a task, they often did not know why they were taking certain actions. Contrast this with programs whose tutorials are built into their designs. Some programs will not let you make

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an action for the first time without telling you a bit about what you are doing, or suggesting some other part of the program that would help with your action.

WordPress, simply, was created when many features and lots of choices were the most important things to users. Modern design focuses more on attractive presets and a general emphasis on the experience of using the tool itself, not necessarily the end result. Programs designed more recently go out of their way to make the user feel competent and smart when they complete actions. WordPress does not care how you feel. Ultimately, that kind of design is baked in to the program, and can be hard to get rid of without a total redesign. As mentioned earlier, because they have such a broad user base right now, the company may not be willing to risk a major design overhaul and potentially alienating its current users.

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[3] Wong, J (2014). Wix vs WordPress – Our Detailed Comparison. Retrieved from <http://www.websitebuilderexpert.com/wix-vs-wordpress/>

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Usability Testing Questions:

Step 1: Go to <http://whoisyourgirl.wordpress.com/>

USER NAME: wiyguser

PASSWORD: iamyourgirl

Step 2: Complete the following sections about creating in WP:

A. Post #1 - create a new post:

1. Title the post "Insert-[*your name*]"
2. Enter "Image by-[*your name*]"
3. Place the robot image in the center of the page
4. Publish Post

B. Post #2 - create a new post:

1. Title the post "URL-[*your name*]"
2. Enter "Content by-[*your name*]"
3. Hyperlink "<https://duckduckgo.com/>" to the word "Content"
4. Publish Post

C. Post #1 – create a category:

1. Name: "Insert-[*your name*]"
2. Parent: none
3. Description: leave blank
4. Click "Add New Category"

D. Post #2 – create a category:

1. Name: "URL-[*your name*]"
2. Parent: none
3. Description: leave blank
4. Click "Add New Category"

Step 3: Complete the following sections about editing in WP:

E. Edit Post #1

1. Add the category "Insert-[*your name*]" to the post

F. Edit Post #2

1. Add the category "URL-[*your name*]" to the post

G. Edit Post #2

1. Change the title of the post to "URL2-[*your name*]"
2. Change the hyperlink to "<http://dialasong.com/>" in the word "Content".
3. Publish Post

H. Change the blog theme

1. "Vertigo" to "Harmonic"

I. Change the "Site Title" and the site's "Tagline"

1. Site Title: [*Your Name*]'s site
2. Tagline: [*Your Name*] is the best blog in the world.
3. Save Changes

J. Turn off comments

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WordPress Usability Testing: Personal Reflections

By Jonathan Kelly

November 12, 2014

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This is the second online collaborative team project I have worked on, and both times have been very different. In the first project there were very strong opinions about every piece of the puzzle, and how everything should be done. In this project, the attitudes were more relaxed. Each scenario had its own advantages and disadvantages. There was very little butting of heads in this project, which is great, but there was also more difficulty in setting deadlines, as there was not that one person in the group who just *had* to have things done early for their own sanity. While that person is never going to be me, I think someone having that attitude in a group project can be very useful.

In both cases, collaborating in a group where you can meet synchronously, but not face-to-face sets up certain challenges. It is harder to get a feel for a person and their personality when you cannot see them in person. However, the project progressed not as much through synchronous meetings, but through emails and Google Docs. Having a shared document is extremely useful in an online collaborative project. It allows everyone to feel a certain amount of agency and participation in the project, and it leaves people to work in their own timeframes. It also creates a record of who did work, and of the work that they did.

Of course, things were further complicated for our team by the early birth of my daughter. I was largely unavailable during the last few crucial weeks of work. Part of the process of working on a project is being able to work when someone, as I did, becomes unavailable. I greatly appreciate my team members being willing to pick up the slack that I left, though I still feel like I was able to make contributions.

Usability testing is actually quite complicated. I feel we just scratched the surface of all of the things you should think about when testing a product for usability. While I believe we got some good results, just creating certain tasks and having expectations for those tasks was quite

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challenging. There was always a question of how much information to give the user. Should we talk them through the steps on how to insert a picture into a post, or should we just say, “Insert a picture into your post”? There is a broad range of information that can be given and withheld, and we also had to keep in mind the patience of the people we were asking to test. How complicated could we make our test and not make it miserable for the person taking it?

Certain concepts of usability really came up with this test. WordPress is just not designed to be very usable. It is designed to be powerful, and there is a difference. The idea of guiding a user through the process and helping them to not feel confused is just not part of the process. In the world of WordPress, if there is a way to do it, that is close enough.

If I were going to do this project again, I think I would push for stronger benchmarks. Setting benchmarks and goals is really crucial, I think. It would have been nice to have a full draft done earlier in the process. I think it’s good to let a project live in your mind a bit while it is being finished, and I think the best way to do that is to get something down on paper. Not only that, it would have meant that we had some buffer time built in in the case of unforeseen events (such as a baby being born).

Group Activity Peer Evaluation Form

Total Possible Points

20

***Make sure you submit completed peer evaluation forms for each member in your team including yourself.**

Name of individual you are evaluating: Alison DePollo

1. What was the role and tasks assigned to this individual?

There weren't many assigned tasks in this project. Most pieces were worked on together, such as the testing form. Each person was supposed to perform the test on one Tester. Alison was able to find two testers when Jonathan was unavailable to complete this portion.

2. What were the tasks that this individual accomplished?

Alison helped create the questions of the test, and she put together the final test page that was handed out. She also worked on the final summary of the results of the tests. She also completed the final read through of the paper and fixed any final problems.

3. On a scale of 1 to 20 (1 being lowest and 20 being the highest) how satisfied are you regarding this team member's performance in this project? Circle or fill in the numerical value you feel accurately portray the level of your satisfaction.

Very Satisfied

Not Satisfied

20

10

0

20

Comment on your satisfaction rating so that you provide supporting evidence of your decision.

Alison was an active participant and did her fair share of the work on the project.

**Group Activity Peer Evaluation
Form**

**Total Possible Points
20**

***Make sure you submit completed peer evaluation forms for each member in your team including yourself.**

Name of individual you are evaluating: Jonathan Kelly

1. What was the role and tasks assigned to this individual?

There weren't many assigned tasks in this project. Most pieces were worked on together, such as the testing form. Each person was supposed to perform the test on one Tester, but Jonathan was unable to due to his baby being born early.

2. What were the tasks that this individual accomplished?

Jonathan helped develop the testing questions. He worked on the description of the testing process. He also did a revision and some formatting on the final paper.

3. On a scale of 1 to 20 (1 being lowest and 20 being the highest) how satisfied are you regarding this team member's performance in this project? Circle or fill in the numerical value you feel accurately portray the level of your satisfaction.

Very Satisfied

Not Satisfied

20

10

0

20.

Comment on your satisfaction rating so that you provide supporting evidence of your decision.

Jonathan did his best under the circumstances. Even though he was unavailable for a portion of the writing, he still communicated with his team and made contributions both at the beginning and the end of the project.

Group Activity Peer Evaluation Form

Total Possible Points

20

***Make sure you submit completed peer evaluation forms for each member in your team including yourself.**

Name of individual you are evaluating: Jason Tyler

1. What was the role and tasks assigned to this individual?

There weren't many assigned tasks in this project. Most pieces were worked on together, such as the testing form. Each person was supposed to perform the test on one Tester, which Jason did.

2. What were the tasks that this individual accomplished?

Jason helped develop the questions for the testers. He also worked on the description of WordPress at the beginning of the paper. He also assembled the first draft of the final paper from our individual pieces.

3. On a scale of 1 to 20 (1 being lowest and 20 being the highest) how satisfied are you regarding this team member's performance in this project? Circle or fill in the numerical value you feel accurately portray the level of your satisfaction.

Very Satisfied

Not Satisfied

20

10

0

20

Comment on your satisfaction rating so that you provide supporting evidence of your decision.

Jason really helped pull up slack when Jonathan was unavailable. He did a good bit of the grunt work to get the paper done.