



WordPress Plugins Explained

Tutorial Contents



This tutorial explains what WordPress plugins are, how plugins work, and how plugins help extend your WordPress website's functionality.

Links to additional tutorials on how to install, update and delete plugins are provided at the end of this tutorial.

WordPress is open-source software, which means that anyone can study how it works, modify it however they like to make it do whatever they want, and then share it with other users.

Being open source, then, not only makes WordPress a powerful software for publishing websites and managing content, but it also makes it infinitely flexible, scalable, and extensible.

In practical terms, you can start your digital presence with a basic website and then very quickly and easily expand its functionality to make it do whatever you want, need, or can imagine, simply by adding inexpensive (and often completely free) applications called **plugins**.

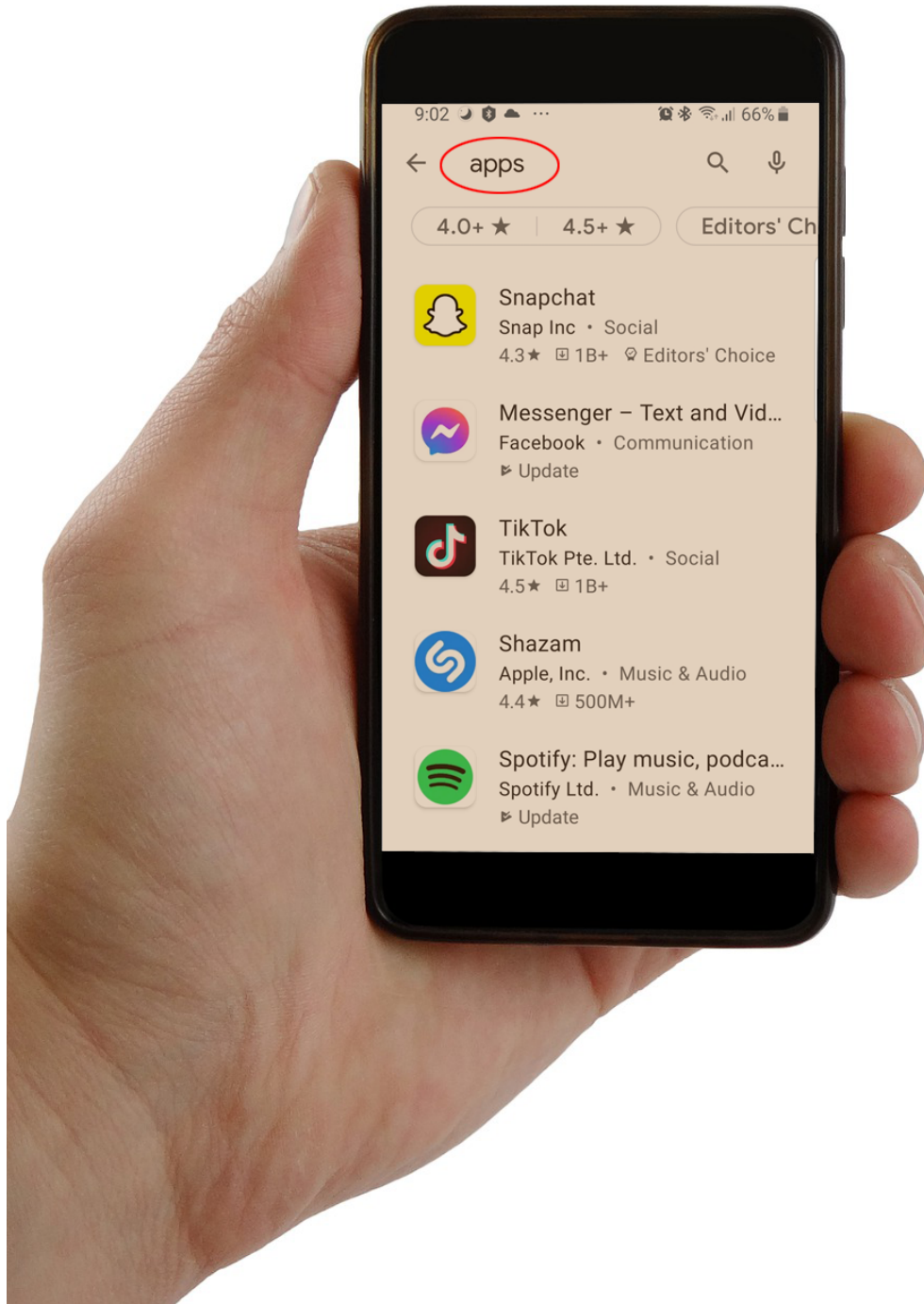
What Are WordPress Plugins?

Like most of us, you probably own a mobile phone and are familiar with using *apps*.

An app is a little software application that is typically very easy to install.

Once installed, it immediately adds new features and functionality to your mobile device.

If the app is well designed and well-coded, it should also integrate and work seamlessly with your mobile device and its software platform.



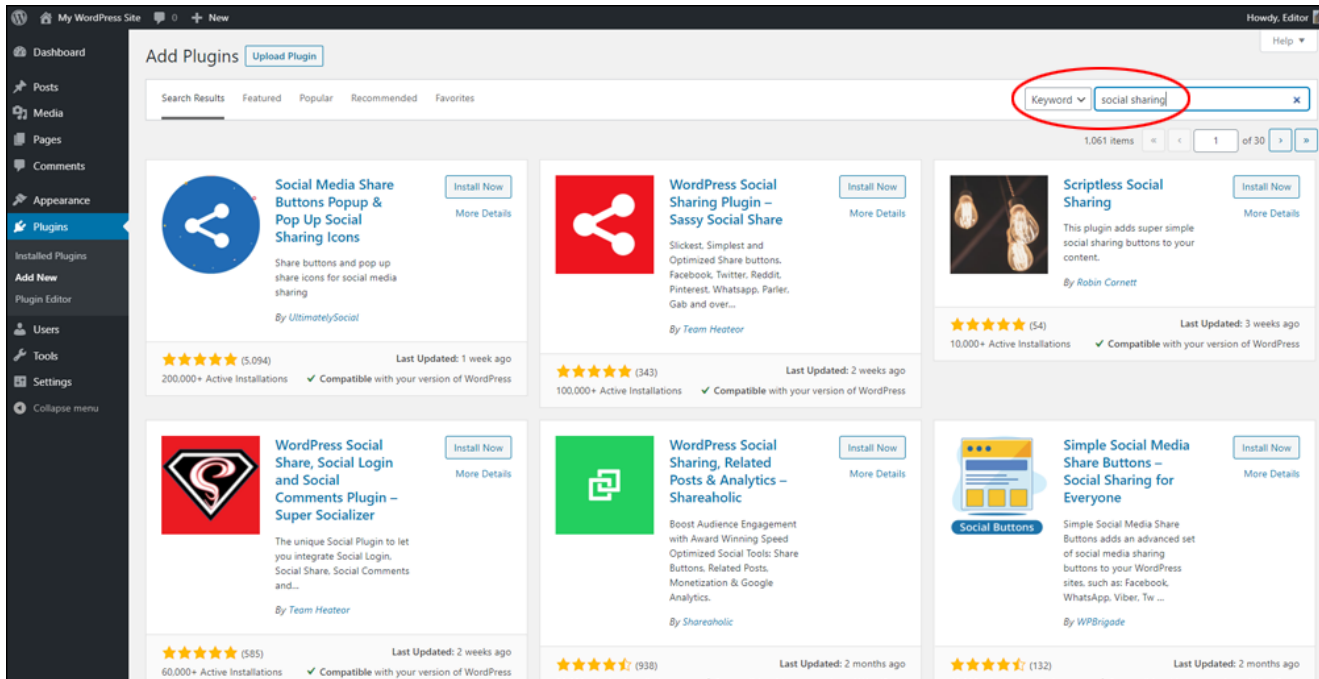
Just as there are loads of social sharing apps for your smartphone...

A WordPress plugin is like an app.

A plugin is not part of the core WordPress software. It “plugs” into it (hence “plug in”).

You download, install, and activate a plugin (a piece of software) created by a third-party developer and this immediately adds new functionality to your site.

If the plugin is well designed and well-coded, it should also integrate and work seamlessly with the WordPress platform.



...there are also loads of social sharing plugins for your WordPress site!

Benefits And Advantages Of Using WordPress Plugins

Imagine this:

1. You take your business online or start a digital presence quickly, simply, and inexpensively with a basic professional-looking website, then...
2. As you need additional features or new functionality for your site, you simply install a new software module from your admin area with a few clicks of the mouse, then...
3. The software integrates seamlessly with your existing site so there's no need to redesign or recode anything, and...
4. A whole new range of capabilities, features, and functionality is immediately added and becomes available on your website, and
5. All this was added quickly and was either relatively inexpensive or done for little to no cost.

The above is exactly what plugins for WordPress allow you to do!

Earlier, we compared WordPress plugins with smartphone apps.

In the same way that apps are easy to install and are either free to download or may cost relatively little money, so do WordPress plugins.

In fact, many thousands of powerful, feature-rich, and really useful plugins are freely available to WordPress users.

While “Premium” plugins do cost money, it’s still relatively little when compared to the cost of investing in a professional web developer to code custom software for your website from scratch.

As WordPress is an open-source application and makes its code publicly available to everyone, anyone can create, modify, and customize any portion of the code to enhance or expand any aspect of it.

This has allowed thousands of third-party software developers to enhance and contribute to the WordPress platform, allowing the software to do just about anything you can imagine.

Although WordPress plugins can do all kinds of different things as we will soon see, almost all plugins have these things in common:

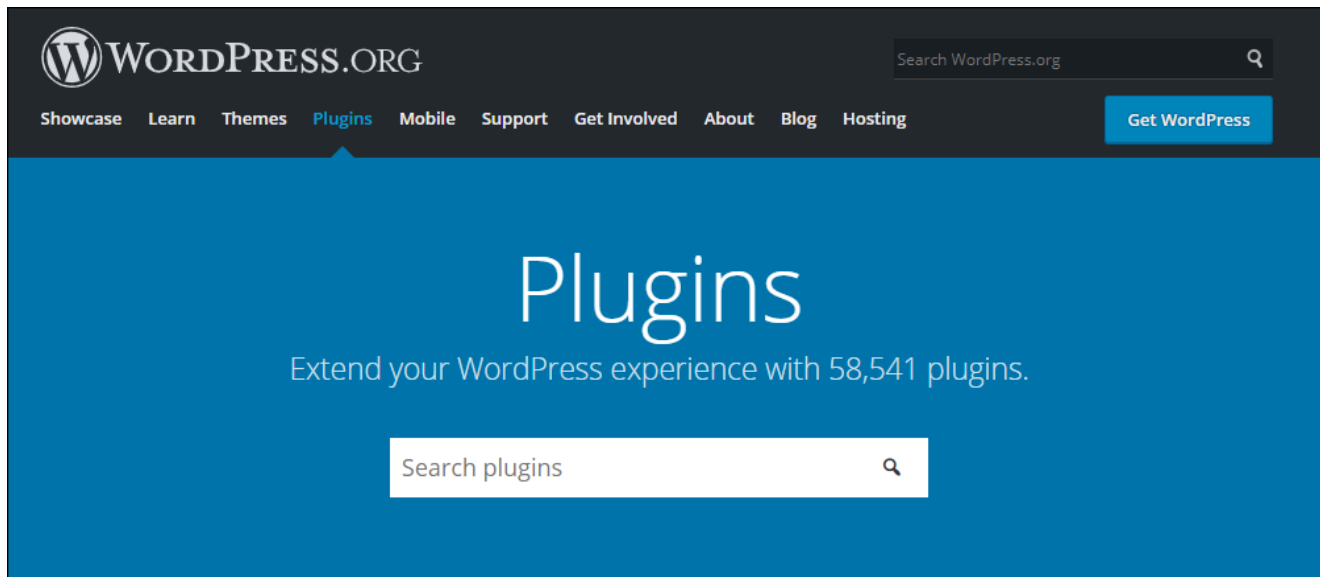
- They allow you to start with the same basic WordPress installation and expand only when and if required.
- They give your site practically unlimited expansion capabilities.
- Most are relatively inexpensive (many are free with options to upgrade if advanced features are required).
- They can be installed, activated, and updated in a standard way (see further below).
- Most are relatively easy to configure and will typically work “right out of the box” without requiring complex technical skills or additional coding. *Note:* some plugins are quite simple and require no configuration and some can be quite complex and may require advanced skills or knowledge to configure.

WordPress Plugins – Powerful, Flexible...And (Many are) 100% FREE!

Just like [WordPress themes](#), there are thousands of excellent plugins available for WordPress users.

Many plugins, in fact, are completely free.

You can access thousands of free WordPress plugins from the [Free WordPress Plugin Directory](#).



WordPress.org's free plugin directory.

All plugins in the WordPress directory are checked to make sure that they comply with **stringent guidelines**, so this is the recommended place to visit for free plugins for your WordPress site. Premium plugins can be found in digital marketplaces like **CodeCanyon** or downloaded from the plugin developers' own websites.

As we've already stated, you can find plugins for WordPress sites that will do just about everything you need or can imagine doing.

Plugin Categories

For example, here are just some of the categories of plugins you will find available:

- SEO
- eCommerce
- Advertising
- Analytics/Reporting
- Backups
- Caching/Speed Optimization
- Security
- Forms
- Popups
- Galleries
- Social Media
- Learning Management Systems
- Membership Sites
- Directory
- Booking/Calendar/Events
- Site/User Management & Administration

- Content Distribution & Syndication
- Traffic & Lead Generation
- User Engagement
- Media/Media Utilities & Management
- User Monitoring

Plugin Features & Functionality

Here are just some of the types of features and functionality you can add to your WordPress site using free and premium plugins:

- Contact forms/conditional logic forms
- Polls and quizzes
- User surveys, social and gamified contests
- Advertising banners and advertising sales management
- eCommerce (from single-item to full enterprise-scale stores with shopping carts, payment processing, automated invoicing, recurring payments and subscriptions, coupons, inventory management, etc.)
- Social media sharing and posting
- Membership sites (from simple password-protection for single downloads to complex sites with different membership levels, unique member logins, per-post subscriptions, drip-feeding, etc.)
- Newsletter and list-building subscription and opt-in forms.
- Sales funnels
- Content publishing workflows and collaborative editing
- Mobile integration and conversion
- Optimizing your content and site for search engines
- Media galleries (images, videos, audios) with playlists, carousels, sliders, lightboxes, etc.
- Testimonials and feedback forms
- Language translation (instantly translate your site's content into any language)
- Site statistics and reporting
- Visitor heatmaps
- Adding site maps for visitors and search engines
- Custom navigation menus
- Live chat
- Currency conversion
- Offsite media storage (e.g. cloud and remote services)
- Making pages load faster with image optimization, caching, content distribution networks (CDN), etc.
- Events and reservations/bookings management
- Business and niche directories, job sites, auction sites, etc.

- Setting up client appointments and reminders
- Detecting broken hyperlinks on your pages
- Finding and replacing text on your pages
- Scanning and fixing malware
- Protecting your site against hackers and brute-force attacks
- Redirecting users to different pages or sections of your site
- Social signal monitoring
- Making your pages printable or downloadable as a PDF file
- Optimizing your site's database and server resources
- Excluding or hiding specific posts or pages from appearing on site maps and feeds
- Protecting content sections
- Converting, migrating, exporting, or importing data to and from other platforms
- Performing bulk edits
- Preventing/blocking spam
- Customizing styles
- Adding code, script, and other elements to your posts and pages, sidebar, header, footer, etc.
- Adding and formatting tables, charts, etc.
- Displaying and managing QR codes
- Improve local search listing results
- Adding maps of your business location
- Distributing and syndicating your content automatically on social sites and other blogs
- Display countdown timers, expiring/scarcity offers, geo-targeted coupons, etc.
- Display personal, custom, or personalized greetings, timed offers, etc.
- And hundreds of other features!

As you can see, WordPress plugins give your site virtually limitless possibilities for expansion.

WordPress Plugins – Applications

Let's look at different ways that using WordPress plugins can benefit your site.

#1 – Protect Content On Your Site With Membership Plugins

If you want to protect content on your site and only make it available to some but not all users, you can use the built-in **password-protection** feature of WordPress (no plugin required).

However, if you want to assign each user different login details or offer users access to different content based on different levels of access (e.g. basic vs pro, silver vs gold, or trade vs wholesale), you can install a **membership plugin**.

member (or you've signed up
log into your members area by
t. (If you're already logged in, it
here for [Membership Access](#)). If
you out no problem :-)
ber today, you can [sign up here](#).

Members Login Here:

You are not currently logged in.

Username:

Password:

Remember Me

Login

> [Register](#)

> [Lost your Password?](#)

Use a membership plugin to offer protected content to different user levels. (Source: OrchidsMadeEasy.com)

#2 – Display Product Images Using Rotating Image Sliders

If you plan to set up an eCommerce site, you can add many kinds of plugins to create an online store that will work exactly as you have imagined.

For example, a popular feature of eCommerce sites is the ability to display different product images using an image carousel or slider.

You can easily accomplish this using a [WordPress eCommerce image slider plugin](#).

Ship Your Idea

£20.00

Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Vestibulum tortor quam, feugiat vitae, ultricies eget, tempor sit amet, malesuada aliquam semper. Aenean ultricies mi vitae eleifend leo.

Color
Choose an option ▾

1 Add to cart

SKU: T-SHIRT-SHIP-YOUR-IDEA
Categories: [Clothing](#), [T-shirts](#)

Add an image slider to your eCommerce store using a WordPress plugin. (Source: [WooThumbs](#))

Do you plan to promote regular events on your WordPress site?

If so, you can use an **events management plugin** to inform your visitors about different events, take bookings and registrations online, etc.

Keywords

Location

Select Date Range ▼

Choose a Category...

Choose an event type...

Events

11
NOV

TECH JOBS FAIR

Tech Innovation Career

11 November 2021

Berlin

TechJobsFair.com

Tech Jobs Fair Berlin – 2021

🕒 2021-11-11 @ 03:00 PM (CET) - 2021-11-11 @ 08:00 PM (CET)

📍 Berlin, Germany

Meeting or Networking Event

30
SEP

MARKETING EXPO 2020

Marketing Expo 2020

🕒 2020-09-30 @ 10:00 AM (GMT) - 2020-12-31 @ 01:00 AM (GMT)

📍 Surat, Gujarat, India

Game or Competition

paid

28
SEP

WOMAN BUSINESS

Woman Business

🕒 2020-09-28 @ 09:00 AM (IST) - 2020-12-31 @ 01:00 AM (IST)

📍 Online Event

Festival or Fair

paid

LOAD MORE EVENTS

Use an events management plugin for WordPress to promote events on your site. (Source: WPEventManager.com)

You can also add advanced booking features to your site for all kinds of applications, such as booking accommodation, making dining reservations, setting up medical appointments, etc.

Add booking

Options

Help

Visible months: 2

Calendar width: 90 %

Add booking



Emails sending

December 2016							January 2017							>>
SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA	SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA	
				1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30	31					

Powered by WP Booking Calendar

First Name*:

John

Allow users to easily make bookings and reservations on your site. (Source: WPBookingCalendar.com)

If you plan to offer training courses or instruction programs on your site, you can use **eLearning Management plugins** to set up, run, and manage online courses.


JAMIE & ANNIE
HEALTH & NUTRITION

Home All Courses Yoga Sadhna Eating Healthy About Contact [Start Learning](#)

Courses

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Ut elit tellus, luctus nec ullamcorper mattis, pulvinar dapibus leo.


Featured Courses



Control Your Brain with Pranayama

Tellus maiores ullam ullamcorper, nostrud lacinia veniam torquent.


[See more...](#)



Seek Health with Yoga Sadhana

Repellat perspiciatis cum! Doloremque ea viverra eu doloremque.

[See more...](#)



Healthy Eating for Healthy Life

In porttitor ipsum eu justo condimentum euismod ullamcorper viverra.

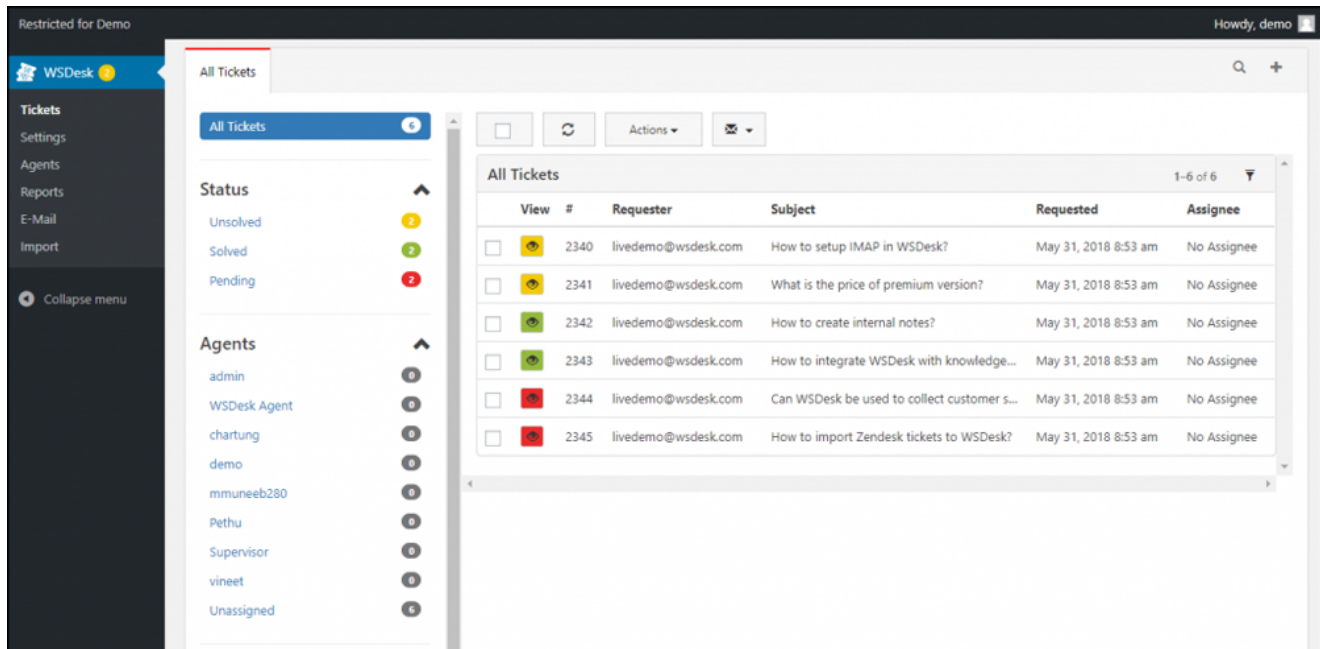
[See more...](#)

Run online courses using eLearning management plugins.

You can also take advantage of the built-in WordPress commenting feature to increase user engagement using plugins.

For example, your site visitors can easily:

- Leave comments on your posts to initiate online discussions using WordPress, Facebook, etc.
- Contact you using a contact form.
- Dial your business number from their mobile phones.
- Engage with your support team using a knowledge base, live chats, video conferencing, or open a support ticket via a dedicated support helpdesk.
- And so much more.



Set up a complete support helpdesk system in WordPress using plugins. (Source: WSDesk)

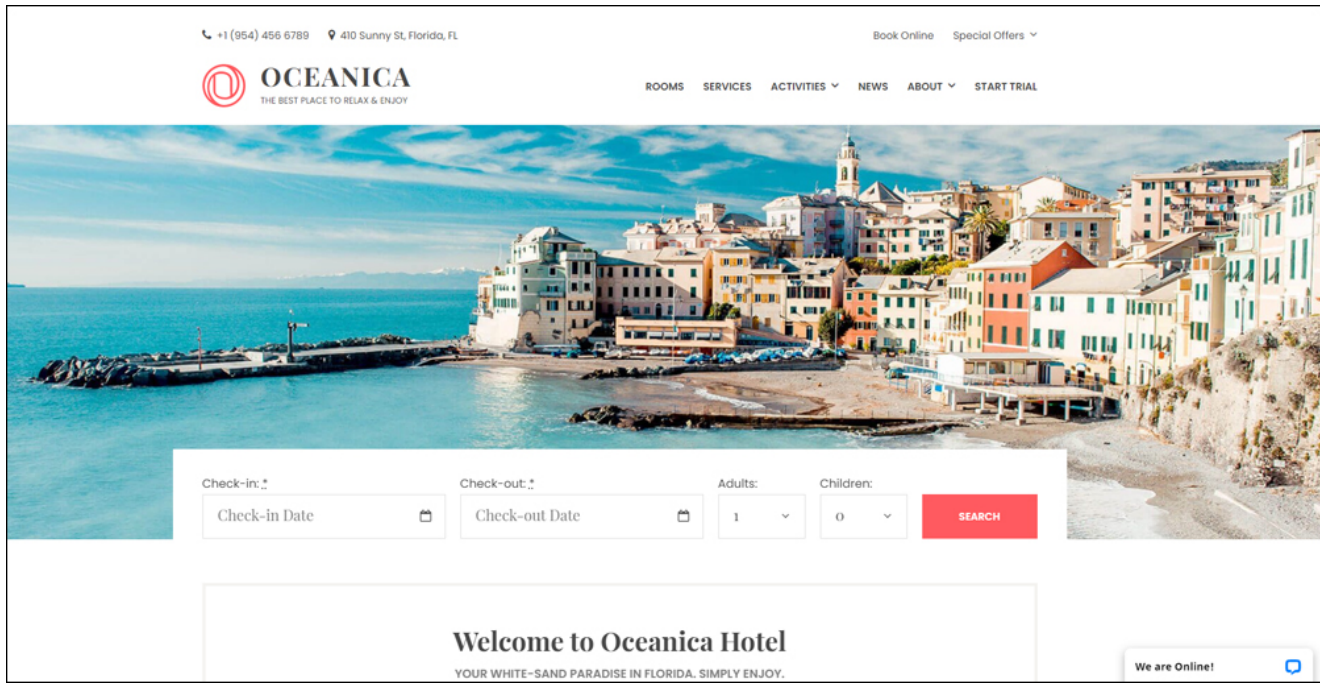
You can also add plugins that make it easy for visitors to share your content online on their social networking sites.

You can also integrate complex “back end” applications using a WordPress “front end.”

This allows you to manage what your visitors see on your site (the “front-end”), while a third-party application handles all the technology on the backend.

A typical example of this application are travel sites with affiliate programs.

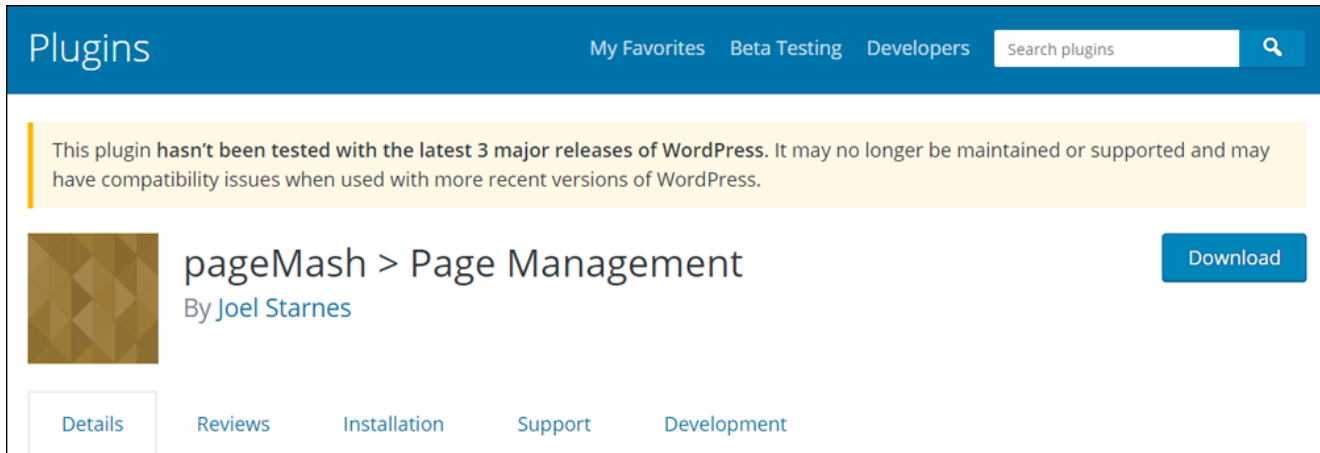
Website owners use the front end of their site (e.g. a WordPress blog) to publish articles promoting travel-related posts and when visitors click on links for more information, they are then redirected to an integrated database engine with details of locations, hotel accommodation, flight bookings, etc.



Many services integrate with WordPress using plugins to provide backend functionality.

WordPress Plugins – Additional Tips & Information

- There are loads of WordPress plugins to choose from. Be careful not to overload your site's server resources by installing too many plugins, as this can affect your site's performance and page loading speed. It can also create additional maintenance work and lead to potential conflicts and errors.
- Only keep the plugins that your site needs. Delete any unnecessary and inactive plugins from your site, as these can also consume additional server resources.
- Free plugins typically receive little to no support from the plugin developer. When considering premium plugins, research what kind of reputation the plugin developer has in terms of providing support, regular updates, new features, etc. Be sure to check plugin reviews and user recommendations.
- If you see an unsupported plugin that has not been updated for a long time (e.g. two or more years), think twice about installing it on your site. WordPress regularly updates its core software and any plugins that are not frequently updated can create potential conflicts on your site.
- Make sure to keep your plugins up to date. Outdated plugins can create conflicts or issues on your site and contain security vulnerabilities that hackers and malicious users could exploit.

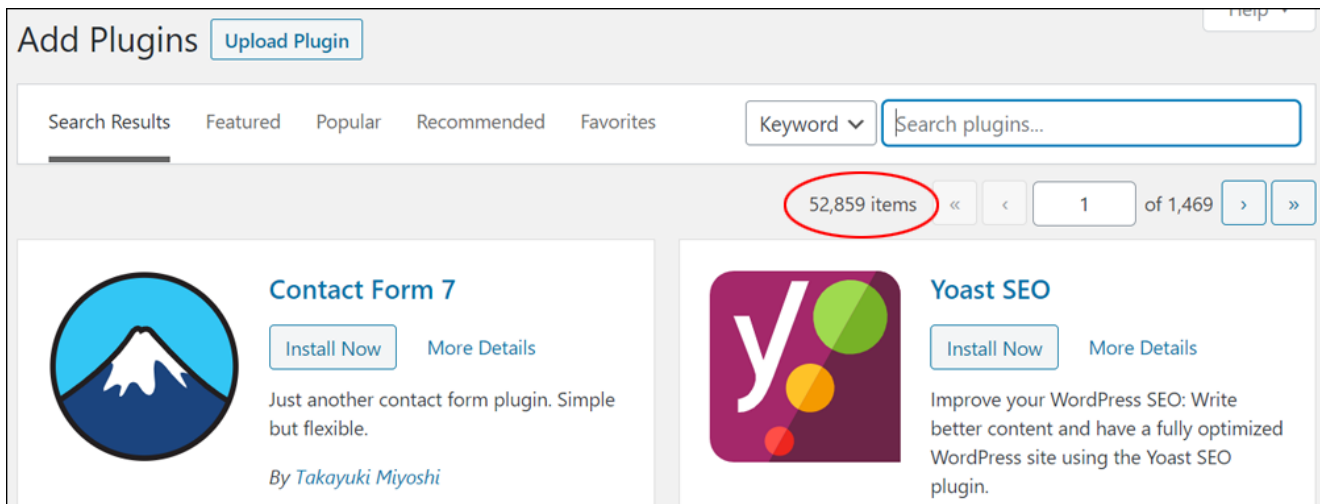


WordPress lets you know if the plugin you are trying to install has not been updated for a while.

There are currently over 50,000 free WordPress plugins available on the WordPress plugin directory.

So, if there is anything you need or want your site to do, chances are there is already a WordPress plugin that will do it (and it's probably available for free or at minimal cost).

If a plugin does not exist that can do what you want or expect it to do, it can be developed or customized, often at a reasonable cost.



Whatever you need doing, there's a WordPress plugin that'll do it!

How To Get The Most Out Of WordPress Plugins

As you can see, plugins are an important element of WordPress.

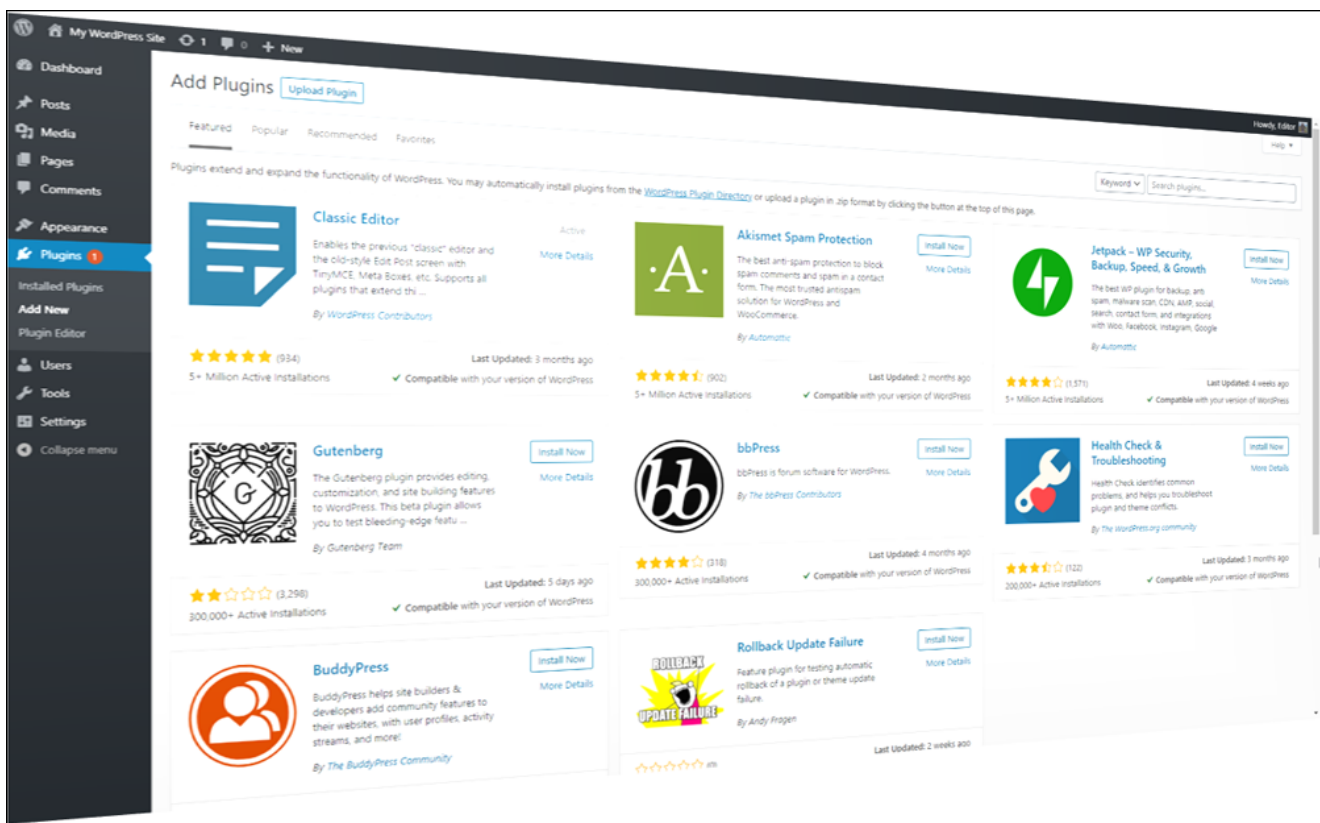
Plugins help make WordPress one of the world's most powerful, flexible, and scalable web publishing platforms and content management systems.

Plugins also provide WordPress users with easy, simple, and inexpensive ways to scale and expand their web presence without having to spend tens of thousands of additional dollars on web development costs.

With WordPress plugins:

- You don't have to spend money in advance on unnecessary web development costs to add features to your site that you may not need. You can start with a simple, basic site and add more features as you need them.
- You can develop a flexible and cost-effective strategy to grow your web presence.

Hopefully, this information has given you a better understanding of WordPress plugins – what they are and how they can significantly enhance the functionality of your WordPress site.



Plugins give your WordPress site unlimited expansion potential.

To learn more about using WordPress plugins, go here:

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