It Will Never Happen To Me:
WordPress Horror Stories

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If you're considering creating a WordPress website, this eBook is for you!

Many people have come to me requesting a WordPress website because they heard about it from another entrepreneur, a podcast, a blog post or another source of GENERAL business info.

I love WordPress. I've been building sites with it since 2008 (and websites since 1997). Please believe me when I say this:

WordPress is not for everyone!

If WordPress is the right option to build your site, it's important to understand that maintenance is essential. Your budget needs to include this on-going maintenance & quality hosting. It is not "set it and forget it".

This eBook is also useful to help you make the choice NOT to build a WordPress site. You should have an overview of what WordPress involves so you decide if it's right for you. There are other ways to build websites. We can review your specific needs and options with a strategic consultation.

Maintenance keeps your business open online!

Most people never think about it until it happens, and the consequences can be deadly. One day your site goes down.

For every minute that your potential customers can't find out about your business online... YOUR BUSINESS IS CLOSED!

Your website is running software (like on your computer) and it needs to be monitored frequently for updates for security fixes and new features.

It is critical to update the WordPress software and plugins in order to avoid security breaches.

An alarming number of WordPress websites don't have the proper security they should have.

Security tools should be a basic component of any website, especially if you're handling financial or other sensitive user data, such as info covered under HIPAA, CCPA, GDPR or similar privacy laws.

Even if you have a small site, you're a target for hackers. Without proper security, your site is wide open to attack.

The code that runs your site (WordPress core, plugins and theme) are updated frequently to keep them secure. Hackers look for sites that have not made these updates.

Hacking could mean security warnings displayed when a visitor comes.

Imagine you're a site visitor coming to find out more about a business, only to be warned not to proceed!

Your site could get blacklisted by search engines, flagged for distributing malware (malicious code), or other security problems.

Hackers can use YOUR WEBSITE for their malicious purposes.

Or even worse, it's been hacked and all of your customers' information has been compromised. The hackers have ripped off the personal data and sold it, posing as you. (Yes, a dramatic example, but you get the point!)

Not only have you lost your website, but also your customers' trust!

Are you thinking, *"Do I REALLY need this?"*

YES! First, let me say that I'm conservative on making recommendations to spend money in your business.

All too often, people don't think about website security until it's too late and all is lost. **But if you're proactive and you ensure that your site is secure from the very beginning, you can prevent this from happening to you.**

Investing in proper WordPress hosting & maintenance means your site will stay up & running. If you don't have problems, that means it's working. That is your return on investment (ROI).

Maintenance & hosting are critical, and it's an on-going expense to keep your website up and running. Build this into your budget from the start.

Always Update—THE MOST IMPORTANT TIP!

Security software is safest when it's straight out of the box. This is important for your OWN computer and also for WordPress. Over time, hackers play with the program and figure out its weaknesses so that they can get through them.

Updates patch up these weaknesses. If your security software isn't updated, it's full of holes that can be exploited. Whenever a new security update comes out, it needs to be installed as quickly as possible.

This means someone has to constantly monitor your website. Just be sure you know what you're doing first. Otherwise, you'll create a bigger mess.

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Sometimes updates are just new features so they can be put off. Other times the update won't work with your setup and doing it will break things. So much to consider!

With all updates, the person doing it needs to be prepared for it not to go as planned. Every single time. That means having time not only to do the updates, but to check the websites for problems. If there is a problem, then the site needs to be restored from a backup. Only then can troubleshooting begin.

> **WORDPRESS SITES MUST BE BACKED UP BEFORE DOING UPDATES!**
> **WordPress does warn you multiple times before you do any upgrades.**
> # Don't ignore this!!

How Long Does Maintenance Take?

Let's look at how long it takes me. I been building WordPress sites since 2008, and I have a good system setup. It's not fully automated, which means I give the websites my personal attention to make sure they are running properly.

Even if you have a "simple website", there is still maintenance to be done, and this takes time to do it right.

Here's a snapshot of my maintenance time in 2020:

Site Description	Update Sessions	Total Updates (Theme, Plugin or WordPress)	Month
Simple site, no blog, no content changes	8	14	JUNE
Medium-sized site, with blog, no content changes	6	18	AUGUST
Medium-sized site, with blog, big content changes	10	25	SEPTEMBER
Medium-sized site, blog, a few days of content changes	6	11	OCTOBER
TOTAL	30	68	
4-month average	**7.5 times**	**17 items**	

I try and do these updates after hours and/or using a "stage" site, a site that is a copy of what the public sees on your "live" site. I also build websites in a similar way, so all of my clients have the benefit of what I learn from each one.

If you are trying to do this yourself, and it's the only site you're doing, it will take MUCH LONGER.

Just imagine if you don't know what you're doing, and you run into a problem like I outline in this eBook...then what?!

DIY UPGRADE TURNED THE SITE INTO A BLANK WHITE SCREEN!

Another person had a friend upgrade it instead of contacting me. They ignored all of the warnings before proceeding. **Their site went down during a big event, and they lost sales and exposure to a big audience.** I was called as an emergency and was able to fix it. This was an additional rush expense. The "friend" claimed they had not seen any warnings – but really they just clicked before reading!

Worst-Case Scenarios

There's an old saying that "just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they're not all out to get you." Unfortunately, this is the best attitude to have when you're online. Hackers spend all day, every day, trying to crack websites. **When assessing your risk, always imagine the worst-case scenario and what it would mean for your business to be hacked or offline!**

WordPress Sites Under Attack!

Global WordPress Brute Force Flood

Written by Sean Valant

Thursday, April 11th, 2013

| 213 | 549 | 👍 4.2k |

g+ +1   🐦 Tweet   f Like

As I type these words, there is an on-going and highly-distributed, global attack on WordPress installations across virtually every web host in existence. This attack is well organized and again very, very distributed; we have seen over 90,000 IP addresses involved in this attack.

At this moment, we highly recommend you log into any WordPress installation you have and change the password to something that meets the security requirements specified on the WordPress website. These requirements are fairly typical of a secure password: upper and lowercase letters, at least eight characters long, and including "special" characters (^%$#&@*).

The main force of this attack began last week, then slightly died off, before picking back up again yesterday morning. No one knows when it will end. The symptoms of this attack are a very slow backend on your WordPress site, or an inability to log in. In some instances your site could even intermittently go down for short periods.

blog.hostgator.com/2013/04/11/global-wordpress-brute-force-flood/
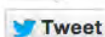
Global Blacklisting Results in Undeliverable Email

Written by Sean Valant

Friday, August 23rd, 2013

| 22 | 50 |

g+ +1   🐦 Tweet

Yesterday (August 22nd, 2013) a massive number of IP addresses used for email gateways on virtually every webhost in the world became blacklisted on multiple networks. This resulted in a global inability for email to be received (any time the email originated from one of the blacklisted IPs and was "received" on one of the blacklisting networks).

The issue is on-going at the time of this writing and some customers are still being affected at this

As with all issues of this nature, there are lessons to be learned. The most important lesson here is to (again) keep all scripts on your hosting account up-to-date. Most scripts have a one-click feature to update them anytime a new version is released. Keeping scripts up-to-date is paramount in ensuring a secure hosting account.

It is your responsibility to ensure that scripts/programs installed under your account are secure and permissions of directories are set properly, regardless of installation method. When at all possible, set permissions on most directories to 755 or as restrictive as possible. Users are ultimately responsible for all actions taken under their account. This includes the compromise of credentials such as user name and password. It is required that you use a secure password. If a weak password is used, your account may be suspended until you agree to use a more secure password. Audits may be done to prevent weak passwords from being used. If an audit is performed, and your password is found to be weak, we will notify you and allow time for you to change/update your password.

TERMS OF SERVICE: www.hostgator.com/tos

Backups save you when disaster strikes.

WordPress releases updates all of the time and if you don't update your site, it's vulnerable to attacks from hackers.

From WordPress.org: *"Your WordPress database contains every post, every comment and every link you have on your blog. If your database gets erased or corrupted, you stand to lose everything you have written. There are many reasons why this could happen and not all are things you can control. But what you can do is **back up your data**. After all, it is important. Right?"*

*"Making backups is essential because problems inevitably occur and **you need to be in a position to take action when disaster strikes**. Spending a few minutes to make an easy, convenient backup of your database will allow you to spend even more time being creative and productive with your website."*

codex.wordpress.org/WordPress_Backups

But Some Cheap Hosts Do Not Guarantee Backups!

5.) Backups and Data Loss
Your use of this service is at your sole risk. Our backup service runs once a week, overwrites any of our previous backups made, and only one week of backups are kept. This service is provided to you as a courtesy. HostGator is not responsible for files and/or data residing on your account. You agree to take full responsibility for files and data transferred and to maintain all appropriate backup of files and data stored on HostGator servers.

TERMS OF SERVICE: www.hostgator.com/tos

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Backup Policy, Do You Provide Backups?

The specific backup policy depends on what type of account you have. We do make weekly backups for all our servers except dedicated servers.

We can restore your web, email and database content from those per your request. However, this is NOT a procedure you should rely on to keep copies of your content safe; we recommend you make your own backups. Our backups are made every week on a random day, and only the newest backups are kept. We make no guarantees about our weekly backups, and we do require a $15 fee to restore the HostGator backups. If you can provide your own backup file, then the fee is $0 (free). Additionally if your account size exceeds 20GB or 100,000 inodes, your backup will be skipped.

You are responsible for your backups and web content.

For backups that we do provide, our backups are provided as a courtesy and we do not guarantee our backups. It is recommended that you make your own backups as extra protection.

FAQs: support.hostgator.com/articles/pre-sales-policies/rules-terms-of-service/backup-policy-do-you-provide-backups

ACCOUNT DELETED, NO WARNING, NO BACKUP

I had my own website online, and I was in the process of looking for a job, so many potential employers were going to look at my site. One day, it was gone. **The web host had no idea what happened, and they did not have backup like they should have!** Luckily, I did, and I was online again with a new company quickly.

The Keys to Your Online Kingdom

I've worked with several clients that had their old web designer purchase their hosting or domain names. You NEVER want to have someone other than YOU own this. This is YOUR BRAND online. Make sure that it's totally in your name. All of the companies I recommend have great help—call them if you need assistance purchasing.

BE CAREFUL WHO HAS ACCESS TO YOUR WEBSITE

It's not uncommon for people not to know who has access to their website... old web designers or employees, etc. I've also had clients pass along passwords to additional tech companies – one turned over full access to their eCommerce site to a company overseas. It only takes one bad seed to put your site at risk!

ONLY TRUST ACCESS TO YOUR WEB SERVER TO EXPERTS

Another client had just hired someone new to be their tech guru and wanted him to have FULL ACCESS to all of their accounts – hosting and WordPress. I urged them to at least wait until I got back to the office so I could talk to him directly. Twenty minutes later the site was totally down. **It took me AND the web host two days to figure out what happened – he was "playing around" on the web server and TOTALLY DELETED THE ENTIRE FOLDER WITH THE WEBSITE.**

Hosting companies MAY SOMETIMES be able to restore your files (there is a charge), as is the charge for my time. The new staff member claimed they did nothing wrong, although I did know exactly what computer did it at what time.

You really have to be sure that the people with access ARE EXPERTS!

Don't Get Hacked

Common WordPress Malware Infections

In WordPress' core, all security issues are quickly addressed; the WordPress team is focused on strictly maintaining the integrity of the application. The same, however, cannot be said for all plugins and themes.

The focus of this post is not to add to the overwhelming number of WordPress security or WordPress hardening posts that you see floating around the Web. Rather, **we'll provide more context about the things you need to protect yourself from**. What hacks are WordPress users particularly vulnerable to? How do they get in? What do they do to a WordPress website? In this lengthy article, we'll cover backdoors, drive-by downloads, pharma hack and malicious redirects. Please notice that some anti-virus apps report this article as malware, probably because it contains examples of the code that should be avoided. **This article does not contain any malware itself**, so the alert must be based on heuristic analysis.

Over the past two years, Web malware has grown around 140%. At the same time, WordPress has exploded in popularity as a blogging platform and CMS, powering close to 17% of websites today. But that popularity comes at a price; it makes WordPress a target for Web-based malware. Why? Simple: its reach provides the opportunity for maximum impact. Sure, popularity is a good thing, but it also makes us WordPress users vulnerable.

wp.smashingmagazine.com/2012/10/09/four-malware-infections-wordpress/

SITE NEVER UPGRADED, GOT HACKED WITH OBSCENE CONTENT!

This happened to a site that I did not build or maintain previously. I was called in an emergency (which I no longer do). I had to work for several hours to remove it as it was done using a security hole in WordPress. **It was a very complex process to resolve, involving hours of research to trace what happened.**

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CODE CAN GO CRAZY AT ANY TIME!

Sometimes the problem is with the plugin itself. One of the most popular photo gallery plugins, NextGen Gallery released a major upgrade. I did the routine upgrades on several high-profile websites.

The website was severely broken – it was showing code instead of photos and messing up the layout.

Now ask yourself… what would you have done next?

I carefully "rolled back" to a previous version (although many people DELETED the plugin when this happened, which deleted all of their galleries). **The sites were "fixed" by the undo, while I researched the proper fix via posts in the tech forums to fully solve ASAP.**

DIY UPGRADE WITH NO BACKUP = SITE NEEDED TO BE REBUILT!

Another client tried to upgrade themselves, without running a backup first. An unknown problem occurred, and the site went down.

After 2 hours of my time, we still could not figure out the problem because it's very difficult to try and troubleshoot this way.

I do bill hourly for this type of troubleshooting. **Without a backup, the site was not able to be recovered.** The entire site would need to be rebuilt from scratch, and we no longer had the old website to look at as a reference point.

PLUGIN UPDATES CAN CRASH YOUR WORDPRESS SITE

Numerous times I've put together plugins and themes only to find that SOMETHING doesn't work right. I've seen images not loading, the site being slow, layout changes… you name it. This has happened when they were first installed, and also after upgrading the WordPress software. I've had plugins crash the ENTIRE SITE and I've had to use FTP to manually remove the files to even be able to access the site through a web browser.

If you don't know what I'm talking about, you should not be doing WordPress maintenance yourself, or thinking you can properly find a cheap solution that what I'm outlining.

BEWARE: "Managed WordPress" does not manage everything

Since I originally wrote this eBook, a new type of WordPress hosting has evolved. It's called "Managed WordPress". At first glance, it seems like it will solve all of your problems. The marketing messages are slick, saying you won't have to worry about anything.

However, the packages I have looked at don't actually manage EVERYTHING. Yes, they do update the "WordPress Core". They may update themes and plugins, but with limitations, such as only the limited options from their selection.

Of course, this isn't obvious, and you really won't find out how well it works until you have to restore from a backup in an emergency.

I have done multiple restores of backups and transfers of sites between the live, staging and development websites. I know my process works!

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If you don't know what I'm talking about, then please trust me that you don't have enough knowledge to evaluate this. **You don't know what you don't know!**

Plus, if you run into a problem, who is the person on your team that is ready to fix it immediately? You don't want to try and hire someone after your site breaks! I gave examples of this, it is always more expensive and a lot of times it does not work. You don't save time or money!

I have a multi-step process for taking care of WordPress sites. That's your first line of defense.

My process has evolved with industry best-practices. I now only use PREMIUM WORDPRESS HOSTING that also includes security updates, daily backups, and a "stage" site to test out changes before we publish them to your live site.

There is also a "dev" (development) website for updates such as phased updates to meet your business goals.

That's all included in my premium maintenance plan, and it's really the best option for your website. I only offer this for sites I build.

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS, I can troubleshoot faster because I'm already familiar with how your site is supposed to look & function. I can also quickly restore a backup, so your site will have minimum downtime.

Focus on YOUR business & outsource the care of your WordPress site to me!

DON'T BECOME THE NEXT WORDPRESS HORROR STORY!

www.virtuallinda.com/maintenance

**NOTE: Due to the complexity of WordPress,
I only do maintenance on WordPress sites that I have built.**

Contact me to schedule your consultation:
www.virtuallinda.com/contact

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