

Introduction

WordPress is a web authoring tool that affords users a myriad of options for designing a website. It is rather intuitive, using obviously titled menu selections for tools to build the website like “Widgets”, “Blog”, and “Theme”. It includes functions to insert and move images and features such as listing the latest website postings on the landing page. WordPress looks a little like operating systems many people are familiar with, or a little like software for creating and editing graphics that many may also know.

Wordpress belongs to a genre of tools known as “What You See is What You Get” (WYSIWYG) tools for website design. This genre of tools is developed for website designers with little to no coding experience. In this same genre, we also considered Wix and Weebly for our usability test. In looking for a tool to use for building websites, we decided an important feature we wanted was the capability to easily create and manage blogs. WordPress seemed to be the best choice based on such criteria.

Target Audience

The test administrators, Ashley and Jennifer, both consider our target audiences to be part of higher education, workplace learning, and/or instructional design training. These audiences include adults--younger adults in colleges with a wider age range in workplace learning or instructional design training. Based on these considerations, we conducted our usability test with a high school student planning to attend university, a graduate student in a Master’s of Accountancy program, and a university lecturer. It is our evaluation that while there will be differences to address, most of our intended audiences will have at least a high school reading level and will be at least moderately competent web and technology users.

WordPress Features

Of the tools considered for this usability test, WordPress was chosen based on the number of users and available tools as well as its affordance for highly successful search engine optimization. While WordPress provides a significant amount of tools in its free package, it offers countless additional features if upgraded to include additional plugins. A quick visual review of the three competing tools showed that WordPress offered significantly more customization options than both Wix and Weebly. WordPress’s Administration page provides access to all its features in a centralized location and contains an easy to understand navigation structure.

We wanted our usability testers to attend to tasks that are likely to be frequently used in designing a professional portfolio website. We also wanted to understand how intuitive WordPress is. Our testers completed such tasks as adding a link to Dr. Howard’s blog on the landing page, changing the theme of the website, creating and publishing a blog and one post, inserting and moving an image, and creating a “Contact” page.

Methods

Our “low cost methods” involved not paying the testers and using readily available applications to capture the testing. We asked for volunteers and used a semi-free virtual meeting tool to record audio and the activity on WordPress. While “low cost”, our methods provided us with all the raw data and the ability to take detailed notes as we knew the test was being recorded. Additionally, as a time saving strategy, the test was performed on only three

individuals across differing age groups and experience so that multiple viewpoints could be assessed without being forced to observe many more test subjects.

Results and Recommendations

Table 1 describes the steps involved in the WordPress usability test. The test was designed to take between 30 and 40 minutes for each user. An administrator was available for testers if they became frustrated and needed a prompt. Any such prompts are noted in the results within the table.

Table 1: User Test Results

<i>Step that was asked to be performed</i>	<i>Details from test with Tester A (30 year old male – university lecturer) – No website design experience</i>	<i>Details from test with Tester B (22 year old female – graduate student) – No website design experience</i>	<i>Details from test with Tester C (15 year old female – high school student) – Some html website design experience</i>
Change the theme of the overall website	No unnecessary clicks (less than 1 minute)	No unnecessary clicks (less than 1 minute)	No unnecessary clicks (less than 1 minute)
Add a calendar widget to homepage and place it in a particular location	Four minutes – no difficulty finding widget, but difficulty finding how to add it to homepage. Navigated to actual homepage on website, away from design mode	Two minutes – no difficulty finding widget or homepage. Was unable to follow instructions on where to add the widget as theme selected did not support this option	One minute – no difficulty finding widget or homepage. Was unable to follow instructions on where to add the widget as theme selected did not support this option
Add a block on homepage that shows latest blog posts – adjust settings for word count	Less than one minute to add block. 10 clicks to find settings to change word count	Less than one minute to complete entire task. Found settings menu in one click.	Less than one minute to complete entire task. Found settings menu in one click.

Create a blog post that is a specific type and publish it	Five clicks to find where to add post. Created a page instead of a post until prompted by administrator to correct. Once post add button located, immediately found correct type of post. Five minutes taken to insert and size pictures. No unnecessary clicks to publish.	Two minutes to complete entire task, however, tester did not add the requested type of post. Once realized the error, tester was unable to change to the correct type of post. Spent four minutes trying to change before abandoning and making a new post.	No trouble with this. One click each to complete all tasks.
Add a heading feature to the blog post	Unable to accomplish task based on selected theme. Searched for four minutes (30 clicks) before asking for help from the administrator.	Added heading with no unnecessary clicks. Five clicks to be able to get it to top of page. Less than one minute total.	Added heading with no unnecessary clicks.
Insert social media links at bottom of blog page	Six clicks. Task completed in less than one minute	Four clicks. Task completed in less than one minute	User had chosen a theme that already included this.
Add a new page in a particular style and publish it	No unnecessary clicks (less than two minutes – most time looking for requested type of page)	No unnecessary clicks (less than two minutes – most time looking for requested type of page)	No unnecessary clicks
Add an image with caption to the page	Unable to find caption tool for image. Created a work around by inserting a separate caption block. Three minutes searching.	No unnecessary clicks to add image and caption. Tester had left settings menu open for easy access and was easily able to navigate	Unable to find caption tool for image. Created a work around by inserting a separate caption block. Only one minute searching before following work around.

Create a new navigation menu with specific features	Task completed in eight minutes. 35 unnecessary clicks. Was unable without prompting after questioning administrator about location of menu insertion. Tried to add menu from "Menu style" page instead of through Appearance menu.	Task completed in three minutes. Tester struggled to find Menu option but made no unnecessary clicks in searching. Appearance menu was fifth menu inspected for tool, but first click.	Task completed in two minutes. User searched for Menu option, but once found, had no trouble with task.
Add newly created page and post to menu	Once menu was created, two minutes to figure out how to add pages. Seven unnecessary clicks	Less than one minute. No unnecessary clicks.	Less than one minute. No unnecessary clicks.
Reorder menu creating multiple menu levels	Less than 30 seconds. No unnecessary clicks.	One minute. Was easily able to reorder menu but four extra clicks to find how to create parent/child relationship levels in menu.	Two minutes. Was easily able to reorder menu but 15 extra clicks to find how to create parent/child relationship levels in menu.
Add a link to another website on site homepage	Six unnecessary clicks and two minutes to navigate back to homepage edit feature. No unnecessary clicks to add link.	Less than one minute. No unnecessary clicks.	Less than one minute. No unnecessary clicks.
USER COMMENTS	Found WordPress to be very robust in its tools and ability to create a variety of features. Other than navigation frustrations away from Admin page (which tester notes would be more intuitive with practice), test very pleased with tool	Found WordPress to be surprisingly easy to use. Would change the placement of the MENU creation tool as it should belong to some sort of PAGE or POST, not in appearance. Overall pleased with the tools and the consistency of menu choices with other technologies used in other circumstances.	Found WordPress to be easy to use overall, but certain widgets did not seem to have enough options to change features to do tasks--for example, could not find options to add excerpts, name, and date to latest postings widget.

After completing the test with the three testers the administrators have made the following conclusions about WordPress based on the results. WordPress provides a significant number of customizable options that users find appealing. For the most part, WordPress is organized in a manner that users find to be easily navigable. One exception to this is the location of the Menu Creation tool which users struggled to find in the Appearance section. Users seem to appreciate the difference between a page and a post once it is explained to them, but the difference is not explained in the tool, and therefore, without detailed instructions, the users felt as though they would not have known which type of object to create for an individual task.

The results of the usability test support the administrators' selection of the tool. Each tester found the tool to be manageable and capable of performing a wide variety of tasks with relative ease. While each user also noted that a couple hours of training would be helpful, they were able to accomplish the wide variety of tasks asked of them in less than an hour without it. This accomplishment speaks to WordPress's innate usability and supports the administrators' choice of tool. Based on overall comments from the testers, WordPress offers the desired ability to create websites that are dynamic and customizable. One tester's comments that WordPress's settings menu and choices are intuitive as they emulate other technologies that the tester is familiar with.

These conclusions support the recommendations that if users want the capability to create and maintain a blog as part of their website as well as have access to a wide variety of choices in their design, WordPress fulfills that need. Recommendations also include using WordPress if the designer wants a more complicated or highly customized website as WordPress leaves more control over design to the user. If users want a familiar look and feel to their web authoring tool, WordPress is also recommended as it provides themes that give a consistent feel to the overall web experience.

Improvements

An improvement WordPress could make is designing their themes to be more customizable. One usability tester stumbled while trying to change basic features of the website like the Header Image after she had changed the theme. Another tester noted the inflexibility of themes when she encountered the inability to customize where a menu is placed when a certain theme is chosen. Additionally, as noted above in the results section, creating a new menu option for creating navigation menus would be helpful rather than tying these to the appearance category.

An improvement we could make for our next usability test is to plan the test as we work on a website together. While having more knowledge of the tool would have helped us in creating the steps, not having that experience made the usability task more authentic as we tried to ask users to do what we would want to be able to do instead of what we knew was easy or even possible. Another improvement that we could have made to the test would be to have scheduled the testers to perform it at the same time (or closer to the same time) to avoid the lag between testers that delays the accumulation of the results.