
DIET PILLS, SEO, THEME FRAMEWORKS

There are no magic bullets.



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By @theandystratton

<http://theandystratton.com>

What is a “pre-built” WordPress theme?

- * A theme purchased that has already been coded with a core set of functionality and design elements
- * Often purchased in a online marketplace or from an online vendor specializing in theme creation
- * Designed to solve a generic set of common visual design and functionality issues

What is a WordPress theme framework?

- * A pre-built theme with flexible functionality
- * Typically contain their own sets of action/filter hooks on top of WP's core API
- * Typically meant to be customized via WP Admin or by child theming

Disclaimer

This presentation primarily discusses common, low-cost themes and theme frameworks that miseducated clients and WordPress users attempt to customize.

While I would love to call out specific authors and marketplaces, this presentation will remain nameless.

My blog and twitter stream will not.

Common Misconceptions

- * Easy to customize & less risky than a freelancer
- * Compatible with your desired/existing plugins
- * They are SEO magic!
- * They save time and money by minimizing development efforts

Easy to Customize

- * Depends on:
 - * Theme/framework itself
 - * Your WordPress & web development knowledge
 - * Your knowledge of the theme/framework

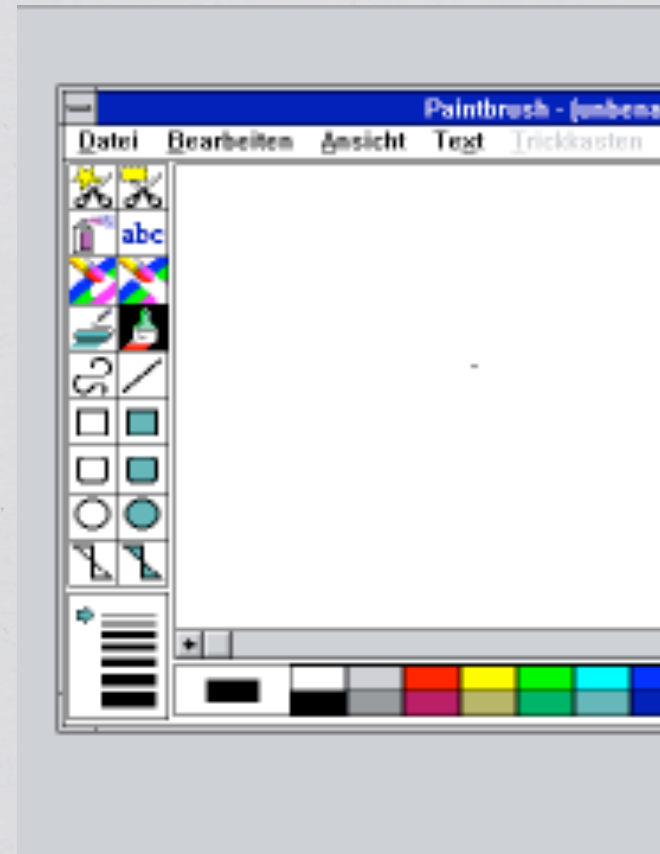


Easy to Customize

- * Target customers for pre-built themes/frameworks are users who have minimal budget, time or skills for customizations
- * May require hours of auditing to figure out the coding who/what/where/why/when/how of this theme package
- * Some do not use the standard WP functions for common tasks
 - * Getting permalink URLs
 - * Getting posts/pages
 - * Relying on WP settings without checking

Easy to Customize

- * Some are full of code that is “painted into a corner”
- * May be difficult to extend functionality
- * Changing one feature could break another
- * May modify/disable core WP functionality that other plugins may require to



Less Riskier Than a Freelancer

- * You have no idea who coded this thing*
- * Many marketplace themes have glaring optimization & security holes
- * Don't know how customizable it is until you're in the admin interface

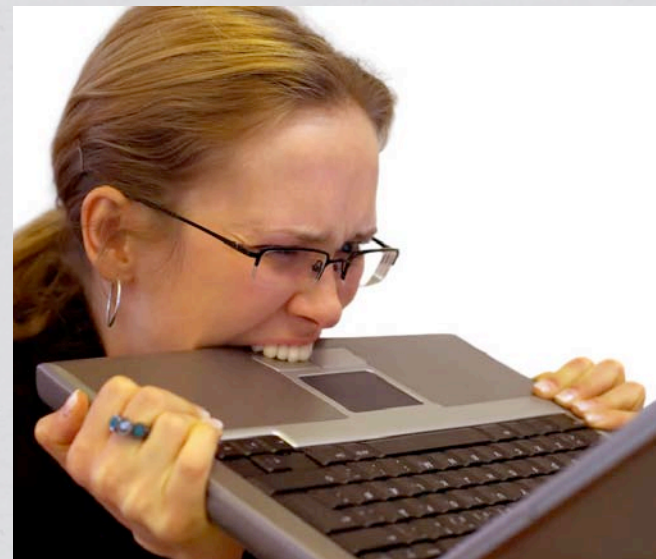


Case: Optimization Issues

- * Client with a site “re-designed” into a low-cost theme framework
- * Website was on by a large web hosting company that obviously doesn't like elephants much (*another issue all together*)
- * Site would timeout 99% of the time, 200+ database queries per page load
- * Rewrote the theme using same HTML/CSS; built just the additional features needed:
 - * **30 queries and the site actually loaded.**

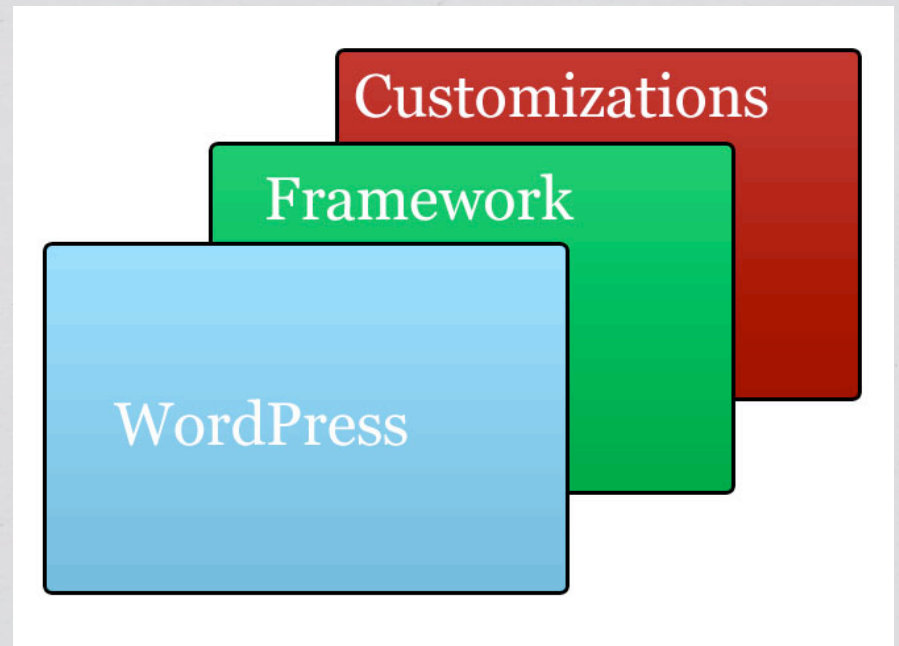
Compatible With Plugins

- * Some themes use custom code to do fun, special features that bypass the actions and hooks that plugins use
- * Support may be an issue
- * What do you do if you upgrade WordPress and your theme stops working?



Compatible With Plugins

- * Themes built on a framework give you three layers of possible vulnerabilities
- * Upgrades, optimization, security
- * *Assuming we're comparing an experienced and knowledgeable WordPress contractor*



my_formatter()

- * Recent I had a client using a theme turning off the core content filters `wpautop` and `wptexturize`
- * `wpautop` formats your content with HTML paragraph tags and line breaks
- * `wptexturize` will help convert some special characters (e.g. ñ, », —) into corresponding HTML entities

my_formatter(cont'd)

* The theme replaced these with a filter that ran later, emulating shortcode behavior to enable users to insert raw HTML into the WYSIWYG editor's HTML tab, like this:

* [raw]

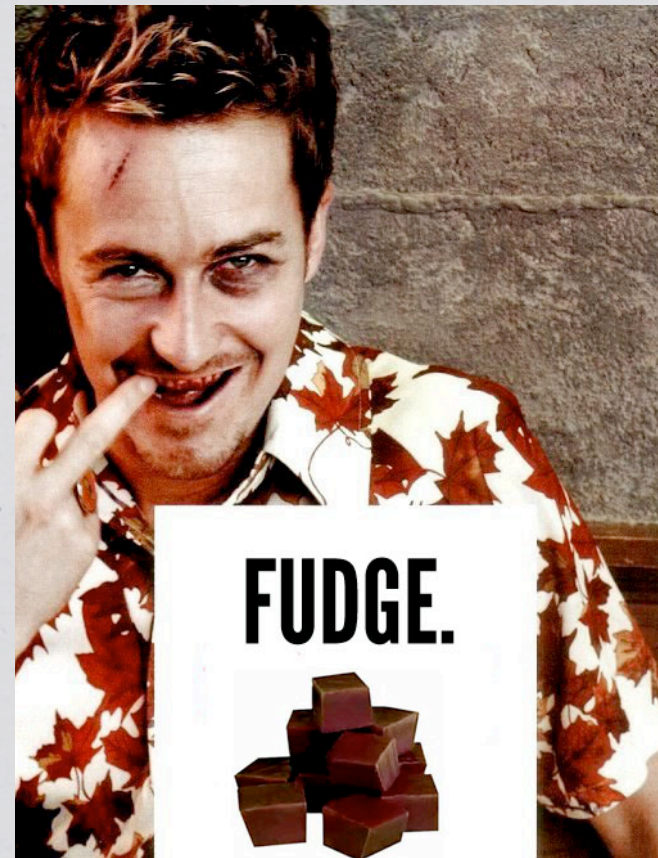
```
<script type="text/javascript">
for ( var i = 0; i < 100; i++) {
    alert( '\n00b' );
}
</script>
<FONT COLOR=BLUE><B>I AM A HAX0R</I></B>
[/raw]
```

my_formatter(cont'd)

- * This allowed it's users to paste HTML snippets, third-party Javascript widgets (e.g. Twitter, etc.) into their post content
- * It removed the auto-formatting by WordPress so the raw HTML/CSS/Javascript was not being malformed with injected tags
- * It then auto-formatted the remaining content

Problem: my_formatter()

- * This was not a shortcode, it was a content filter pretending to be a shortcode
- * It ran after shortcodes were processed by WP
- * It malformed ANY and ALL shortcode output

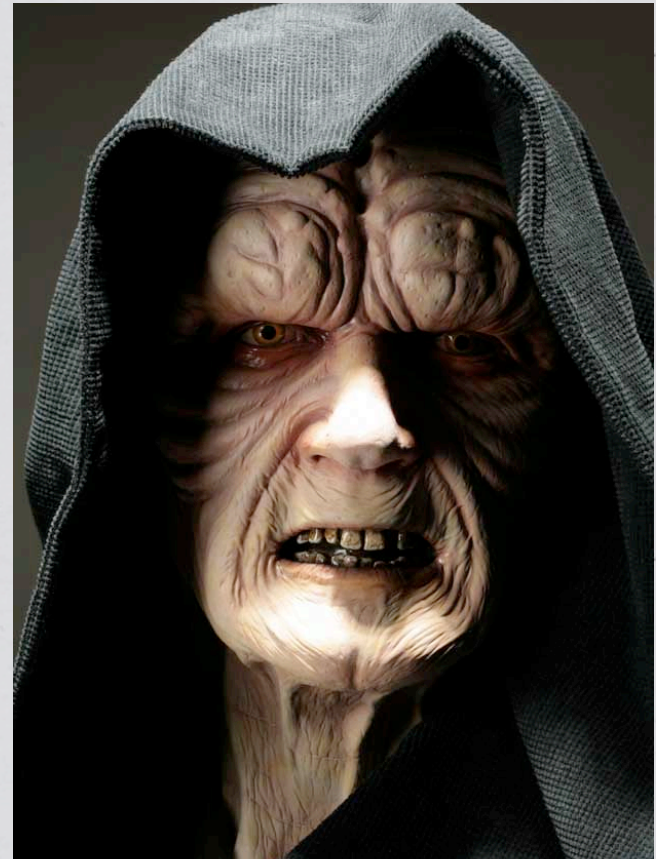


Problem: my_formatter()

- * So if you used a contact form that output specific markup it was injected with line breaks and wrapped in paragraph tags
- * Behavior is now globally unexpected for all plugins and developers coming into the project
- * This issue cost us 3 days on a project!
- * BEWARE.

SEO MAGIC!

- * Great rankings are not because you installed the hottest new WP theme framework
- * Customizing your theme can affect your rankings further
- * Content is king, Backlinks are the Emperor



SEO Magic: Markup

- * Some themes come packaged with title/meta tag management that can be duplicated by a very popular, FREE plugin
- * Your theme's PHP isn't optimized, it's output (markup) is
- * Is the developer who built the \$28 theme you just bought an expert in accessibility, semantics, and more?
- * Once you begin customizing markup, you're changing the optimization of the theme/framework

SEO Magic: But It Does Rank!

- * **No, Galileo. You're wrong.**
- * This assumption is based on confounding data:
 - * Popular themes/frameworks are used by heavy content writers who are focused on writing and like customization options
 - * Their content is good. People link to it (back/inbound links)
 - * Search engines like this. They are relevant recommendations of good content.

SEO: Kings and Emperors

- * Your content is king and it supports your SEO emperor:
inbound links (backlinks)
- * Without quality inbound links from other relevant sites, you're nothing
- * You can't polish a turd with strategically placed <h1> tags, meta descriptions and custom title tags and expect first page rankings
- * Remember...

*A sexy sports car with all the features is
nothing without an engine and gasoline.*

It's Good Stuff, Cheap!

- * What have you ever gotten that was amazing in quality?
- * Here's how it works:



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_triangle

But, It's Good and Cheap.

In Theory.

- * Unknown issues and limitations increase time/cost
- * Often find issues after launch or when a feature is used after project completion (new work orders, more time)
- * Have had many \$30 theme purchases cost clients over a thousand dollars, results were still unpolished and compromised

*Not having an optimization/security
vulnerability:*

Priceless.



Does it ever make sense?

If content is king: context is queen.

Does it ever make sense?

- * Use your best judgment in context with your budget, client, project and level of patience.
- * Short-lived microsite
- * No budget
- * Avoiding a Comcast/Verizon/Intuit/Office Live site
- * “We love it, just want to change the logo and add content”

It Really Doesn't Make Sense...

- * ...if the client needs very unique branding
 - * *there could be thousands of sites that look nearly identical*
- * ...if security is a major, major concern
- * ...if you need highly customized functionality tailored to a specific business/industry

IF It's Your Site

- * Measure your needs versus how well the theme you're choosing meets them.
- * Prepare to make compromises. Possibly many.
- * Over-estimate your costs. It will probably be more expensive than you think.

IF It's For a Client

- * Educate your client as best as possible, ensure they understand the possible issues and limitations
- * Account for unknowns when estimating time/cost
- * Decide what path you want to take as a contractor, every path has it's pro's and con's

There Are No Magic Bullets.
