

What's the Difference Between WordPress.org and WordPress.com?



You've heard of WordPress, but you may be confused by WordPress.org and WordPress.com. Dot com is hosting and dot org is the CMS. Let's chat more.

People hear WordPress and think of websites — which is perfect. WordPress powers quite a lot of the world's top sites. But you may be confused by two versions: WordPress.org and WordPress.com. What's the difference?

What is WordPress?

Before we talk about the difference between the domain names, let's talk about what WordPress is. WordPress is a Content Management System (CMS) that began in 2003. This CMS is powered mostly by PHP and is highly extensible. This gives you the ability to publish content (blog) on your website and develop the powerful solutions enterprise sites require.

As part of the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) movement, WordPress is created and maintained by a network of volunteers all over the world who freely contribute their time and expertise.

The software is free to download on WordPress.org for you to host at the website hosting company of your choosing — even on your own server. WordPress.com is a hosting company which has easy onboarding for anyone from the beginner blogger to enterprise solutions with their WordPress VIP product.

The short version is that WordPress.org is where the software can be downloaded (often referred to as “self hosted” or “dot org”) and WordPress.com is a hosted solution for this software that is free to start.

Let's parse it out a bit more.

What are the different hosting options?

You can either choose to “self-host” WordPress by purchasing third-party hosting and installing WordPress yourself. Some hosts also offer to set up WordPress for you and handle some of the maintenance, security, and backups. This is referred to as managed hosting. With both of these options you can fully control and customize your WordPress site.

Hosting is typically the main expense to a website and is available in all sizes, from tiny personal sites to the largest enterprise sites in the world. These will range in price from a couple of dollars per month to tens of thousands. Hosting can include extras such as the domain name you’ll also need.

When we refer to WordPress.org, we refer to the open source WordPress software in use on either of the above self-hosted or managed hosting options.

What is WordPress.com?

WordPress.com is a commercially managed WordPress service run by Automattic, the company which has the exclusive commercial usage of the WordPress trademark. This means any sites with WordPress in the domain are maintained by Automattic – so you know they are authentic.

How is WordPress maintained and developed?

As Open Source Software, WordPress is developed and maintained by a community of volunteers called contributors. These professionals come from around the world and connect both online and at conferences to work on the software and to grow the community.

For every new release of the WordPress software, a select group of developers and designers manage the scope and the schedule. Under the leadership of Release Leads, they integrate bug fixes and improvements submitted by contributors from the community. These individuals are called Core Contributors because their work is used in the core WordPress software (often referred to as Core) used by millions of websites.

WordPress.com is developed by Automattic and its employees. This uses the WordPress software as a base, but customizes it to offer a different look, feel, and set of features. This is why WordPress the software and WordPress.com do not look the same.

What are the practical differences between WordPress.org and WordPress.com?

WordPress.org and WordPress.com use the same software but have practical differences. This section will talk you through some of these to help you make a decision between the two platforms.

Code Editing

Self-hosted and managed hosting sites typically have access to code editing, offering full developer control and customizability, whereas WordPress.com typically offers no access to code editing other than CSS.

In practice, WordPress.org sites can be changed in any way and integrate with any third-party tools such as Google Analytics or Facebook's Pixel. WordPress.com sites are limited in this respect.

Support

Self-hosted and managed hosting typically come with a range of support. That said, it's ultimately the responsibility of the user to manage their site and it is possible for the user to break the site.

WordPress.com, however, comes with support that will solve any issue with the website. The benefit of this model is that it does not allow the user to break their own website.

Plans and Pricing

You need hosting and a domain name to use self-hosted or managed WordPress. These can be inexpensive, but you need to pay for them. WordPress.com, however, offers a free plan which allows you to create a website with the domain `youexamplename.wordpress.com`. This has limited features, but it is free! WordPress.com also offers paid plans which introduce extra features at various tiered levels.

Security

WordPress is a secure software with a dedicated security team. A website is, however, public and can be a target for hackers. Self-hosted WordPress typically leaves responsibility for security with the user; whereas managed hosting and managed WordPress (including WordPress.com) can take care of security for the user.

Backups

Similar to security, self-hosted WordPress typically leaves responsibility for backups with the user; whereas managed hosting and managed WordPress (including WordPress.com) typically takes care of backups for user.

Should you choose WordPress.org or WordPress.com?

The choice is up to you! Whether you're using WordPress.org or WordPress.com, you're still using WordPress. It's a fantastic Content Management System to make blogs, websites, and apps.

We've discussed the key differences between the two options, including what's involved with hosting, the cost differences, and practical differences between the software. You should consider these carefully and make the choice which best suits your needs now and in the future.

It's all WordPress. Start publishing!