Learn the many ways to become a part of the worldwide WordPress community.

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Becoming a Part of the WordPress Community

Throughout this book, I talk about the WordPress community and how it is the lifeblood of WordPress. It is no exaggeration that I couldn't have written this book without the support of the entire community, from users to developers. At least a few times while writing every chapter in this book, I stopped to ask a question on one of the email lists or the IRC channels, look through the forums, or just ask one of my friends about a detail or to double-check a fact. This final chapter of the book is dedicated to how you can learn from and become a part of the larger WordPress community. Believe me, when you start getting into it, you'll be amazed at how much you learn and the depth of knowledge people have—and are willing to share.

The important thing to remember about the WordPress community is that it's important to give back as much as you can. Not everyone can be a developer or beta tester, but you can share what you know with others, give constructive feedback, or even let a developer know how much you like his plugin or theme. We're all guilty, myself included, of often forgetting to help out the people who we rely on for making WordPress better and better, so even something as small as letting a developer know that you think you found a bug (politely, of course) is a great way to help. If you want to learn more about WordPress, you don't have to just stick to the virtual world of email, forums, and chat; around the world are WordCamp conferences, where WordPress users gather to learn more about our favorite blogging engine. Because so many WordPress users live around the world, chances are that a WordCamp will be close to you sometime in the next year. If you are on the west coast of North America, you might even see me there, giving a talk or just hanging around.

I'm going to talk about a few of my favorite ways to get into the WordPress community, and a few helpful websites that I've found over the years (some more geeky than others, I'll warn you now).

Before I start, I want to reiterate something I talked about in Chapter 15, "Troubleshooting Common Problems": social norms on forums and email lists. Of all the "rules" to remember, keep in mind that people *can't see you* when you're writing.

They can't see sarcasm or a wry smile or wink. Even emoticons (like ;-) or :-(or :D) can't always express the subtlety of language. Also, remember that you are writing to an international community, many of whom don't speak or write English as their first language. English is the lingua franca of all the primary WordPress communities, which means that sometimes understanding and being understood can be a challenge. Just be patient.

Almost as important as patience and trying to write clearly and without subtle meaning is staying on topic on whichever board or list you are on. I know it is tempting to go off topic (OT), and we're all guilty of it sometimes, but try to keep to what the list is about. And if a moderator or someone reminds you to stay on topic, apologize and drop it. Don't debate if something is or isn't on topic; just roll with it. Staying on topic, and being reminded to, dovetails nicely into the next part of the community: flame wars and trolls. It's just one of those sad facts of life that some people just like to stir up trouble and make life miserable for others. Although it is extremely hard at the time, the best thing you can do if someone steps out of line and is rude or disrespectful to you is not to buy into it. Getting caught up in a flame war or trying to take down a troll just won't come to a good end. Try to ignore the person, and let the moderators do their job and boot the people if they continue.

On the Internet, "trolls" are people who just seem to take pleasure in making other people miserable. They leave nasty comments or messages, hoping to bait people into engaging them. When you engage a troll, it will just get worse. Trolls thrive on the attention they get and seem to take perverse pleasure in making others unhappy and upset. The best advice is DNFT: Do not feed the trolls.

Don't let a fear of trolls or flame wars keep you from participating. I have rarely, if ever, encountered a problem like that on any WordPress list, forum, or chat. So, dive right in and soak up all the WordPress community spirit.

A *flame war* is a heated argument online that, often, reaches of the point of personal insults and meanness. When tempers start to rise within a forum thread or email list, it's a good idea to just back off and let things be. There are times when having the last word just isn't worth it. This is one of those times.

WordPress Forums

Starting off with the WordPress forums makes perfect sense because between the forums at WordPress.org (http://wordpress.org/support/) and the ones at WordPress.com (http://en.forums.wordpress.com/), everything there is to know about WordPress (past, present, and future) is discussed. Which forum to pick depends on what you're looking for answers about. Obviously, if you have installed WordPress, you should start at the WordPress.org forums, and if you have a WordPress.com question, you should start there. Within each of the main forum are sections for developers, sections for people testing new things, and sections for people creating new and cool themes (or editing CSS within WordPress.com). Although starting off with the basic help and support section is probably where most of us find ourselves (myself included), some pretty amazing things happen in the other forums as well.

Both the WordPress.org and WordPress.com forums have sections to show off your latest creation (http://wordpress.org/support/forum/11 and http://en.forums. wordpress.com/forum/showcase), which is also a great way to find out about cool new blogs to read and to get inspiration if you're looking for a new design for your blog. Both sets of forums have idea and suggestion sections, so whichever forum you haunt the most, you can find great things to learn and read. As I talked about in Chapter 15, the forums are some of the first places I go for answers to questions. Even if I find that there *is no* answer to the question, which *does* happen, I at least have some other ideas and paths to check out to solve the question.

Each forum (.org and .com) has its own independent registration, and that's not likely to change, so if you want to contribute to both, you need to have accounts on wordpress.org and wordpress.com. It's worth mentioning that forums are only as good as the people who take the time to *answer* the queries that people have. I think it's easy for all of us to sit back and just read the answers, or when we see a question to think, "Oh, someone else can answer this better than I can...", but for the entire community to continue to thrive, we do need to take time to contribute to the forums. I think making a personal challenge to respond to one post a month is a fair exchange for all the value we gain from all the forums.

Now, forums are great. And they contain probably the largest single knowledge base of all things WordPress, but often some of the cutting-edge discussions take place on the email lists for the various topics within the WordPress community.

Email Lists

As much as I like forums, sometimes I think I still like email lists better. Maybe I'm just old school that way, but I often find that mailing lists can be great for quick questions and answers. You can find several official WordPress mailing lists on WordPress.org at http://codex.wordpress.org/Mailing_Lists. I subscribe to several of them (especially the testing-related lists because I do a fair amount of testing).

Although email lists are great, they can quickly become overwhelming if they are "high traffic" (lots of messages). For example, the WP Garage list (http://tech. groups.yahoo.com/group/wpgarage/), which is for general questions, can be quiet for days or weeks; then it explodes with a flurry of emails on particular questions. If this kind of thing scares you and makes you fear checking your email, don't sub-scribe with your primary email address until you get a sense of the traffic. Even generally low-volume lists can get nuts occasionally, so just keep that in mind.

I think I get faster responses to questions when I use email lists because the ques-tions come right to where most geeks live—our email inboxes—but that also might be because of the kinds of questions that I'm asking to which groups. No matter which group you pick, keep in mind that it's great to ask questions, but remember to answer them, too.

IRC

If you want to talk about old school, I think the only thing more old school than email is IRC (Internet Relay Chat). As I talked about in Chapter 15, there are two main ongoing chats on irc.freenode.net: #wordpress and #wordpress-dev. The IRC channels can wax and wane in activity, but chances are there is always someone around who is talking about some facet of WordPress.

IRC is like instant messaging, but with lots of people all at once. You can imagine that keeping conversations straight can be a little confusing at times, but that is a minor detail. The #wordpress-dev channel plays host to a weekly WordPress devel-oper chat on Thursdays at 20:30 UTC (so 3:30 PM Eastern time or 12:30 PM Pacific time), if you want to get a sense of what is going on at the cutting edge of WordPress development. Between email and IRC, chances are you can get an answer to even the most complex WordPress question any time of the day or night.

Okay, IRC, email, and forums aren't for everyone. Sometimes you really just need to sit down and learn things in person, or at least rub elbows with WordPress rock stars. The place to do that is WordCamp.

WordCamp Conferences

No, WordCamp isn't a place geeks go during the summer to talk about WordPress and stay in cabins by a lake. (Although that isn't a bad idea, as long as we can get onto the Internet.) WordCamp is a conference where you get to talk about all things WordPress. The hub for all things WordCamp is central.wordcamp.org, and this statement on the home page describes what WordCamps are all about:

> WordCamp is a conference that focuses on everything WordPress. WordCamps are informal, community-organized events that are put together by WordPress users like you. Everyone from casual users to core developers participate, share ideas, and get to know each other. WordCamps are open to WordPress.com and WordPress.org users alike.

My first WordCamp was the hub of all WordCamps: WordCamp San Francisco. It was an amazing experience. No, it isn't all advanced-level talks about minutiae; there are talks and workshops for all levels of users. I've given talks at WordCamp Whistler (B.C.),WordCamp Victoria (B.C.), and WordCamp Vancouver (B.C.), all of which were aimed at new and novice users. I've also gone to talks about the process for updating WordPress on the command line and how to use custom fields in your themes. (Yeah, it made my head spin, too.)

The two most important principles of WordCamps are community and accessibility. WordCamps aren't pushed down from Automattic as traveling roadshows; they are organized and run by folks in that community. There isn't a formal process for getting one going. You can find all the information you need at "WordCamp Central" (http://central.wordcamp.org/, as shown in Figure 18.1).

The guiding principle is that WordCamps should be open to all people who want to learn, regardless of ability or income. If you can't find a WordCamp near you, think about starting one. Chances are you can gather at least a few people for an afternoon to talk WordPress. Even a Saturday afternoon as an informal WordCamp Bob's House is a great start. If I'm close by, and you invite me, I'll certainly be happy to hang out and talk WordPress. Honestly, that's what WordCamp is all about.

And if you can make it to one of the "big" WordCamps in a major city or to WordCamp SF (which tends to be the "big one" of the year, where all the cool stuff is talked about and announced), you're sure to have a blast. WordPress folks are down-to-earth, fun, and interesting. You might even run into real-life celebrities or rock stars there. (I kid you not!)
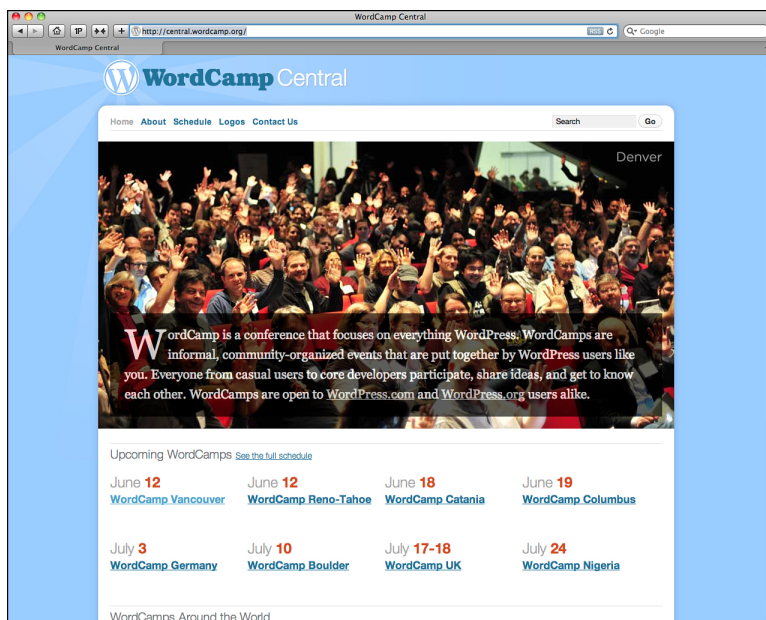
Figure 18.1 *WordCamp Central, the place to go to find a local WordCamp or host your own*

Helpful Blogs

As the capper on this chapter, I want to share with you a list of some of my favorite WordPress-related sites that offer tips, tricks, and other great stuff. This is in no way, shape, or form a complete list. I'm sure I'm forgetting or missing some great sites. Be that as it may, here is a selection of sites to check out:

- Mine (hey, it's my book, I'm allowed): trishussey.com
- Smashing Magazine: www.smashingmagazine.com
- Matt Mullenweg's WP site: ma.tt (Need I say more?)
- WPTavern: http://wptavern.com
- Yoast: http://yoast.com/
- Cats Who Code: http://www.catswhocode.com/blog/
- Justin Tadlock's blog: http://justintadlock.com/
- Nettuts: http://net.tutsplus.com/
- Aaron Brazell-Technosailor: http://technosailor.com/

- Lorelle on WordPress: http://lorelle.wordpress.com/

- Noupe: http://www.noupe.com/

- Alex King: http://alexking.org/

- WPBeginner: http://www.wpbeginner.com/

- WebDesignerDepot: http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/

- WebDesignBooth: http://www.webdesignbooth.com/

- WPArena: http://wparena.com/

- BinaryMoon: http://www.binarymoon.co.uk/

- WPEngineer: http://wpengineer.com/

- Nathan Rice: http://www.nathanrice.net/

- WooThemes: http://woothemes.com/