WP engine®

Case Study

THE **WeBBY** AWARDS

How WP Engine helped The Webby Awards breakthrough on WordPress.

Recreating a digital experience to honor the best of the web.

Industry
Mass Media

Site
webbyawards.com

Challenge
Ensure top-notch performance and reliability at all times for the Webby website

Solution
A switch to WP Engine's Digital Experience platform for improved performance and access to an enterprise-level tech stack

Results
Improved performance and the confidence to showcase winners of 'the Internet's highest honor'.

Established in 1996 during the Web's infancy, The Webbys *is presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences (IADAS)—a 2000+ member judging body. The Academy is comprised of Executive Members—leading Web experts, business figures, luminaries, visionaries and creative celebrities—and Associate Members who are former Webby Winners, Nominees and other Internet professionals.*

The challenge.

When the Webby Awards were created in 1996, the internet was really still in its infancy. "We started with 15 categories, which were all honoring websites. The submissions were judged by a group of experts, which is the foundation for our academy as it is today," said Claire Graves, Executive Director for The Webby Awards.

"We've grown as the internet has grown. We started off just honoring websites, but as more content was made on the internet, we started to grow. We started to honor video, then podcasts, and added mobile when the iPhone came out, and then social. This year, we expanded even more to honor games," said Graves.

Ten years after their inception, it seemed that the Webby Awards had achieved royalty status. Music legend, Prince, was greeted with a standing ovation when presented with the Webby Lifetime Achievement Award for his visionary use of the Internet to distribute music and connect with fans.

"From a production side, the year that we had Prince performing at the Webby's, that was sort of a breakthrough moment. When people rushed the stage, I think that you know you've done something special," said Steve Marchese, Executive Producer for The Webby Awards.

Just prior to this, The Webby Awards were proclaimed "the Internet's highest honor" by the New York Times. With so much momentum, the team at The Webby Awards saw site traffic increasing.

"**Being able to take 20 years of content and seamlessly move that over, was a scary thought. But, the team was incredibly professional, and sort of held our hands the whole time. The team at WP Engine seamlessly moved us over. We saw some of the traffic go up and down, and found right where we needed to be in terms of customer service.**"

Steve Marchese,
Executive Producer, Webby Awards

The largest amount of traffic on The Webby Awards site flows through the Winners Gallery. Here, visitors can view the most recent winners, and even look back through 22 years worth of award winning content. All the work that went into winning the awards is displayed, making the gallery an extremely valuable resource.

"It's a lot of pressure to be the Webby Awards, because we have to do everything totally correct on the internet. Everybody thinks it's hilarious if something is a little bit wrong or anything happens on our site. We just have to be totally on top of our stuff," said Graves.

"People will say, 'you need a nicer 404 page,' and really go deep into the site and point things out for us. We'll get emails from university professors saying, 'you need to make your site more accessible.' The critical eye is definitely there. It's helpful, but it's also nice that with WP Engine, you're able to go in there really quickly and flexibly change these things. People will look at the site and what we've done creatively and if it's stable from a programmatic sense, and they'll also look at how quickly we respond to the feedback as well," said Marchese.

The solution.

"We worked with an agency called Code & Theory to redesign the site. They had been doing a whole lot of WordPress sites for really big media agencies like Vogue and Interview Magazine. A lot of publishers. When they said we should do this on WordPress, we said of course, because you can just build really beautiful websites," said Graves.

With an entire community of contributors, and a strong open source software, WordPress was the perfect solution for a company that honors web innovations.

"Additionally, we could upgrade it regularly without doing too much. It's really easy to use, with a low barrier to entry for people that might not be developers. So, the team can go in and use it and update pages really frequently. That ease of use in addition to 40,000 plug-ins allows us to do quite a bit," said Steve.

To help facilitate user experience even further, The Webby Awards team started to work with the engineers from WP Engine. The transition of the site onto the WP Engine platform took place over the summer of 2017.

"Being able to take 20 years of content and seamlessly move that over, was a scary thought. But, the team was incredibly professional, and sort of held our hands the whole time. We didn't have to do very much, to be honest with you. The team at WP Engine seamlessly moved us over piece by piece. We saw some of the traffic go up and down, and found right where we needed to be in terms of customer service," said Steve.

The biggest website concern for the Webby Awards team was the traffic spike around announcements. "The biggest traffic we get is when we announce the awards over two days. We announce the nominees in the beginning of April, so we see see a huge traffic spike there as people go to the site to see if they've been honored. And then, we announce the winners about three weeks after that, and that's when we see a massive spike. We open up the call for entries in early September, and we have deadlines throughout that period, where the site gets a lot of traffic as well," said Marchese.

"The WP Engine team reached out to us about these times of high traffic, and we started by putting together a production calendar to see when those dates are

WPengine®

coming. Prior to a big event, WP Engine is proactively reaching out to monitor the spikes with a team onboard in case to help with if needed. It's been phenomenal customer service. More than I even expected in terms of people reaching out letting us know that eyes are on the site, and that always makes us feel really good. There were even points at which I said, 'you don't have to keep emailing me, I know you're on top of it,'" said Steve.

The results.

Over the years, the team at The Webby Awards had issues with their tech stack, and spent a lot of time making sure the site didn't go down. "It was a lot of intellectual capital invested to make sure it didn't. And now, I don't really think about it anymore - it is an incredible burden lifted from our shoulders," said Steve.

Being free from worrying about performance allows the team to focus on experience, customer service, and what's next in the internet evolution. "We're an organization that gives an award for internet excellence, we need to have a website that also exemplifies that," said Steve.

"It was really important for visitors to have a pleasant experience on the site while voting, exploring the winner's gallery, and more...WP Engine made that happen this year," Marchese said. Compared to 2017, Webby site visitors were staying on the site longer and perusing through more pages per session. Year-to-year, for the Webby Awards nomination announcement and voting period, the average session duration was up nearly 7% and the average pages viewed per session was up nearly 6%.

After migrating to WP Engine.

3.70%	6.28%	-2.41%	5.22%	1.5%
Number of sessions per user up.	Average session duration up.	Bounce Rate down.	Pages /session up.	Returning visitors up.

About WP Engine.

WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress digital experience platform that gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; Limerick, Ireland, and Brisbane, Australia.

WPengine®