

# SPRING CLEANING TIPS

FOR WORDPRESS SITE  
OPTIMIZATION

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TORQUE

 WPengine®

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Spring is here and an important tradition of the friendly season is a thorough spring cleaning to get rid of the old and get ready for the new.

However, forget about your home, your apartment and your garage for a moment, and instead turn your attention to another important piece of real estate: your WordPress website.

Just like everything else in life, websites tend to accumulate clutter over time and like rooms and attics it makes them harder to access and a pain to use.

For that reason, a spring clean is just as much in order for your site as it is for non-digital possessions. And with spring in the air, now is the perfect time to get started.

In this ebook I will show you how to clean up and declutter all parts of your WordPress website and turn it back into a lean, mean, smooth-running machine. We'll optimize everything from the file system, media files and database to the frontend and content.

***So, put on your digital work gloves and let's get going.***

# BUT FIRST, BACK UP!

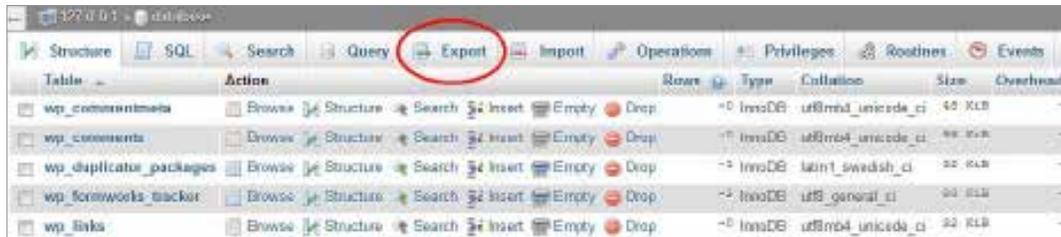
Before we get into the thick of things, we first need to make sure nothing can be lost in the process that can't be recovered.

We are going to put some serious work into your site and – to quote every stereotypical movie gangster – it would be a shame if something were to happen to it.

So, first fire up your trusty [FTP client](#), log into your server and copy the entire folder containing your site to your hard drive.

After that, it's time to download the database. The usual way to do this is [phpMyAdmin](#) or some other database management tool.

Log in, click on the name of your database and find the **Export** button.



Pick *Custom*, make sure to select all necessary tables as well as the following options:

- Add DROP TABLE / VIEW / PROCEDURE / FUNCTION
- Add IF NOT EXISTS
- Add AUTO\_INCREMENT
- Enclose table and field names with backquotes

Use Gzip compression for a smaller file, and hit **Go**. You should be prompted with a file download. Save the file and you are done.

## Plugin Options

Of course, you don't have to do it manually. Plenty of plugins and services out there make this part quicker, easier and – in many cases – automatic, such as:

- Duplicator*
- UpdraftPlus*
- WP-DB-Backup* (database only)
- BackupBuddy* (paid)
- VaultPress* (paid)

If you already use automated backups or work with a managed WordPress provider that offers them, one of the first steps in your spring cleaning can also be to free up space by deleting older backup files or move the backup location to somewhere outside your own server entirely.

***All good on the backup front? Then let's dive right into the next step.***

# SCAN FOR MALWARE AND CHANGE PASSWORDS

First, we will make sure your site hasn't been unknowingly compromised by malware or another kind of hacking attempt.

That is not to say that you are sloppy with your site maintenance. However, WordPress is increasingly becoming a target for hackers so an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.

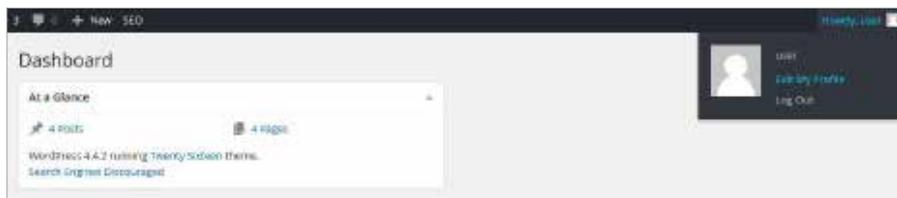
To run checkups for malicious software on your site, you can use the following plugins and services:

- [Sucuri SiteCheck](#)
- [WordFence](#)
- [WP Antivirus Site Protection](#)
- [Quttera Web Malware Scanner](#)

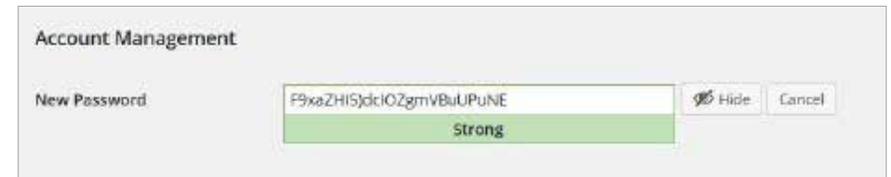
Should (god forbid!) you find malware on your site, refer to [this article](#) on how to clean it up. However, if you adhere to [basic security measures](#), chances are good that there is no problem.

After the scan, it's time to change your password. Yes, I know it's a bit annoying to remember a new login but it is also one of the easiest ways to keep hackers out of your site.

To change your password, log into your site and go to your profile.



You can find the option to change your password further down on the page.



Use a password generator like this [one from Norton](#) to create a safe password. If you decide to come up with your own, keep an eye on the safety gauge in the WordPress backend to make it a good one.

Should you have a lot of people with admin privileges on your site, it might also be a good idea to force all of them to change their passwords, just to be safe. A plugin like [WP Password Policy Manager](#) can help you do so.

Finally, consider increasing your entire site security with a plugin solution like [WordFence](#), [iThemes Security](#) or [All In One WP Security](#). At the very least install [Login Lockdown](#) to protect yourself from brute force attacks.

Plus, there are plenty of other things you can do to [harden WordPress security](#) if you want to take this any further.

**Ready to move on?  
Alright, me too.**

## DELETE UNUSED PLUGINS AND THEMES

Everyone loves to try out new WordPress themes and plugins, however, many forget to uninstall the ones they don't end up using.

That's why plugins often make up the biggest share of unnecessary clutter on WordPress websites.

Besides making WordPress harder to use, they can also seriously diminish site performance. Plus, out-of-date themes and plugins are one of the major reasons *WordPress websites get hacked*.

Time to take the broom to them.

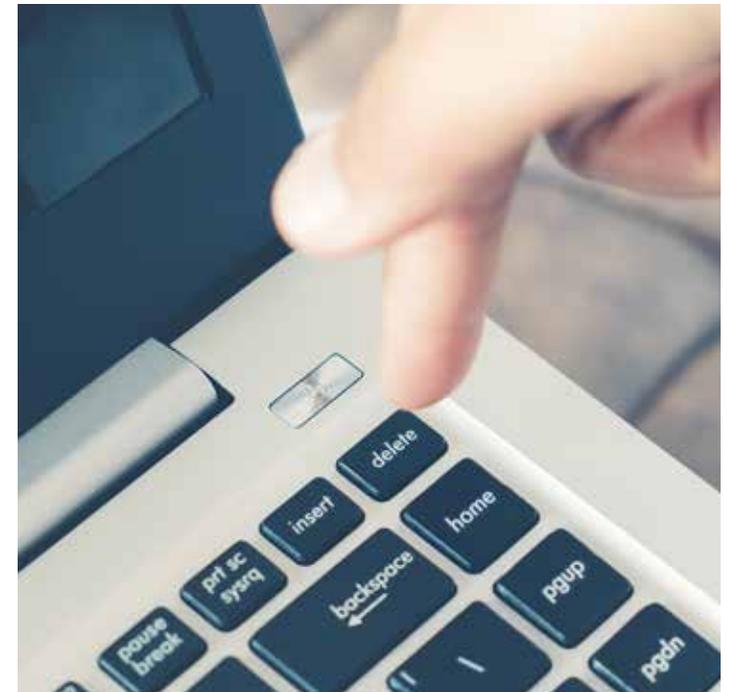
As the next step in your cleaning efforts, take some serious stock of everything you have installed on your site.

***Go through all plugins and themes and consider whether they are actually necessary. If they're not, remove them.***

Even with plugins that you do use but only occasionally, it's a good idea to at least deactivate them in order to cut down on the amount of code that your site needs to load.

On the same note, running the *Plugin Performance Profiler* will enable you to find performance hogs so you can get rid of them or replace them with less resource-hungry alternatives.

If you are anything like the average WordPress user, this step alone should seriously remove some clutter from your site.



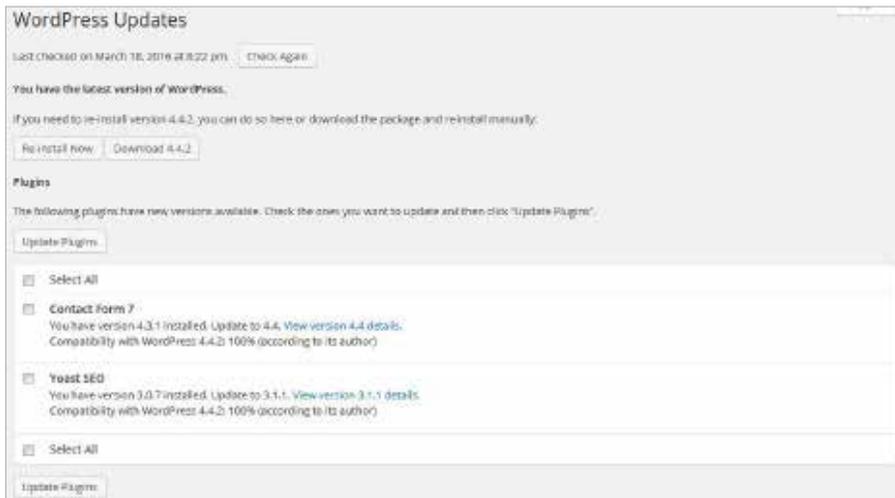
# UPDATE WORDPRESS COMPONENTS

Now it's time to update what's left from the previous step as well as the WordPress core.

This will let you take care of the latest features, code optimizations and performance updates, making for a website that runs much more smoothly. It's also an important step in keeping your site safe.

***Fortunately, updating in WordPress is easy as pie.***

All available updates can be found under **Dashboard > Updates**. Make sure to bring everything listed here up to speed.



For the future, you might also consider running updates automatically in the background. To allow WordPress to install core updates by itself, all you need to do is add the following line to your wp-config.php file:

```
define( 'WP_AUTO_UPDATE_CORE', true );
```

At the very least, you should enable security updates to be applied automatically, like so:

```
define( 'WP_AUTO_UPDATE_CORE', 'minor' );
```

If you want to do the same for themes and plugins, add these two lines of codes to your function.php file:

```
add_filter( 'auto_update_plugin', '__return_true' );
```

```
add_filter( 'auto_update_theme', '__return_true' );
```

However, I only partially recommend this, as it can easily take out your site from a bad update without you even being aware of it.

# DELETE AND LIMIT POST REVISIONS

On to the smaller things. Whenever you click *Save* on a post or page draft, WordPress stores it as a new revision. That way, you can always go back to an older version of your work.

While that's a neat feature, this will create a ton of revisions over time that will grow your WordPress database exponentially, especially on busy websites and blogs.

Although this doesn't have any real effect on site performance, it does make handling the database (storing, moving, uploading) much more time intensive.

For that reason, our next step in the big WordPress spring clean is to both limit future revisions and delete the ones already stored in your site.

The first part is quite easy. All you need to do is add the following line to **wp-config.php** to limit the number of post revisions the platform will create for any one post:

```
define( 'WP_POST_REVISIONS', 3 );
```

The number, in this case, denotes how many revisions will be created per post or page. While I find three a sufficient number, you can also change it to your liking or switch revisions off completely by setting the value to *false* or *0*.

To delete old post revisions, we can use a number of different plugins:

- [WP-Optimize](#)
- [Better Delete Revision](#)
- [WP-Sweep](#)

My personal favorite is [Optimize Database after Deleting Revisions](#) because it enables you to keep a set number of the most recent revisions.



# REMOVE OLD POST AND PAGE DRAFTS

After post revisions, it's time to move on to post and page drafts. Especially on multi-author sites, there are always a bunch of them lying around.

**Time to get rid of them.**

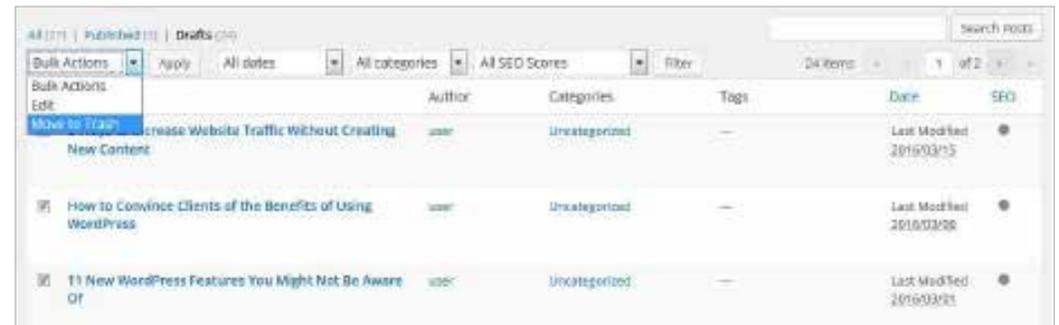
Finding post and page drafts is easy: all you need to do is go to **All Posts** or **All Pages** and click the link on top that says **Drafts**.

Feel free to look through everything in that list first to see if there is any material in there that can be salvaged for the future. We wouldn't want to throw away a perfectly good post idea, would we?

After that, mark the drafts you want to get rid of via the checkbox on the left or tick the box at the top or the bottom of the menu to include everything in the list. After that, all that's left is to click on **Bulk Actions** and choose **Move to Trash** from the drop-down menu.

Nice going. However, note that so far the drafts have only been moved to the trash and not completely deleted. WordPress will do so automatically after a while.

To clear up the database space now, you can go to the trash and empty it manually. Just click on **Trash** at the top of the screen and then the **Empty Trash** button that will appear.



## Done.

***For the future it might also make sense to shorten the time interval after which WordPress deletes trashed items.***

***This can, you guessed it, again be achieved via wp-config.php with the following piece of code:***

```
define( 'EMPTY_TRASH_DAYS', 30 );
```

***The number at the end denotes the number of days before the trash is emptied. You can even set it to zero and have deleted items be sent to draft nirvana directly.***

***However, use this with caution for obvious reasons. WordPress will not ask for confirmation before deleting items permanently.***

## TAKE CARE OF COMMENT SPAM

Spam is a necessary evil of running a WordPress website. Before I set up my first web presence, I had no idea about the amount of spam comments posted across the web on a given day.

Depending on the size of your site, when left unchecked, the *Comments* menu will accumulate hundreds, thousands, even hundreds of thousands of spam comments in no time.

Luckily, there are plenty of high-quality anti-spam plugins out there to help with this problem:

- Antispam Bee*
- Anti-spam*
- WP-SpamShield Anti-Spam*
- Akismet (paid)*

Be aware that only some of them delete spam comments automatically, for example Antispam Bee merely moves them to the *Spam* folder so you can review comments before deletion.

Needless to say, this will still result in bloat, only in a different place.

Thankfully, WordPress makes it very easy to delete all spam comments at once. Just go to the spam section and use the **Empty Spam** button.



## DELETE UNUSED MEDIA FILES

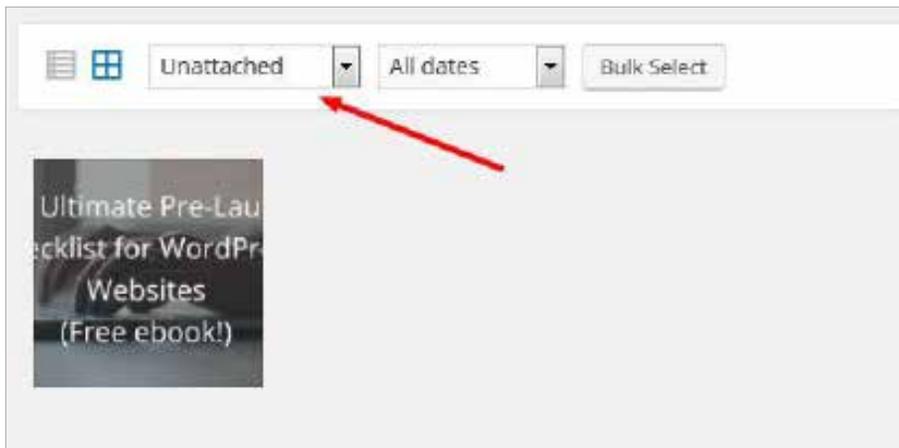
Next stop: media files. Spacewise, images, videos and other media most often make up the bulk of a WordPress installation.

On the one hand that's quite natural. Underscoring your written content with visuals is quite a good idea for user experience and [SEO](#).

On the other hand, because WordPress creates several size versions of every image uploaded, it also results in a lot of files that aren't actually used and only there **just in case**.

To sort out the media library, we can first manually delete all images that aren't used anywhere.

For that, merely go to the media library and choose **Unattached** from the drop-down menu that says **All media items**.



This will allow you to select and delete all media files not attached to a post or page. An alternative route is to use the [Media File Cleaner](#) plugin.

***However, in order to avoid creating media bulk in the future and to make your site faster in general, it's a good idea to reduce the size of all image files added to your site to a minimum.***

First of all, you should make sure to reduce the size of your images pre-upload. No need to have a poster-sized file if nobody is ever going to see it that big.

Second, make sure to run your visuals through an optimization tool like [RIOT](#), [TinyPNG](#) or [TinyJPG](#) before uploading them to WordPress.

These tools will strip away unnecessary data, reducing file size in the process without compromising quality.

The same can also be achieved automatically via WordPress plugins. Both [EWWW Image Optimizer](#) and [WP-Smush](#) will do so without any further action necessary on your part.

Finally, to make your site even leaner, you might consider offloading the media to a [Content Delivery Network](#) and not save them on your own server at all.

# FIND AND REMOVE BROKEN LINKS

Broken links are an annoyance for your visitors. Missing images, links that go nowhere and files that can not be found are not part of a smooth user experience.

Search engines don't like them either, even more reason to take care of them.

An easy way to find broken links on your site is to use the free website [Dead Link Checker](#). Just enter your URL and the [Dead Link Checker](#) will tell you about all links on your site that aren't going anywhere and where they are.

An alternative way is the [Broken Link Checker](#) plugin. However, a lot of users have noted performance problems with this plugin, so use with caution or only activate periodically.

Once you have sniffed out a broken link on your site, you have the following options:

- CORRECT IT**  
If something is wrong with the link, such as a typo, all you need to do is make it right.
- REPLACE IT**  
Should the resource you linked to no longer exist, it might be a good idea to find an alternative that you can point visitors to instead.
- REMOVE IT**  
If neither of the alternatives above is an option, maybe just do away with the link altogether.

One more quick note: To catch broken links coming from the outside, install the [Redirection plugin](#). It automatically tracks when visitors hit on non-existent pages and allows you to set redirects to the correct address.



***Broken links are an annoyance for your visitors. Missing images, links that go nowhere and files that can not be found are not part of a smooth user experience.***

# MANAGE WORDPRESS TAXONOMIES

Just like forgotten drafts, many WordPress websites are full of unused tags and categories. While that isn't a huge problem, they do get in the way of content creation (too many options) and can also confuse visitors.

To continue the spring clean, go to **Posts > Categories** and click on the **Count** link in the list on the right. This will order your taxonomy items by the number of posts they are used in. The same can be done with tags.



<input type="checkbox"/>	Name	Description	Slug	Count
<input type="checkbox"/>	My category		my-category	0
	My other category		my-other-category	3
<input type="checkbox"/>	Name	Description	Slug	Count

By checking all categories and tags with the count number zero, you can then easily delete them via the **Bulk Action** menu.

***While we are at it, it might also be a good idea to think through your categories and tags and see if they can be simplified, merged and/or removed.***



## REMOVE OLD SHORTCODES

Next on our cleaning to-do list are shortcodes. A lot of themes and plugins use them to introduce functionality to your posts and pages, which is all fine and dandy.

However, shortcodes can become a bit of a nuisance when the components they belong to are removed but the shortcodes themselves aren't. This is often the case for older content and looks a bit ugly for visitors.

While it's possible to search for orphaned shortcodes manually, plugins make much quicker work of this tedious task. Both [Remove Orphan Shortcodes](#) and [Hide Unwanted Shortcodes](#) will happily take care of it for you.

***The best part: instead of deleting the shortcodes that are no longer in use, the plugins can just hide them from visitors. This way, they can be reused should the need arise.***



## CLEAN UP THE WORDPRESS HEADER

From now on we are getting into slightly more technical things.

One of the reasons I earlier advised you to disable plugins that are not actually in use is because a lot of them (and themes for that matter) tend to add code to the website header.

Naturally, the more code has to be read and executed, the longer it takes to load a page. Therefore, the WordPress header is the next place we will target in our sweep.

Two plugins that are immensely helpful in this regard are *WP Head Cleanup* and *WP Asset Clean Up*. Both of them allow you to stop scripts from loading that would usually add to the loading time of your site, yet they work differently.

WP Head Cleanup allows you to disable a bunch of assets that are part of the WordPress header by default but often are not necessary.

With the second plugin you can disable CSS, JavaScript and other files on a per-page basis. That's very useful, for example to make sure that the assets of a contact form are only loaded on pages where the form is actually present.

***In both cases, it's probably a good idea if you know what you are doing before making any changes.***



## *Minify CSS, HTML and Javascript*

Cleaning up and uncluttering is not only for the parts that you and your visitors can see. Files in the background also deserve a makeover.

Minification is an excellent tool to turn our website into a mean and lean machine. It's a technique that can help reduce the size of web code files and thus reduce page load time.

Essentially minifying means removing all characters from the code that make it more readable for humans but are unnecessary for machines, like spaces, line breaks and comments.

While there are ways to achieve this manually, the easiest way is to use a plugin like *Better WordPress Minify*, *WP Super Minify* or *WP Minify Fix*.

# CLEAN AND OPTIMIZE WORDPRESS DATABASE

From the WordPress file system, we are now moving on to the glue that is holding it all together – the WordPress database.

Just like the rest of WordPress, if left unchecked, the database accumulates significant clutter and unnecessary or unused data.

We already took care of post revisions, drafts and spam comments earlier (which are all saved in the database) but there is more we can do to make the database squeaky clean.

First of all, you might have leftover tables in there from uninstalled plugins that no longer have any function.

Second, over time databases accumulate something called **overhead**, which denotes temporary disk space used by database tables. **Database optimization** commonly refers to the removal of this data.

Both of these issues can be taken care of manually via phpMyAdmin, which makes optimization a piece of cake.

When you enter your database, you will see the amount of overhead per table displayed on the right side.

Table	Action	Rows	Type	Collation	Size	Overhead
wp_commentmeta	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	0	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	48 B	0 B
wp_comments	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	0	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	16 B	0 B
wp_duplicate_packages	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	0	InnoDB	latin1_swedish_ci	16 B	0 B
wp_lootworks_tracker	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	0	InnoDB	utf8_general_ci	40 B	0 B
wp_links	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	0	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	22 B	0 B
wp_options	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	138	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	2.3 KB	0 B
wp_postmeta	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	634	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	176 B	0 B
wp_posts	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	275	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	6.5 KB	0 B
wp_termmeta	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	0	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	48 B	0 B
wp_terms	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	15	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	48 B	0 B
wp_term_relationships	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	149	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	22 B	0 B
wp_term_taxonomy	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	15	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	48 B	0 B
wp_usermeta	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	34	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	48 B	0 B
wp_users	Structure Search Insert Empty Drop	1	InnoDB	utf8mb4_unicode_ci	48 B	0 B
14 tables	Sum	1,208	InnoDB	latin1_swedish_ci	7.1 MB	0 B

All you need to do to get rid of it is to select all tables (use the *Check All* checkbox at the bottom), choose *Optimize* table from the drop-down menu and click *Go*. That's it.



**However, finding and deleting unused database tables by hand is both tedious and risky if you don't know what you are doing. Therefore, using a plugin is probably a safer way.**

Two good options are *WP Clean Up Optimizer* and *Plugins Garbage Collector*.

The first plugin also does a lot more, like optimize tables and clear the post trash.

# REMOVE UNUSED WIDGETS

Still with me? We are almost done. Your site is almost as good as new. Now let's direct our efforts to the WordPress frontend. First stop: widgets, both active and inactive.

Under **Appearance > Widgets**, look through your widgetized areas and just like with plugins beforehand, ask yourself if each one is absolutely necessary.

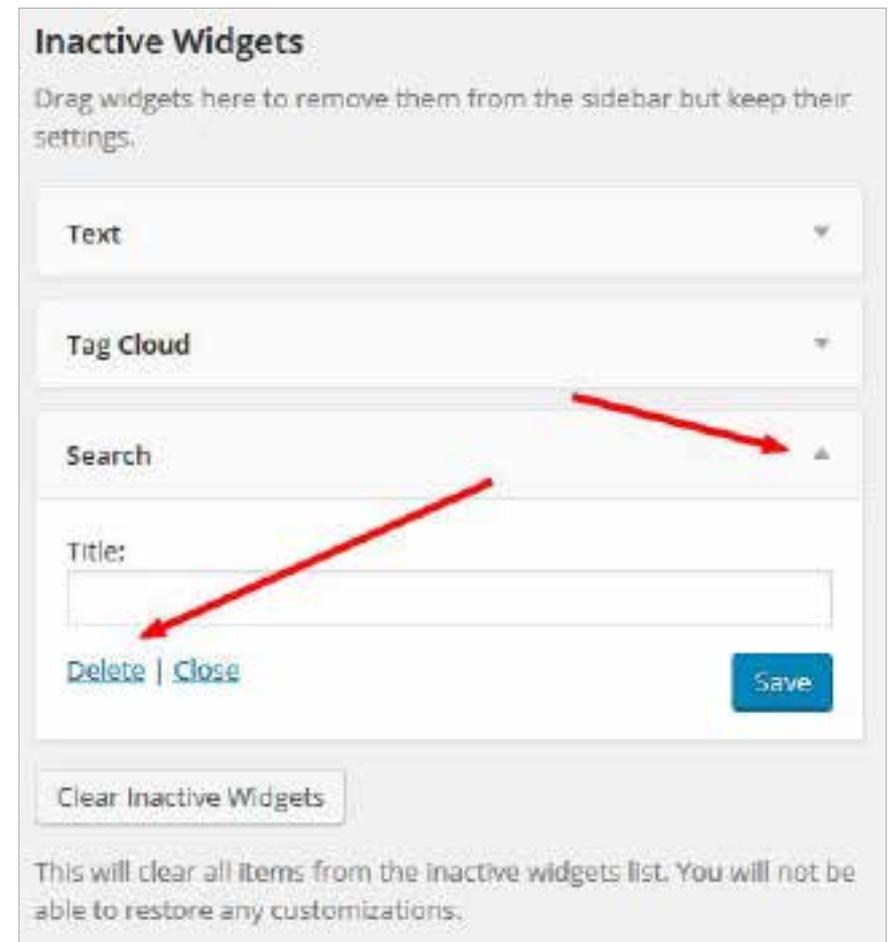
***Does the widget still serve its purpose?  
Would it hurt your site if it was no longer there?***

Delete those you no longer need or place them in the **Inactive Widget** pile in the lower left corner if you are not sure.



The inactive widgets are also our next stop. Since they take up space in the WordPress database, we want to have as few of them as possible.

You can remove widgets from this part either by dragging and dropping them upwards on top of the available widgets or by clicking the small arrow and then **Delete**.



Alternatively, use the **Clear Inactive Widgets** button to empty the inactive widget pile completely. Boom, well done.



## CLEAN UP THE FRONTEND

What we have just done to the widgets, we can extend to the entire frontend of your site.

As part of our big WordPress spring clean, look through the main pages of your website and ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the goal of each webpage?
- Do all the elements on this page work toward that single goal?
- Which elements can be removed?
- How can the user experience be further improved or streamlined?
- Do I need this page at all?

Usually, this will turn up a number of site elements that are more distracting than helpful and can go the way of the dodo.

A good example of this are social sharing options. Check both how often they show up on the page as well as the platforms you offer sharing for. A lot of people go overboard here.

# UPDATE YOUR CONTENT

As the final step we turn our attention to the heart of your website: the content.

No, I am not suggesting that you go through all articles on your site and check them for typos to make them spotless.

Instead, I advise that you do some targeted spring cleaning of your older but still successful content to give it an extra boost for the future.

As a first step, go to your Analytics suite (I will assume you have Google's solution) and then to **Behavior > Site Content > All Pages**.

At the bottom, find **Show rows** and choose something higher than 10, let's say 50. This will allow you to see the pages and posts that bring in the most traffic.

By cleaning up and updating as many as you can, you can turn them into even bigger visitor magnets.

## *Add New Information*

By updating data and adding novel information to your post, you can make it more valuable to your visitors.

It also allows you to slap "[Updated + this year]" onto it to let users know that the information is still relevant. The recency of information is a big factor in the decision to click on it.

Google also loves up-to-date content and will take notice if you maintain yours well.

Plus, this way you can reuse the posts for your newsletter, social media and other marketing channels.

## *Add Long-Tail Keywords*

Also, why not throw some extra keywords in the mix?

In *Google Search Console* under **Search Traffic > Search Queries** you can find a treasure trove of search phrases that users are already typing into Google for which your content shows up.

By including the phrases two or three times within older relevant articles, you can give your content a serious SEO bump over time.

## *Update the Structure and Writing*

While you are at it, you might as well give your oldie-but-goldie content a quick lookover for some much needed editing.

Over time, your skills as a content creator (hopefully) get better. I personally cringe a little when I read some of my earlier articles.

Therefore, it's a good idea to put your new knowledge to use and make up for your earlier inexperience with improved post titles, additional subheadlines and clearer formatting.

## *Update Personal Information*

Finally, don't forget to look through your about page, portfolio, contact page and other important pieces of real estate and see if the information on there is still current.

After all, your website is supposed to accurately represent you to the outside world, so make sure it does.

# CONCLUSION

Over time, WordPress websites accumulate a lot of clutter, bloat and dead weight. That's normal and part of the process. However, that doesn't mean you should tolerate it indefinitely.

The arrival of spring is a good moment to give your website a thorough makeover and remove a lot of the burden it has collected over the last months (or even years).

*By cleaning up, you not only potentially make your site faster and more pleasant to use, but also maintain its capability to be an excellent tool for your needs.*

From here you can move on to cleaning up other parts of your web business like your newsletter recipient list, social profiles or editorial calendar. However, I will leave you to do that by yourself (that may become a summer cleaning effort).

## *To quickly summarize our spring cleaning program once more:*

1. Scan for malware and increase security
2. Delete unused plugins and themes
3. Run updates for all components
4. Remove post revisions and limit them for the future
5. Delete unneeded post and page drafts
6. Get rid of comment spam
7. Remove unused media files
8. Find and remove broken links
9. Reduce categories, tags and other taxonomies
10. Remove obsolete shortcodes
11. Clean up the site header
12. Clear and optimize the WordPress database
13. Get rid of unused widgets
14. Clean up the site frontend
15. Update your content structure, keywords and personal info

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: NICK SCHÄFERHOFF

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