WORDPRESS VS. JOOMLA
WHICH IS THE RIGHT CMS FOR YOU?

BY NICK SCHÄFERHOFF

WHITE PAPER

The emergence of open-source content management systems has done tremendous things to level the playing field online. Thanks to free software solutions, today literally anyone can start their own website, blog, business, and career on the internet.

Of all available platforms, there is no debate that WordPress has done by far the best.

The fastest growing CMS for six consecutive years, the platform of choice for half of all CMS-based websites and powering more than a quarter of the entire internet -- the numbers speak for themselves.

Yet, there are other solutions for building websites that are looking to knock WordPress off of its throne, one of which we recently highlighted in a white paper on the differences between Drupal and WordPress. This time we want to have a look at another CMS contender: Joomla.

To better understand the differences between the two platforms, in this white paper I will take a detailed look at Joomla and then compare it to WordPress on a number of markers.

That way you will be able to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of both systems and make a decision about which one is better for you and your project.

I'm a bit anxious about writing this as it is sure to restart an ongoing discussion with my brother (who is a Joomla guy), however, let's not have my private life stand in our way.

Joomla - The Basics

Like WordPress, Joomla is an open-source content management system based mainly on PHP with an SQL database holding the whole thing together. It derives its name from the Swahili word Jumla, which means all together or as a whole, which I quite like.

Overall, Joomla is the second most popular content management system used on internet.

The platform was established in 2005 as a fork from another CMS called Mambo and has overall been downloaded 68 million times, according to their website. Its latest version, Joomla 3.5, came out in March 21, 2016. (For comparison, you can see the number of downloads for the current version of WordPress here -- as of this writing WordPress 4.5 had been downloaded nearly 19 million times and counting.)

Like WordPress, the Joomla CMS is developed and maintained by an active community of volunteers. As will become obvious from the comparison below, that's not the only thing the two systems have in common.

Sites built with both WordPress and Joomla consist of a file system and database, a front end and back end and have other similar characteristics. However, there are also some decisive differences as you will learn in the following.

WordPress vs. Joomla - The Big Showdown

Alright, now that we have a better idea about what Joomla is, let's have a look at how it compares to its more popular big brother.

User Friendliness

One of the main selling points for CMSs is that they enable anyone, even less tech-savvy users, to create websites without writing a single line of code. Because of that, usability is one of the key considerations for deciding on a platform and our first comparison criterion.

WordPress

As anyone who has used the platform can attest, user friendliness is one of WordPress' strongest points. It starts with the installation that takes only minutes to complete (hence its name "the five-minute install") and ends with the intuitive user interface that makes creating and managing an entire website easier than using Facebook.

Menus, posts and pages, widgets and everything else can be created and placed with a few mouse clicks or convenient drag and drop. Users can install themes and plugins from right inside the admin area and change their entire site design, layout and functionality.

In addition to that, the WYSIWYG editor makes content creation no more complicated than using Microsoft Word (I'd argue it's even less complicated).

The editor makes child's play out of placing photos and adding other media (thanks to drag and drop and auto embed) as well as assigning categories and tags, previewing and scheduling your posts and more.

Because things are so easy, so is handing off websites to clients, which is why WordPress is a favorite among agencies and developers who build sites for others.

Joomla

In terms of usability, Joomla is quite similar to WordPress, though somewhat more complex.

Installing it on a server merely requires downloading, uploading and running an installation script. Plus, as with WordPress, many hosting providers now offer one-click installations for this platform.

Furthermore, Joomla sports a graphical admin interface where users can add articles, media, menus, extensions, and languages as well as change settings and update the platform via a single mouse click.

It is also worth noting that the platform offers a few more features and settings out of the box that WordPress doesn't come with. Proponents say this makes it more powerful and gives users more control, which might be true, but it also makes Joomla more overwhelming for beginners.

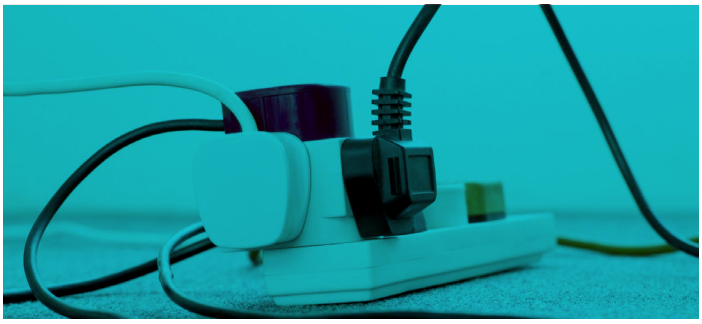
For example, users can switch off post dates from the admin area by default, something that often has to be achieved via code in WordPress. Yet, at the same time, configuring the location of modules (Joomla's equivalent of widgets) is a bit more painful -- you need to edit the options for each module in turn.

WordPress' drag-and-drop functionality makes this more convenient.

However, content creation is similarly easy with Joomla as it also comes with the TinyMCE editor, though the platform has different default features enabled than WordPress.

Overall, most people should be able to learn how to create and run Joomla sites quickly although the technical learning curve is steeper than WordPress.

Extendability



Content management systems have millions of users, each with different types of goals and websites they want to create.

For that reason, besides delivering a great core product, the systems need to be able to cater to all of those needs via extensions.

WordPress

It's no secret that the WordPress directory contains thousands of free themes and that there are many more premium offers out there.

> Basically, users can find specialized themes for any type of website, not only with custom design and layout, but also custom capabilities and options specific to their needs.

Plus, with child themes and a little coding knowledge users can build upon and modify themes further to make them completely fit their purpose. Besides that, the WordPress directory has more than 40,000 plugins to add any type of functionality, from improving your site's SEO, to building membership sites, online shops and more.

Plus, there also premium options available.
In short, whether you want to create a portfolio website, enterprise site, blog, or even blog network, you can easily do so with WordPress.

Joomla

The Joomla platform also offers users many different extensions and its community divides them into several different types. For example, the Joomla equivalent to themes are called templates and they determine the look, and feel of websites, including the back end.

What's different here is that there is no central theme directory so users need to do some Google searches to find trustworthy vendors.

The largest type of extensions, called components, are probably most accurately likened to custom post types in WordPress as they render parts of the page body and come with their own menu items.

What's called plugins in Joomla are mostly event handlers. That means they execute if certain conditions are met, for example to filter or block part of the content. Depending on their complexity, the line between plugins and components is a bit blurry.

As already mentioned, Joomla modules are like widgets. They render part of pages in such form as search fields, login menus, and breadcrumbs.

Components, modules, and plugins can all be found in the official directory and at the time of this writing there are almost 7,800 of them available. Users can search them by category (from Access & Security to Shopping Carts), tags, compatibility, score and more.

What's noteworthy, however, is that not everything in the directory is free. In fact, about half of all available extensions are paid, which is quite an interesting difference between Joomla and WordPress.

Joomla's final extension type are languages, which is pretty self-explanatory and we will talk more about them further below.

Support

As easy as content management systems make creating websites, everyone, especially beginners, will need help at some point. For that reason, it's vital that these platforms have a proper support architecture in place that users can turn to.

WordPress

As the most popular CMS out there, WordPress also boasts a large support system through its vibrant and welcoming community. Volunteers in the WordPress support forums are always happy to lend a helping hand to strangers.

In addition, users can turn to the WordPress Codex, Documentation and Handbooks, not to mention sites like Torque and other external resources that deliver high-quality content and tutorials for getting the most out of the CMS.

Plus, in case you can't figure something out by yourself, there is also lots of paid help available from thousands of WordPress developers. The platform itself is also well maintained with major updates coming out every three to four months bringing new features and improvements.

And if you choose a managed WordPress provider, they offer support to customers to take the heavy lifting off of your shoulders.

Joomla

As open source software and the second most used CMS out there, Joomla also has great community support via:

- Community forums
- Documentation
- Mailing lists
- IRC chatrooms

That is in addition to many third-party resources and paid trainings that can be found online.

The downside of Joomla is that due to the size difference between WordPress and Joomla, paid help tends to be harder to find and more expensive. Since the ecosystem is smaller, Joomla experts are more in demand and therefore can ask for higher prices, however, it's still easier and cheaper than the third rival Drupal.

Aside from that, Joomla is updated more frequently than WordPress with minor versions coming out every one to three months. However, major releases typically only come out once a year, compared to WordPress releasing several versions annually.

SEO

For anyone who not only wants a website but a *successful* website that generates traffic, search engine optimization is an important consideration. How do our two CMSs compare here?

WordPress

WordPress delivers powerful search engine optimization out of the box. For example, setting a custom URL structure is super easy, as is changing post URLs to add important keywords. Additionally, the platform has very good functionality for image optimization built in by default.

Overall, WordPress natively takes care of 80 to 90 percent of SEO, which is one of the reasons for the strong endorsement from Google.

In addition, plugins like Yoast SEO (check our detailed guide on how to use it) can take optimization to a whole new level by giving users control over almost any SEO aspect of their site and being a tremendous help with creating optimized content.

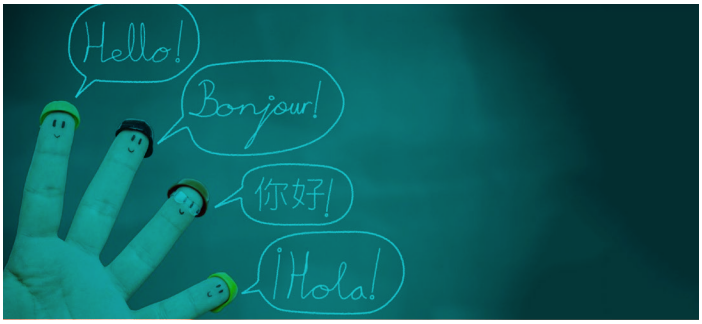
Joomla

Search engine optimization is a slightly messier affair in Joomla. While the platform isn't SEO unfriendly per se, optimization is much more complicated. Especially on-site optimization can be a pain for the uninitiated, although Joomla offers solid basic functionality like URL rewrites, meta descriptions and the ability to set title tags on a per-page level.

Even advanced meta data like noindex or nofollow is available, as are extensions to further improve your site's SEO.

However, search engine optimization is overall not as easy as in WordPress, and Joomla is generally regarded as the less optimized platform of the two.

Translation and Localization



While English continues to be the main language of the internet, others are catching up. With website owners operating in an increasingly international environment, the ability to offer more than one language is becoming a crucial feature for content management systems.

WordPress

The WordPress community has done a lot in terms of internationalization and translation.

First of all, the platform is now available in dozens of languages and lets users choose which language they want to use the platform in at install. In addition, WordPress has a number of functions that developers can take advantage of to make all parts of WordPress websites translatable.

While the platform has no functionality to build multilingual websites out of the box, there are a number of excellent plugins that let you do so. Plus, WordPress Multisite empowers users to build a network of websites from one WordPress installation and give each its own language.

In short, building multilingual websites with WordPress is no problem at all.

Joomla

Multilingualism is an area where Joomla shines. For one, language extensions enable users to add translations for the admin area right from the back end.

More importantly, Joomla has the capability to handle multilingual content by default without needing additional plugins. Users can just go to the language manager, add a new locate, and start creating content in different languages right away. Of course, you need to know what you are doing so that it works, but it's a powerful feature that WordPress should consider.

Security

As a website owner, you quickly become aware of the many hackers out there only waiting to harm and take over your site for their nefarious purposes. For that reason, security is a central consideration for any CMS that wants to play in the big leagues.

WordPress

With a self-hosted WordPress site, security and maintenance are basically your responsibility (with a managed WordPress host, you can offload much of the maintenance and security). Sure, your host also needs to have their stuff together, however, in the end, keeping your site safe is your own job.

The good news is that if you educate yourself on how to protect your WordPress website and take basic precautions, you are already 100 percent more equipped to keep your site safe than those who ignore this topic.

For example, one of the most important contributors to security is to keep your site up to date, which is one of the reasons WordPress makes this so easy.

The CMS will alert you to any available updates for both WordPress core and its components and allow you to apply them with one click.

Furthermore, unless specifically disabled, the platform will also automatically install security and maintenance patches for known vulnerabilities.

In addition, WordPress users have many security plugins to choose from that can further increase security, many of them of the set-it-and-forget-it variety.

Joomla

Joomla is very similar in its handling of security -- it puts most of the responsibility on the user.

For example, the community actively responds to vulnerabilities and offers patches as soon as possible, however, implementing them is up to website owners themselves. Thus, following best practices for online security is also a good idea for those running a Joomla website.

The platform also offers automatic updates and security extensions to further increase the safety of websites built with it.

Special Features

As we have seen above, neither of the two CMSs examined here is a one-trick pony. Both can be used to build all sorts of websites. However, there are some things each of them are especially suited for and we'll take a look at that as our final point of comparison.

WordPress

While WordPress has long moved on to be a full-featured CMS capable of powering large-scale, complex, high-performing enterprise websites with ease, there's no denying its roots as a blogging platform.

For that reason, it still does that extremely well.

If you are planning to build a blog or make blogging a major part of your marketing strategy (as you probably should, content marketing anyone?), there is no way around the CMS with the capital W and P.

Post archives, taxonomies, a solid comment system -- WordPress has it all right from the start. You can literally start blogging in minutes.

As if that wasn't enough, as WordPress users you also have masses of additional blogging tools available.

While Joomla can also act as a blog platform, doing so requires additional extensions and a lot more fiddling around which is why it just can't hold the candle to its competitor in this regard.

Joomla

Joomla, on the other hand, has its own area of expertise and it's social networking. The CMS comes with a lot of built-in options to create membership sites, forums, and ways for users to create and publish content on your site.

Plus, it has a lot of extensions that further improve its capabilities in this area. While WordPress also has many plugins for this (such as these) Joomla appears to offer a lot more native support for it.

WordPress vs. Joomla - Who Is the Winner?

Open-source content management systems have revolutionized the internet by giving everyone the ability to build and maintain complex websites without the need to know code.

While WordPress is clearly the biggest fish in the pond, Joomla is a worthy runner up with interesting capabilities and possibilities of application.

On the surface, the two systems are not too dissimilar: both are PHP-based, use a SQL database and have passionate communities behind them.

Plus, each of the systems has notable users to their name, from The New York Times, CNN, and TechCrunch on WordPress to Linux.org, Harvard University and the Guggenheim Museum for Joomla (For more notable users, check this article on the most well-known websites built with WordPress.)

Of course, WordPress beats Joomla in usage by a wide margin, but there are other differences. With its intuitive user interface and features that will let even beginners hit the ground running in no time, WordPress excels in ease of use. Its large community offers loads of support and masses of themes and extensions, both free and paid.

Coupled with the ability to customize literally every part of your site, there are no limits to what kind of web presences you can build with this CMS.

Aside from that, WordPress is loved by search engines and -- with a little vigilance -- as secure as web entities get. Plus, for blogging there simply isn't any other tool out there that comes even close to WordPress' capabilities.

Joomla, on the other hand, offers more functionality out of the box, which gives users more granular control but also results in a steeper learning curve. Just like WordPress, the platform offers loads of templates and extensions for site customization, even if theme distribution is not as centralized. In addition, the division of extensions into several categories can be a bit confusing, same as the fact that there are paid solutions in the official repository. Also, the CMS lags a bit behind when it comes to matters of search engine optimization.

On the other hand, Joomla support is excellent and security taken just as seriously as it is in WordPress. Plus, the CMS really shines when it comes to handling multilingual content and creating sites with social networking capabilities.

Overall, it's understandable why Joomla is often thought of as a compromise between WordPress and Drupal, as it is less technical than the latter but more complex than the former.

WordPress and Joomla both have their distinct advantages and disadvantages. When it comes down to it, however, WordPress is **the more powerful, accessible, and trusted CMS**, and is therefore the winner.

About The Author: Nick Schäferhoff

Nick is an entrepreneur, online marketer, and professional blogger. A longtime WordPress enthusiast, he helps clients across the world build successful online businesses through a mix of content marketing, blogging and web design. You can get in touch with him via Twitter or through his website.

twitter.com/nschaeferhoff
nickschaeferhoff.de/en

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About Torque

Torque is a news site featuring all things WordPress. We are dedicated to informing new and advanced WordPress professionals, users, and enthusiasts about the industry. Torque focuses primarily on WordPress News, Business, and Development, but also covers topics relating to open source and break-through technology. Torque made its debut in July 2013, at WordCamp San Francisco, and has since produced valuable content that reflects the evolution of WordPress, both as a platform and a community. Torque is a WP Engine publication, though maintains complete editorial independence.

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WP Engine powers amazing digital experiences for websites and applications built on WordPress. The company's premium managed hosting platform provides the performance, reliability and security required by the biggest brands in the world, while remaining affordable and intuitive enough for smaller businesses and individuals. Companies of all sizes rely on WP Engine's award-winning customer service team to quickly solve technical problems and create a world-class customer experience. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas and has offices in San Francisco, California, San Antonio, Texas, and London, England.
www.wpengine.com

WP Engine 504 Lavaca Street, Suite 1000, Austin, Texas 78701 info@wpengine.com wpengine.com