WP engine®

Customer Q&A.

A conversation with the University of St Andrews.
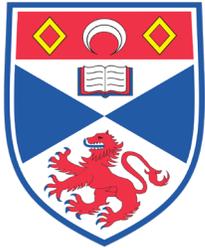
Industry
Education

Site
https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/

About
• Founded in 1410
• Located in Fife, Scotland

The University of St Andrews is a British public research university in St Andrews, Fife, Scotland. It is the oldest of the four ancient universities of Scotland and the third oldest university in the English-speaking world.

We sat down with Stephan Evans, University Web Manager, about using WordPress and WP Engine to manage and maintain more than 200 research groups and other university organisations.

Why WordPress?

Myself, along with countless other faculty members and researchers have found the multisite to be a wonderful tool for disseminating research results, collaborating with others in our respective fields of study and sharing information from the university with the outside world.

As a content management platform, WordPress has been a big part of the multisite's success. As it is so user-friendly, we've found that contributors are able to quickly create a website or blog and configure and administer it without needing specialist programming knowledge. Over time, this ease of use has allowed more than 200 research groups and other university organisations to create sites within the content management system.

What lead you to WP Engine?

Our list of contributors has continued to grow, so has the responsibility of keeping the platform up to date and secure. We found this ongoing maintenance to be an increasingly burdensome task and a couple of years ago, we began looking for an outside partner that could take on the responsibility of providing the university with a more secure and stable environment.

I met WP Engine's Senior Sales Rep in the UK, Jon Bird, at an institutional web management workshop in Liverpool. He provided me with a demo of WP Engine's Digital Experience Platform which was quite impressive, and the level of 24/7/365 support he offered was great. WP Engine also had experience supporting higher education institutions and Jon assured us that our data would be kept in servers located in the UK, alleviating concerns about privacy and data protection.

How was your experience with migration?

We migrated over in March of 2018 and the process was seamless. One of the only issues we needed to tackle was how we were going to manage user logins using the university's single sign-on service.

To remedy this, we used the WordPress Authorizer plugin which allowed users to authenticate their identity using the university's Client Access Server (CAS). Configuring the plugin was relatively easy, but we had issues with users needing to repeatedly log in in order to manage their sites. Ultimately, our WP Engine support team helped us resolve the issue by forcing all links to go over https.

What are some of your favourite features of the Digital Experience Platform?

In general, WP Engine's customer support has been excellent and we have 24/7/365 access to WordPress technicians via email and online chat. Using the chat function, we've found that support staff is consistently available within minutes of initiating an online chat session. We've also been able to resolve most of our issues this way, with only one or two issues being transferred to a support ticket that is handled using a separate system.

Another WP Engine feature we've been pleased with is the staging function, which is available on the platform but not always taken advantage of (or even known about). A staging site allows users to perform testing that is independent of the parent site, and it benefits from not having any caching so it's ideal for development purposes. Many of our multisite users have enjoyed using this function to test out new plugins, try out new themes and generally improve their sites in different ways.

Finally, one of the biggest advantages we've experienced with our shift to WP Engine has been the automatic updates they provide for every WordPress account.

Prior to moving to WP Engine, we would spend a lot of time providing updates to WordPress core. The process would typically involve manually copying content from the production server to the test server and then updating the test install before eventually updating the live install. Due to the sheer amount of time this would take, we were always behind the latest version of WordPress. Having WP Engine take care of these updates for us has been a huge relief.

WP Engine fast facts.   Founded in 2010 | 80K+ Customers in 136 Countries | Supporting 500K+ WordPress Domains
Serving 2B Page Views/Day | Largest Customer Success Team in WordPress, Available 24/7/365