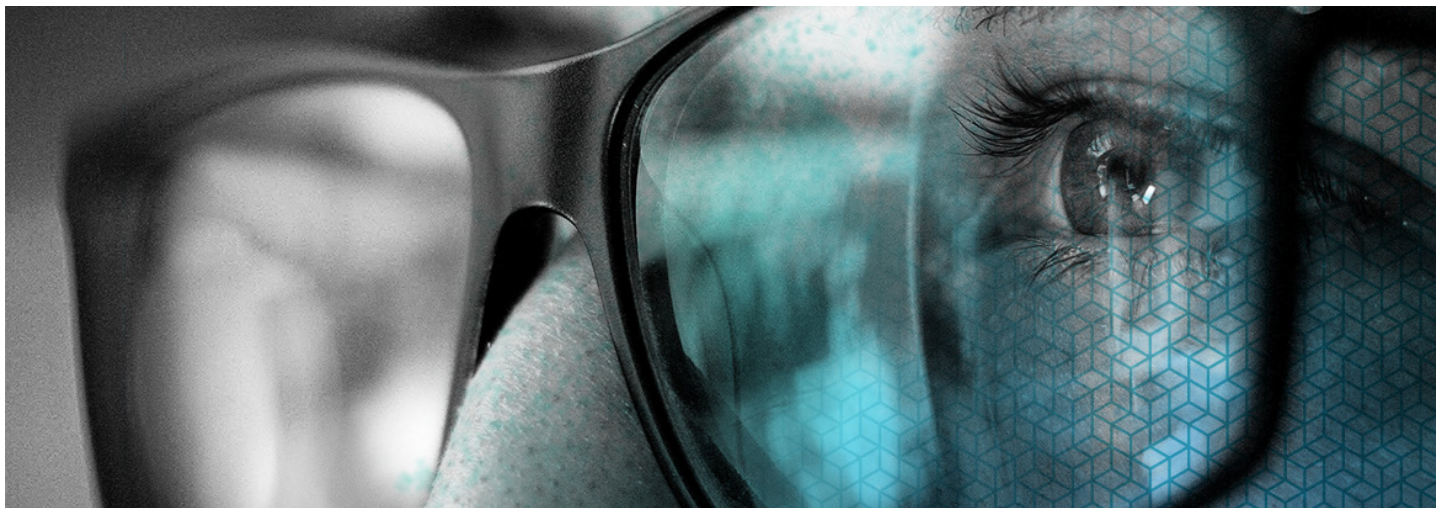




americaneagle.com

Accessibility + WordPress.

WHITE PAPER



Introduction.

What is web accessibility (a11y)?

The word accessibility is abbreviated to “a11y,” with the number eleven in the middle referring to the number of letters that the word contains between the first and last letter.

According to the World Wide Web Consortium ([W3C](#)), “The Web is fundamentally designed to work for all people, whatever their hardware, software, language, culture, location, or physical or mental ability. When the Web meets this goal, it is accessible to people with a diverse range of hearing, movement, sight, and cognitive ability. However, when websites, web technologies, or web tools are badly designed, they can create barriers that exclude people from using the Web.” Web accessibility is a new and confusing topic for many people, but in simple terms, we are referring to making websites accessible to those with disabilities.

Who does web accessibility, or lack thereof, impact?

In the same way many stores and restaurants offer entrances and facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities, people are becoming more aware of the need to make websites accessible to everyone, in an effort to end online exclusion.

People with all kinds of disabilities can be prevented from having full use of the internet due to inaccessible sites. Those with visual

disabilities are often unable to use a site if it isn't screen-reader compatible. Those with hearing, physical, or cognitive disabilities as well as the elderly can find certain sites to be inaccessible, while sites that include flashing elements can trigger seizures in those with photosensitive epilepsy. Accessibility also helps general usability for all your current and future customers, members, or readers drawn to your site.

Why is web accessibility important?

Today, the web is a vital source of information, a place to meet people and communicate, contribute, educate and express yourself, shop, pay bills and use as a tool for completing errands. For many people using the web to complete these daily tasks is a step towards greater independence, yet if sites are inaccessible, people with disabilities can easily be excluded from using these functions, which are considered by many to be normal parts of everyday life.

What are the benefits of having an accessible site?

If your website is inaccessible to those with disabilities, you are potentially excluding nearly one-fifth of the population from visiting it, not to mention limiting your potential customer base. Online grocery store shopping, for example, could be hugely beneficial to those with disabilities, and if you take the time to make your site accessible, you are likely to be rewarded with valuable customer loyalty—especially now, while accessible sites stand out from the crowd.

According to [W3C](#), UK supermarket Tesco increased their revenue by £13 million (almost \$19 million U.S. dollars) a year by making their website accessible to visually impaired users. Incidentally, they found that users without visual disabilities also preferred the more accessible variation of their site. As many can discover through A/B testing, minor changes to a site can have a huge impact on conversion rate; you're likely to receive an increase in conversion from all users if the general preference is for the site redesign.

In fact, there are many benefits to making your website accessible. In addition to broadening your customer base and increasing usability, accessibility also helps search engine crawlers read and interpret page content, so you'll potentially achieve greater visibility and put your business in front of a larger audience.

Most importantly, having an accessible site means you're opening the door to users who would find it difficult or even impossible to work with you if your site were inaccessible, and thus, you're promoting an inclusive online community.

What does the future hold in terms of web accessibility?

It's very likely that in years to come, accessibility guidelines and laws will be implemented, as discussions surrounding compliance are currently ongoing. Rather than wait until these come to fruition, you may want to start developing your site now. Due to the likelihood of upcoming regulations, there have been some attempts to prey on corporations; a number of companies have received letters threatening legal action based on inaccessibility — be wary and always contact your legal counsel immediately for advice on how to handle these matters. If you have any questions regarding your own legal exposure, please contact your legal counsel for a full review of your legal options, duties, and obligations.

What will I need to do to make my site accessible?

Depending on the needs and adjustments for accessibility, site preparations might entail the following:

- Whole site audit color reskin or re-theme
- Updating media content with closed captioning and audio/video transcripts
- Going through content and adding in additional text

- Alternatives to visuals Reworking page functionality to better improve usability
- Redesigning components of the site to account for all user types
- Strategizing content and layout to have better organization and readability
- Creating better context for links and clearer messaging
- Form restructure for easier flow and understanding
- Full site overhaul to resolve dated techniques such as table layouts

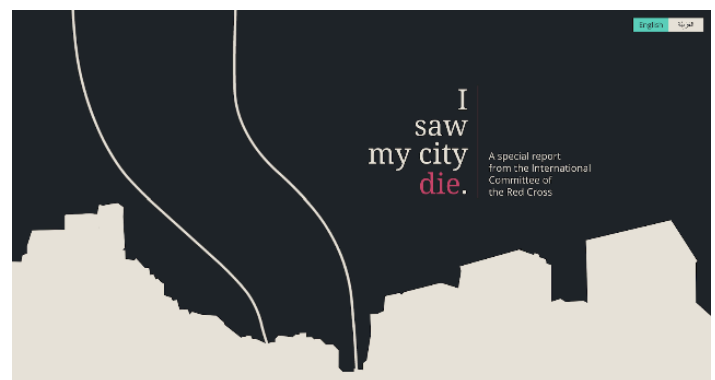
What's the standard?

Every business must comply with some level of accessibility compliance. There are specific requirements for federal sites via [Section 508](#), an amendment to the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act. Most other U.S. sites need to comply with [ADA](#), the Americans with Disabilities Act. For European sites or sites serving an international user-base, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG](#)) provide a single shared standard for web content accessibility internationally. To determine which laws and regulations apply to you, [Americaneagle.com](#) strongly recommends that you consult with legal counsel.

Best practices for web accessibility.

It's important to remember that accessibility is not only a consideration throughout development, but also during the design phase.

Readable



I saw my city die. Webby Winner 2018, Best Practices.

To make sure your site is easily readable, you might want to consider the following:

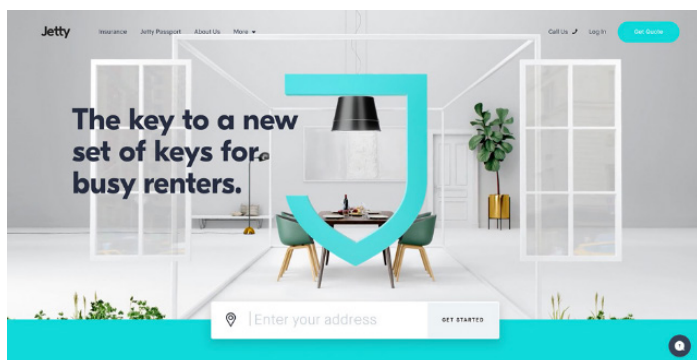
Color contrast ratios: There are many different levels of color blindness and low vision, not to mention unsatisfactory monitors that will mean the user have difficulty reading content in low contrast colors. Red on blue is notoriously difficult to read, as are colors with low contrast ratios such as light blue on white. Aspects such as font weight, and whether the font is bold or capitalized can also influence how easy or difficult text is to read.

Font size: Older sites often used 10 or 12-pixel fonts, but over time most site designers have realized that in terms of font, bigger is better. The default font size for most browsers is 16 pixels — this is typically preferred by all users and makes the site more accessible to those with low vision.

Hover-over and focus states: Hover-over refers to when the area which you are hovering over with your mouse is highlighted, and a focus state is the keyboard equivalent of this; a focus state, highlighting the text you are on, is given by some sites when you tab through using a keyboard. The focus state is more often overlooked than the hover-over function, but might be considered more important because a mouse provides a cursor for an extra indication of where you have read up to. Many users find a keyboard easier to use than a mouse, but a lack of focus state can mean some sites are too difficult for them to traverse.

True text: Designing your site with the intent of using true text rather than image-based text will make it easier for everyone to access it. If your text is in an image and the user can't read it, they cannot change it, but the user can increase the default font size of true text. Text in images can also be problematic for users on mobile devices, which may account for almost half of our audience.

Understandable



Jetty. Webby Winner 2018, Professional Services and Self Promotion.

It is important to ensure your content is understandable, easy to comprehend, and broken into a simple format.

Forms: Forms can be particularly frustrating for users if they are unclear and difficult to fill out. Making forms easily accessible is beneficial to everyone as you'll get more form entries and your customers will remain calmer during the form-filling process. Proper error and success messaging is key to decreasing user confusion. If a form is filled out incorrectly and the user is presented with an error message that doesn't make sense to them, the user might give up on the form. Human sentences within error messages are essential to easily rectifying form errors. In-line descriptions of errors — error messaging that highlights the input area where the user went wrong — allow the user to easily identify their mistake without having to search through the page. Offering plenty of error information not only assists those using screen readers and those who are color blind, but also makes the process simpler for all users.

Link text: Avoid vague link text, for example “read more” or “click here.” Make it clear what your user is accessing when they click hyperlinked text—if your users must rely only on visual context, some users will get lost. Screen readers won't necessarily know what unclear links relate to. Side note: some of this can be accounted for in development and is not only up to your site designers.

Logical layout: Every page should have a logical layout that is structured so users can traverse the page without getting lost. User-friendly navigation and sort order is essential to reducing bounce rate and retaining the attention of all users.

Help text: Help text can be read if you click the small question mark found next to certain words or phrases. Help text is often found on forms but can be found all around some sites, adding in explanations of how to use different complex features or functionality. Use of help text can make form filling and website use much simpler for all users.

Jump-to functionality: Jump-to functionality allows the user to jump to certain areas of the page—for example, “jump to top,” is efficient and improves navigation for all users. Adding in options to skip repetitive links such as navigation, breadcrumbs, etc. can let non-mouse users easily jump to the main content of pages.

These are just some of the major items to account for should you choose to make your site accessible. All of these design suggestions offer extra benefits to all users, as opposed to limiting your design team or hindering their creativity. As ease of use is essential to site success, it is often the case that implementing accessibility is a win-win situation for all.

A11y common mistakes.

Even if you think your site is accessible, you may still be making some of the common accessibility mistakes listed below. The shift to becoming accessible is not always straightforward or easy. Take the time to maintain an accessible site and constantly ensure that it follows WCAG, ADA or Section 508 guidelines appropriate for your business.

Perceivable

Anything visual should provide a fall back as an alternative source of information.

Alt text vs. alt attribute. Not all images need alternative text but all images need alternative attributes. If the image is not adding any value to the content and is purely decorative, there's no need for alt text.

Subtitles and audio descriptions. Videos and transcripts need subtitles and audio descriptions. However, word-for-word descriptions might not always be best practice. If you visually display something important and don't explain it in words, someone with visual impairments is still missing important context.

Inaccessible PDFs and downloadables. Although accessibility guidelines apply to websites, PDFs and other downloadable content must also meet the requirements.

Operable

Most of us use a mouse but there are plenty of users out there who rely on other ways to navigate websites.

Missing keyboard functionality. Accessibility via a keyboard is often ignored on many areas of a website.

Timer-based content. Carousels and other timer-based content are not friendly to screen readers and are generally not accessible.

Ambiguous external links. Links are often used to point to external resources using vague phrases like "Learn More". These are ambiguous and often leave users in the dark. Learn more about what?

Understandable

Inaccessible forms are a major but common issue.

Attribute. Regardless of what it is, you should always state what language you are using on your site.

Unexpected inputs. Select dropdowns immediately change pages which can be confusing and unwanted on screen readers.

Error handling. Poor error handling and nonexistent labels on forms due to improper HTML/ARIA ties.

The major benefits of accessibility

Creating an accessible site can seem like a monstrous task. Not only that, but you might not deem it very important to you or your company. In reality, there are plenty of worthwhile benefits associated with creating and maintaining an accessible site, other than just compliance.

Ease of mind

Put your best face forward.

Minimize legal issues. No one likes legal issues. Having a process in place to maintain standards can get you ahead of tenuous and expensive legal struggles.

Set for scale. Creating universal accessibility means you already have international standards in place. One less thing to consider when scaling globally.

It's the right thing to do. Living without easy and simple access to the internet is a hardship. Accessible sites make people's lives easier.

Increased user base.

Remember that one in five Americans is living a disability.



Improved SEO. Screen readers work like search engines; increased text content improves SEO. Better user experience leads to reduced bounce rates and increased session time, which also improves SEO.

Set Yourself Apart. If users with disabilities hit a site that's inaccessible, they will bounce. Be the accessible option in your marketplace.

Increased Conversions

Usability focus helps everyone.

Diversified interactions. Creating multiples ways for users to engage means longer interactions on your site.

Expedite workflows. Conversions happen quickly on a clean and easy interface.

Feedback loops. More ways to interact means you have feedback on what users are looking for and what users you aren't catering to.

“Web accessibility is a process, not a single project. Using automated testing tools like Siteimprove help you monitor your efforts towards compliance across multiple sites and provide guidance on how to fix issues you do find.”

– Jenn Chadwick, Lead Accessibility Strategist, Siteimprove

WordPress tips.

Accessibility isn't always straightforward. Here are some generic rules to follow when trying to implement accessibility on your WordPress site:

Add alternative text to important images

Alt text (alternative text) are used within HTML code to describe the appearance of an image on a web page. Visually impaired users rely on alt text for context about the image on a page. While some images are primarily decorative, some are essential for understanding the content. The WC3 Accessibility Initiative offers helpful guidelines for appropriate text alternatives.

Keyboard accessibility

One way to make sure key parts of your content are accessible to everyone is to make sure that links are accessible from a keyboard and not just a mouse or trackpad. You'll also need to

get rid of keyboard traps that can't be navigated away with only a keyboard.

Implement skip links



A skip link is a special link that is hidden on your site until it comes into **focus** via the tab key or a screen reader. This gives nontraditional content consumers the opportunity to skip blocks of content. We tend to habitually skip past content that is standard for every site, like menus. Skip links are an A-level standard for WCAG 2.0, you are required by law to have them on your site.

Provide visible focus for keyboard users

It is often difficult for keyboard users to tell where they are on the page when tabbing through. Themes often reset the default focus style, reducing accessibility. Developers need to set their own focus style.

Make dynamic content accessible

Dynamic content, such as video, audio, and carousel sliders, should not be set to autoplay or change action without direct user interaction. Any downloadable media such as PDFs, documents, audio or video content and the accompanying buttons that might trigger these options should all be described. Any video or audio content should also include transcripts, captions, or sign language.

Use a checklist

Accessibility is expansive and can be a bit overwhelming. Use a checklist to make sure you're not forgetting something and therefore losing users. This [checklist](#), which is based on the WCAG guidelines, is helpful.

WordPress plugins and tools for accessibility.

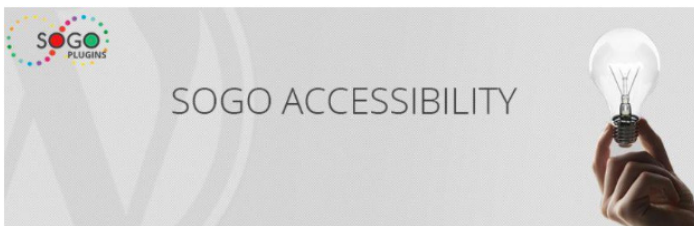
The WordPress plugin repository is expansive and growing. There are plenty of plugins, themes and tools to help you keep your site accessible. Remember that almost all accessibility tools are not the end-all, be-all of site accessibility. Making your WordPress site accessible will take some manual work and will need to be maintained regularly.

WA11Y



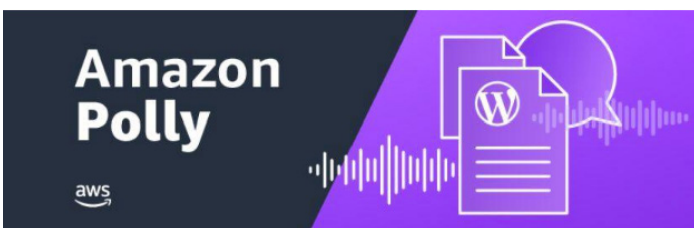
The [wa11y](#) plugin will provide you with a toolbox of resources to help you improve accessibility on your site. Tools included in the plugin are [totA11y](#), an accessibility visualization toolkit, [WAVE](#), and modifiable filters.

SOGO ACCESSIBILITY



[SOGO Accessibility](#) will scan your entire site code and add the support of the accessibility automatically. The admin will be able to add/delete features.

AMAZON POLLY



[Amazon Polly](#) gives a voice to your content by adding an audio version at the top of the page (also available on iTunes!) and/or

translating your post into different languages. Using the plugin, you can choose from a variety of life-like voices and accents.

SITEIMPROVE



The seamless integration between [Siteimprove](#) and WordPress streamlines workflow efficiencies for your web team. With the plugin, your team can fix errors and optimize content directly within the editing environment. Once the detected issues have been assessed, you can re-check the relevant page in real-time and determine if further actions are needed.

WP ACCESSIBILITY



[WP Accessibility](#) adds helpful features with a minimum amount of setup upon installation. WP Accessibility works despite your WordPress theme but can be adjusted according to your theme's needs. Some features that can be enabled are: skip links, add languages and text direction, add a toolbar, add appropriate description to images, and alt attributes.

WAVE

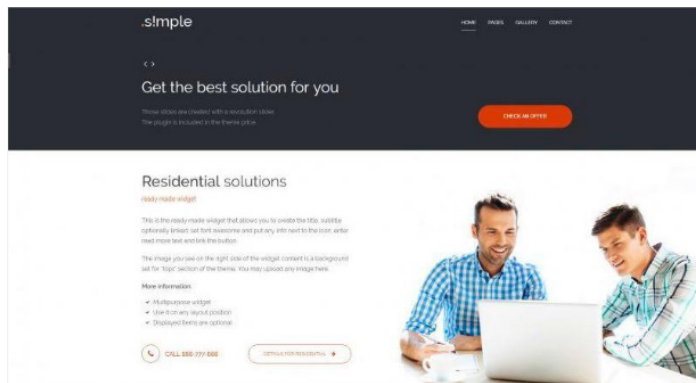


[WAVE](#) is one of the originals in the accessibility field. Originally developed in 2001, this tool will evaluate the accessibility of your site simply by plugging in the domain.

WordPress themes for accessibility

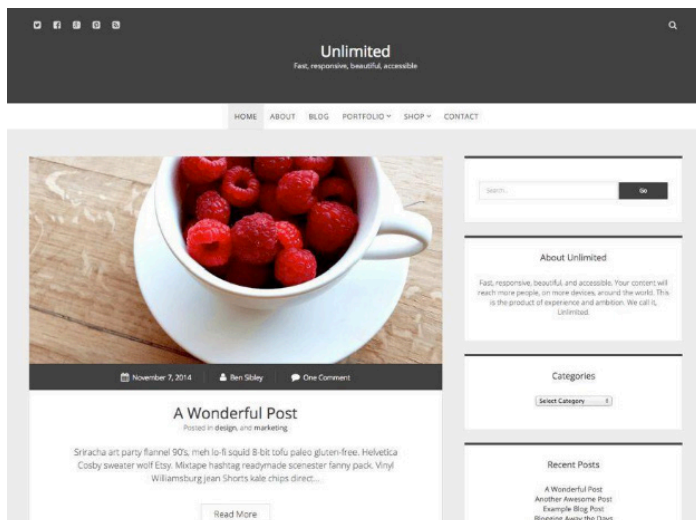
There are millions of things to consider when choosing a WordPress theme. You're going to want one that is optimized for SEO, aesthetically pleasing and WCAG compliant. It's important to take into consideration not just the 'accessibility-label' but whether the theme is suitable for accessibility-focused design. There are plenty out there but here are a few suggestions:

SIMPLE



The **Simple** theme is ideal for small and medium sized businesses. This theme offers ready-made widgets for social icons, short info, testimonials, image carousel, team members or contact form. Also included are rich shortcode, typography and fast loading design.

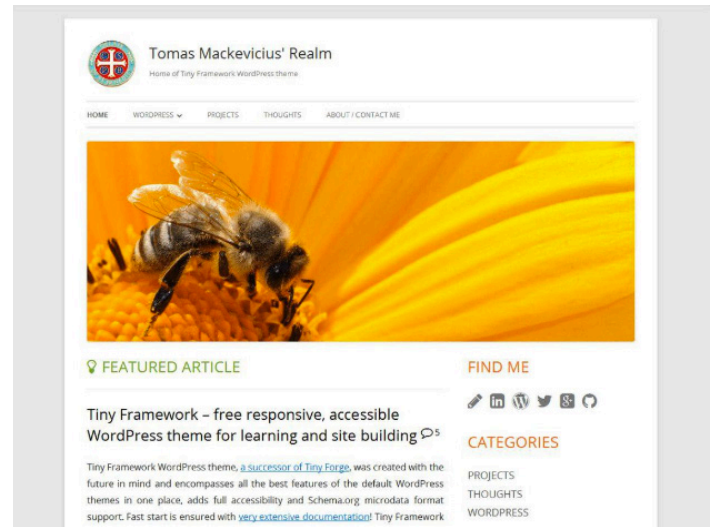
UNLIMITED



Unlimited is a beautiful and accessible WordPress theme. On the backdrop of simple, dark design, your content will stand out to the user. This free, minimalistic theme is perfect for the

avid blogger, magazine, personal site or content-rich website. Unlimited is a cost effective option as well. Because the theme is free, you can extend it to any number sites.

Tiny FrameWork



Tiny Framework adds full accessibility and Structured Data Markup with Schema.org microdata format support. Tiny Framework features elegant responsive mobile-first design, HTML5 ready structure of Underscores, custom per-post headers, custom logo, three-footer widgets, FontAwesome icon webfont and Google Fonts support. Included with the main theme is a child theme, giving developers the ability to experiment with design. With its unique "Coding Tips System" Tiny Framework helps to understand how to extend parent themes and build your own child themes, tweaking them the way you want.

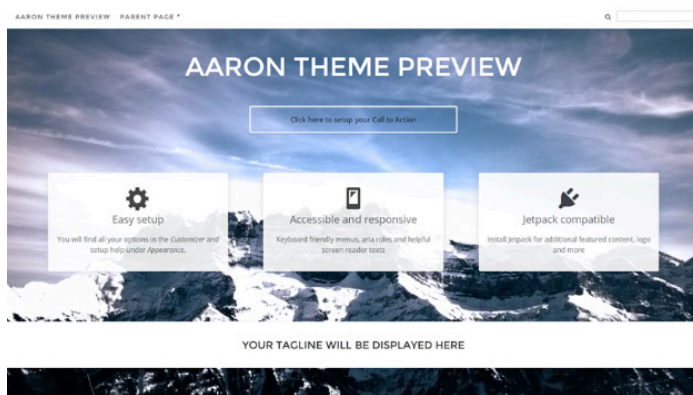
While this theme is fantastic on its own, we also recommend using it as a learning tool for those learning to develop and optimize accessible WordPress sites.

CARMACK



The **Carmack** theme is simultaneously minimalistic and hard to ignore. This theme is perfect as a magazine theme, suitable for video games, movies, music and other visual magazine sites. This theme is built off of the idea of giving the user the simplest journey to view and consume content. With beautiful typography, stunning design, and attention to detail, the Carmack theme is intensely relevant. Other features include localization, GDPR compliance theme privacy and custom CSS.

Aaron

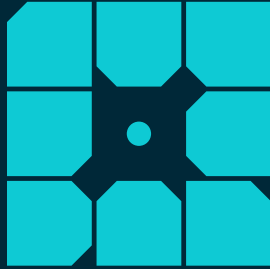


Aaron is a multi-purpose, accessible theme. The theme has two optional menus (including a social menu), logo upload, six page templates, and three widget areas that will hold any number of widgets. This added level of customizability allows you to use Aaron as a theme on a blog or company website. This theme is free and compatible with the JetPack plugin, WooCommerce, and bbPress.



About Americaneagle.com

Americaneagle.com is an industry leader in website design, development, hosting and digital marketing—essentially a one-stop shop offering a full range of solutions for any organization looking to succeed in their online endeavors including help with ADA compliance. They provide site audits and testing, web content guidelines, and remediation services. With over 400 professionals, Americaneagle.com is a family owned, privately held company with a long history of profitability and stability. Since 1995, Americaneagle.com has completed more than 12,000 Web projects for nearly every type and size of organization in nearly every industry, including small companies, start-ups, Fortune 500 companies, professional sports teams, and manufacturers of niche products. Americaneagle.com, Inc., founded in 1978, is based in Des Plaines, Illinois, with offices throughout the country including Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Ft. Lauderdale, and Washington D.C.. www.americaneagle.com



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. WP Engine's combination of tech innovation and an award-winning team of WordPress experts are trusted by over 70,000 companies across 130 countries to provide counsel and support, helping brands create world-class digital experiences. 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.

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