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LEXI MOSTEK:

Hello, everyone we are gonna go ahead and get started. Welcome to our part one webinar on Plugins. My name is Lexi. And I'm just gonna be kind of the technical support behind this webinar. We are so excited that you are here today. And I just wanna remind everyone of some few housekeeping items.

First and foremost, we are recording this webinar, and we will share the recording with you after the event. If you have any questions for our panel and for Doc, who is our moderator and host today, Please use the question and answer feature in your zoom toolbar other than that. If you have any comments or wanna kind of join in the conversation, we have our webinar chat going feel free to hop in there. Tell us where you're tuning in from, and all of that jazz

With that being said, this is part one of a 3 part series. If you're registered for Part one, you're welcome to join us on Part 2 and part 3. Today our topic is going to be plugins 101 taking you through the basics of plugins and everything Wordpress, thanks to those that have answered our poll, giving us a great idea of kind of what your knowledge is with plugins.

and then for the next 2 weeks we'll be having some additional sessions. Next week we will be talking on making the most of e-commerce and woocommerce plugins with a great panel of experts there and then. On Tuesday, the twenty-ninth, we will kick off artificial intelligence plugins what we're seeing what to be leery of. So lots of topics and lots of plugins coming at you this month.

With that being said, this is our lovely panel, today, moderated and hosted by DOC POP, who's a content creator and podcast host here at WP Engine, and then the rest of our panel you can see listed above at this point. I'm gonna turn it over to Doc. Doc, you can take the stage and take it away from here

DOC POP: right on. Thank you so much. Lexi. Howdy, everyone. I'm your host. Doc. I host a show called Press This for Wp Engine. It's a weekly podcast as well. I do a live stream called the Torque Social Hour for Torque Mag.io I've been using wordpress for about 15 years, just as my personal site of choice, my blog of choice and I will be on location with the rest of the torque team and several folks from WP Engine at Wordcamp US. Will be filming videos all throughout the event and posting those to social and as well to our Youtube channel.

And that's it that I'm your host for today, and let's get on to the agenda for what we're going to be discussing today. We are going to have a discussion with the panelists later on. And we're

gonna ask these experts questions about how they feel, best practices, things that you should know about plugins. After that we're gonna get to Q&A's from the audience. But we're gonna kick this off with just a very high level guide to how to get into installing plugins and maintaining plugins just for folks who may not know may not have gone through the steps yet. That's what our goal is for the beginning part of this. So let's get into that

Alright. And here we have just some examples of some of the popular plugins that you can find. These are all viewable on wordpress.org/plugins. This happens to be, I think, the 12 most popular plugins currently in the store. You've got things like [Yoast Akismet Jetpack](#). And what a Plugin does for Wordpress, is it? It adds new flavors, new possibilities to your wordpress site. So you can have a wordpress site, and you can turn it into an e-commerce site by installing [WooCommerce](#). You can improve your SEO by and installing [Yoast SEO](#), which will help give you all the tools to get better. Search engine optimization tools like [Akismet](#) are great for reducing spam. There's a lot of stuff here. So we are just showing you currently the most popular plugins in the free Wordpress Plugin repository. And we're gonna talk about later, how you can find other plugins as well, and how you can find plugins other than the popular plugins.

Let's go on to the next slide

Alright, so, installing a Plugin. What you always want to do is open your dashboard and you can find that top left here and click on the dashboard. And then you're gonna scroll down to plugins, and add new.

Now from here you'll already see some suggested Plugins. These are the featured plugins that most users see. You can also click on popular to see the list that we were just looking at with [Yoast](#) and [contact form 7](#) and all of those. You can also, as you're going through here, you can choose to search plugins, which is what I think most people do. I don't think you're gonna just find stuff from the Plugin suggestions and go from there. This is a good starting point, but most people go here and type in something. In this case I'm looking for a post duplicator.

And this is [Yoast duplicate post](#), which allows you to easily take a previous post that you published and create a new copy of it. But from here you're actually seeing all the things that show up with duplicate. And so we can look here, Yoast duplicate post was recently updated about a week ago.

That's the thing that you always want to find is something that's being maintained. Something's compatible with your website. You can check on ratings and kinda compare all the different duplicate posts. You can click on more info and be able to see more details from here as well.

And from here. If you like. You have chosen a plugin. You can click the install now button from here, and it is installed. So let's go to the next slide.

When you're choosing your plugins, you can select more details that opens up that pop up and like I was saying earlier. The things you're looking for are, is it compatible with your current

version? From this panel you can find installation suggestions which oftentimes installation is just as easy as as installing and activating it. But sometimes it's a little more complex. Reviews are gonna be great. Take them with a grain of salt. You wanna go through quite a few and get an idea of what you're looking at when you're installing a plugin, especially from the Wordpress Plugin Repository. Some of these are maintained from large companies, and some of them are single developers, and sometimes the single developer ones are doing just as good a job with being able to maintain and support everything. But you can really get a good idea from checking out the reviews. And you know, on a very high level, just checking out the stars at the top.

As far as best practices. Once you've installed an update, it's gonna once you've installed a plugin, it's gonna be showing up on your Plugin page. And this is also where you can access things like updates, you can see which of your plugins need to be updated. It is very important to keep, in my opinion, all of your plugins up to date and out of date. Plugin could mean security risk. It could have bugs that have been patched since then. What I recommend is using enabled auto updates. And I just do this for everything. So here I'm bulk selecting.

I'm going to quickly, save, if you're a WP Engine customer, then you know that oftentimes, before you make a big change, you have a chance to save your state. I'm just gonna create a simple little backup here. And a few minutes later, I will have gotten an email saying that everything is ready to go. And I can safely make changes to my site. Know that I have a safe copy. But, like I said, enabling auto updates is a great way to make sure that your sites just automatically updates itself. And I think this is II think it's a great thing this back in the past this would have been maybe a riskier thing. But at this point Plugins tend to work pretty stable.

I really recommend using enable auto updates. And if you do have issues. You can always go back to your previous state if your host allows that now, as well as keeping Plugins up to date, I do recommend that you deactivate plugins that you're no longer using, and if you're deactivating them, might as well delete them too. You really don't need to have a bunch of plugins running or not even running. But just on your site that you're not using anymore.

It's just the best practice too. If you're not using a Plugin. Just go ahead and deactivate it. Delete it. II used to have a lot less plugins. I have a lot on my personal site right now, because I'm connected to the fediverse, which has a whole suite of plugins. This one I just wanna show a shout out to [Wapuu Dashboard Pet](#). This is a plugin. It's free in the repository. If you install it and activate it, it helps. Let you know that your site is up to date, and it gives it does so by showing you a cute whapu on the bottom of your page. It's like a little mochi pet for Wordpress. I love it so that's gonna be it for, like my one, my one shout out to [Wapuu dashboard pet](#) for just encouraging us to keep our sites up to date.

And let's go on to one more slide.

Everything I've shown you so far has been from the Wordpress Repository, and I searched from it within the dashboard. You can also download sites from other sites. So in this case I'm on [every alt](#) which is using AI to help provide alternative descriptions for images you download from

there, and then you go to Plugins. Add new and upload Plugin and the file that you downloaded should be a Zip file, because you can only upload zip files as plugins. So make sure that you don't like uncompress it and try to find something from there. You're gonna upload the whole zip, file and click install now.

And you can install from other websites like I said, Wordpress repository, or just using the dashboard search. Those are kinda how I do a lot of my search. But there are other places you can go. You wanna make sure that you're relying on trusted websites. People that you know, developers that you know, that have good reputations. Sometimes you might find stuff on Github that you might play around with. That's an example of someplace that you might download. [WooCommerce](#) has its own extension store that you can download from

As well you know, professional Plugin developers often host their own sites, including every alt which in this case I believe they're hosting another own cause. It's still they're still kind of making the product perfect before they put it into the repository. But other times you might actually have a developer who has a paid product, and the only way to be able to get that would be to go through their site.

And finally we're just gonna give a shout out to [WP Engine Smart Plugin Manager](#) this is a tool that helps keep track. Update your themes and plugins. This tool also does a visual regression test. Now, the enable auto updates that I was talking about before is a great way to just be able to kind of keep things moving smoothly and uploading updating plugins. But occasionally you might find that there's some change to your site that breaks. Well, the visual regression test is actually gonna do that test for you. So if you have the smart Plugin manager installed. Then it's gonna automatically update at night. And it's gonna run a quick visual test to just check the layout of your page. And if it looks like something's broken if it looks like blocks aren't working right? Or, you know, there's some bad error with your site. It's gonna automatically roll back for you and just let you know. Hey? Like we tried installing this, and we notice this issue, and you can go forward manually if you want.

DOC POP: Alright. And with that I think that is just a very high level kind of guide into how to install Plugins. And since we have these experts here today. These are all folks who have been in the Plugin community for a while and have a lot of great insight. I'm going to start this off with a couple of questions for them, and then we're gonna get to your questions. So remember to drop those in the chat, and we'll try to add those at the end of the show.

We have several great folks here from Brizy, Carimus, OptinMonster and Gravity Forms. Let's get started. I'm gonna let each guest introduce themselves and just tell us about themselves. And maybe if you don't mind panelists, the first Plugin you can remember installing on your wordpress site just quickly, if you can remember that. So, Dimi, let's start with you. Why don't you tell us about yourself?

DIMI BAITANCIUC:

Hey, guys! Thanks for having me, Doc. Hi, everyone! I'm Dimi Baitanciuc I am the CEO and one of the co-founders here at [Brizy](#). We are developing this, you might have heard of it. It's a wordpress website builder called Brizy. It's a plugin. So you will install it as as Doc very kindly showed us in his tutorial. And you'll be using it to create your own website.

I'm in this space in the WordPress space, I think from 2,007, and together with my partners, we've built a couple of businesses across the years around Wordpress, around this excellent ecosystem, with [Brizy](#), with the pixel kit, and in 2018, I think we started the [Brizy](#) for wordpress.

And here we are in 2023 still going strong. And yeah, that's that's all I think

DOC POP: right on. Did you say the first plugin I missed that.

DIMI BAITANCIUC: To be honest, I can't remember. It was so long ago. So it's there 16 years ago.

DOC POP: yeah, if you remember later, we'll get to it. Daniel, let's get to you. Why don't you tell us about yourself? And if you can remember the first plugin that you installed.

DANIEL DAYTON: Yeah, sure. I am Daniel Dayton. I work for [Carimus](#) in Raleigh, North Carolina. We're an agency. So we do from like full service agencies. So we're branding all the way development of websites and applications. We also have a product called [JouleBug](#), which is an app that is a kind of social engagement to promote sustainable life decisions.

And then yeah. So we are more of a consumer in most cases of plugins. In an agency setting. But we also maintain a couple of plugins internally. And yeah, the first plugin I remember installing was probably [contact form 7](#). But since we've kind of switched to [gravity forms](#). So that's yeah, that's me.

DOC POP: Right on yeah, [contact form 7](#) is one of those popular plugins that we saw. And we were, we were researching them a little bit. And it's kind of funny. That was a very popular plugin early on, that's still around. It's got this long tail and that's just a single developer who's maintaining that like one of the most popular plugins in the repository. Angie, can you tell us about yourself in your first Plugin?

ANGIE MEEKER:

Sure I'm ANGIE MEEKER, general manager at [optinmonster](#) and [trust pulse](#) and optin monster is a SaaS company that works with WordPress as well. That helps you grow your email list and leads and sales from the traffic already coming to your website and TrustPulse is a social proof app for ecommerce stores that helps. Your people understand what a, what people are buying on your website helps visitors understand what people are buying on your website.

I've been in the wordpress industry since a really long time. I think. Since maybe like 2005 / 2006, almost the beginning, and helped start our meetup here in Columbus, Ohio, and then moved on to helping organize our Wordcamp and helping then some of the other cities in Ohio start their meetups and word camps so I've been around for a while and excited to be here. And the first Plugin. I'm pretty sure it was [akismet](#). It's always the first Plugin I install on any site. So, I bet that was probably it.

DOC POP: Angie, thanks for organizing events, and also shout out to the Ohio-ans. I know that we have quite a few in the chat. So yeah. And Travis, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your first Plugin that you remember installing?

TRAVIS TOTZ: Yeah, absolutely. I'm Travis Totz, Director of Brand & Marketing at [Gravity Forms](#). Located in Virginia Beach and Virginia, which is where our offices are. But we're generally a remote based company.

Gravity forms is our flagship tool. We also last year acquired [gravity flow](#), which is a marketing automation tool that's built on top of gravity forms. And actually, we're in the process of releasing [gravity smtp](#), which is an smtp tool that we're adding to our plugin suite. Been in the industry like Angie, OG to the space, about 2005/2006 and kind of started building themes, and then, kind of continued to work my way through through various iterations in the space.

My first plugin, I think was probably [Breadcrumb NavXT](#), which John had built. Who's a Minnesota just like myself. Great plugin, I had this project agency project. They need bread crumbs. I was like, what? What's breadcrumb anyways? Fantastic Plugin. Still in the repo today. Actually. So

DOC POP: I love seeing the other panelists. I'll nod their heads. I think some people remember this. And speaking of panelists, let's switch to our panelist view here, and I'm gonna ask a few questions. I think first off I want to know how many plugins are too many plugins I was mentioning on my slides. I feel embarrassed. I have like 20 plugins now, and I used to have this hard core rule. You know, 10 plugins keep it limited. And then I got the activity pub suite, which is a suite of like 7 other plugins, and that's just broken everything for me. But I want to hear from an expert, Dimi. Why don't you tell us? What do you think is too many plugins?

DIMI BAITANCIUC: but it's it's hard to give you an exact number, right? Because this, to this phrase, can vary depending on multiple things or multiple factors.

What I would try to to do is keep to keep a very tight grip on your on your plugins right so and do your job with as few as possible. Right? We always advise our customer clients and friends, and whoever asked us or me sort of to keep in mind the couple of a couple of points when you are installing new plugins on your website, because the decision is sort of taken from that

perspective. So, for example, if you're thinking about the performance, each plugin is adding some code on your website, right? So that can affect the loading times and overall performance of your website or and the and the code quality that is put there. Security is another concern, right? We I don't want to be the naysayer here, but the plugins potentially introduce right? Potentially introduce an entry point to hackers. So if you have many, many plugins that, that might be a concern that you need to keep in mind.

Also maintenance, If you have multiple plugins, you need to maintain them, update them, ensure the wordpress compatibility. And this is another factor that you need to keep in mind so just to wrap it up I would use only essential plugins that do the job for your website or for your business that are also built by reputable companies. Because this is important. So you can ensure that the code is of quality and keep them updated. This is important to keep them up to date.

You need to aim for the quality rather than quantity, and always back everything up. This is this is all I have to say about too many plug plugins, Umhm

DOC POP: and and Dimi. you brought up a point that maybe it's not necessarily about the quantity of plugins that you have, but making sure that you, if you do have, you know, plugins, that they're all that are being used or things you're using, and that none of them are security risk. And in particular, there, you wanna see, if like a plugin hasn't been updated in 4 years, maybe reevaluate if you still want to be using that plugin. It might be literally the only Plugin that does that one thing you do, but quite often you'll find other. So maybe it's not necessarily about the quantity. But we do have a poll up how many plugins is too many plugins? And in the chat I'm seeing a lot of people say 80 as pretty normal.

So I'm feeling a little better about my 20 on my personal site. Dan, I'm gonna ask you the same question. Do you have any thoughts on how many plugins is too many?

DANIEL DAYTON: Yeah, sure, I mean, If you know, kind of just echoing what Jimmy said. I think it really kind of depends. Sometimes the count is a little misleading, because, for instance, like we've got reforms, you know, there's a lot of extension. So you're not really adding a ton of functionality. But you might have that count get pretty high with some of the extensions. So like, I think the most important thing, whenever we're assessing plugins is really like what functionality you're trying to get, and then make sure that we either find a plugin that covers several different things we're trying to do with the plugin or one that, like you're saying is reputable. So we try to really limit the ones we introduce, just because, as you know, we're client sites. We need to make sure that they're we're not introducing any security vulnerabilities or any, you know, potential. Like we're, we're hinging a bunch of our business logic on someone else's plugin that's not being supported. That's an issue for us. So, like everyone else is said here, just make sure that the plugins being you know, updated, and as, you know, as much as you can that you know it has good code quality.

Usually the stars like we've already said, or is a good way to make sure that you. It's a good plugin. But yeah, I mean we have. We do have sites, especially once you get the e-comm space where you know we're +30 plugins. Without doubt, just to kind of get all the functionality the customer wants. But for the most part, I think the least plugins the better, just because, as Dimi said, you know, you're introducing a bunch of code that's running on every page load and gonna have an effective performance. So you're just like a hard look at what you're trying to accomplish and make sure that you know you're making wise choices.

We obviously have customers that will just go ahead, and, you know, add, like 5 different page builders, just because they want to try them out. And this is on a pro production site. So like those sort of decisions, you know, if you have a staging environment, try the plugins out there first. But in general, yeah, the less the better. In my opinion, you know, if you can do it. So that's my 2 cents.

DOC POP:

And in the chat Lisa Ryan says, I don't think you can pick a number just depends on the site which I think we're kind of finding here. And also, I saw a message about the woocommerce plugins. Oftentimes, when you start getting into the extensions there then, you might have some crazy like there's a lot more so like if my site was a woocommerce site, I might have far more plugins than I than I have now, so just I guess the general rule of thumb is, make sure that you're only using what you need, and you're making sure that you're keeping on top of how up to date they are. And deleting and deactivating things you're no longer using.

DOC POP:

Now, if a plugin isn't working as expected, if someone runs into an issue, what is the best way for that user to handle it? I'm gonna pass this question to Travis and see if you have any thoughts there.

TRAVIS TOTZ:

Yeah, troubleshoot troubleshoot troubleshoot.

Generally speaking, if a Plugin isn't working, it's usually a conflict. So you know, the easiest way to try to break down that barrier is to troubleshoot against other installed plugins and sometimes installed themes.

You know. Oftentimes, if it's a plugin that has functionality built into it no front end views, you're you're probably dealing with maybe a Javascript conflict of some sort against another Plugin. I often would tell people, one by one, just activate alongside something else, and then see if it's working that generally is, is the easiest way to go about it, even if it takes some time.

You know, depending on the level of knowledge. You know, you can definitely do things like install a plugin to actually help you troubleshoot another plugin. There's things like [query monitor](#). Things like that that actually exist some in the repo, and some, of course, outside the

repo, the.org repo that is, that will allow you to actually see some conflicts. So you know, there, they'll give you a flag or actually show red status. Usually it's like I said, you know, code related conflict, javascript or otherwise. So, yeah, troubleshooting might take you some time.

DOC POP:

and if you do find an issue with the Plugin, when is it good to reach out to the developers? Is that like a welcomed thing for most developers?

TRAVIS TOTZ:

Yeah, I mean, I think you know, a lot of hosts nowadays will do auto updates. Right? So usually, you know, I would say, one of the first steps should be, you know. Make sure that your plugins are up to date. If you're seeing a conflict, and if not, start that troubleshooting path.

And most of the time like, if you still can't get it to work after a troubleshooting phase. And you really need this specific plugin, check if it's been updated. And I'm sure we'll probably get to that in various conversations today. But check if it's been updated in a while, if it hasn't, or if there's maybe kind of a relatively important issue that you're seeing on your site, and you want to let other people know, but reach out. You know, it's important for us Plugin and authors theme and Plugin authors to really know when there's issues so that we can patch them and address them for our customers right?

Like hundreds of thousands of sites. You know millions of sites, in some cases running various plugins. It's important. You know, these types of things are important to definitely try to communicate. Obviously, we're all human. These pieces of code in most cases are written by human hand, maybe by AI. You never know but in a lot of cases written by human hand. So there are things that you're gonna see. You know, it's important to try to share that knowledge when you can, and when you're running into something. So folks like us can help and fix issues.

DOC POP:

And, Travis, you were talking about something I hadn't thought about which I've done, and I think a lot of this is done. If there's an issue. Oftentimes it comes down to 2 plugins not playing well with each other, and you were saying, you go through and deactivate one at a time. I do want to give a shout out to Peter Bailey in the comments. Who says he prefers doing a binary search on a development site, where he deactivates half of his plugins and checks the site. If it's still working, it goes and does the other half and then narrows it down. That's some that's some smart thinking.

TRAVIS TOTZ:

There, that is smart thinking. Yeah, that's troubleshooting. That's a great tactic, for sure.

DOC POP:

Now, earlier on in the show. I talked about how there are places you can get plugins for other plugins like you can go to the woocommerce's site and get there they call them woocommerce extensions. There are sometimes ecosystems around a plugin, and it's very interesting. You get

into something like woocommerce, or I guess Mailchimp has some other ones. Th, there's all these different ones that there's the plugin. And then there's this ecosystem around it. And Angie, I was actually wondering if you could tell us a little bit about this because of your experience with OptinMonster, which is oftentimes one of those plugins that does work with other plugins. Right?

ANGIE MEEKER:

That's right. Yeah. So when we're talking about how many plugins is too many, there's a temptation. You should know this for Plugin authors. There's a temptation to just cram it all into one big plugin. And if you're not really laser focused on the problem that your plugin is trying to solve you will give into that temptation, and if you don't know your customers well enough, you'll get into that temptation to just cram it all into one plugin, and that's when you end up, when you install a plugin and you realize, oh, my gosh, this has like 800 things I'm never going to use, I don't need. And they're just filling up my site with bloat. Basically.

So what happens over time is that both the Plugin author develops add ons for their plugin that expand the functionality of the core, Plugin or other people. Other Plugin authors who are not even part of the company that developed the original Plugin. Say, I want to hook into that plugin and add functionality from my plugin that's related to your plugin. So for [OptinMonster](#), a really good example of this is [member Press](#). So Member Press is a membership and course software. And they came to us and said, Hey, our people want to use optinmonster to do this very specific thing. They want to show pop ups and campaigns to people who are enrolled in courses or specific memberships.

Well, that's not something that we are going to build into optinmonster, because it's not our primary use case, but it makes a lot of sense for member press users to be able to do that. So we worked with Member Press, and that now, essentially there's an additional piece of optim that works specifically for Member Press. And I think you see that with a lot of different plugins where the Plugin authors know that they have to stay really focused. And so the way to do that is to keep the core plugin really light and lean and create this essentially an ecosystem around it that begins to fulfill all the various use cases that aren't part of the core use case. And then again, that opens up for other people in the wordpress community to extend it even further.

Which I think is pretty great. Woocommerce is probably one of the best examples of this a lot of the eCommerce plugins. You see this really clearly, whether it's Woo or Edd or other plugins like that. You see that extension happening really well and really, easily.

Which you couldnt do, you know, like you think back to when we bought software in boxes, right? And it came in, the software was just what shipped in the box, and if you needed it to do something different. Just tough luck, you know. But that's the kind of the joy of open source, that we get the ability to take that code and do what we want with it, and extend it to do what we want with it, which I think is pretty fantastic.

DOC POP:

I love that you mentioned bloat, which is a thing that comes up with plugins, and so on. One hand, you know, a philosophy a developer might have is to just make sure this plugin has everything, and then some, and on the other hand is for the developer to release a core product, minimal product. And then let people add those extensions, you know, add woocommerce, for instance, doesn't have the ability to handle pre orders so kind of like Kickstarter style pre orders. But there's there's plugins that allow you to do that, but not everyone wants that. And it does actually kind of clutter up your site. It would make it harder to navigate as a, on the dashboard side, it makes it harder to use, so it is kind of cool to see those 2 philosophies take place where some folks do. Just try to cram everything in there.

I feel like I gotta say Jetpack. Jetpack has a reputation for having a lot of things going, but I actually honestly think everything in Jetpack is something I do need. So I'm not necessarily complaining about that. I'm like Jetpack's an easy solution for a lot of install stuff. But you know, for some folks it might just need one specific element of that, and you know they might be able to find that somewhere else, and not have to install a whole suite of things

ANGIE MEEKER:

Even Jetpack, over the years, though to their praise has begun splitting out pieces of it right and letting people make more decisions rather than making decisions for them, which I think is great. Yeah, that's a good example of like this one Plugin does a lot. and maybe that's good for you, and maybe it's bad. It's your own decision, right? Whether that's the right choice for you

DOC POP:

and some of these plugins that we're talking about. I believe woocommerce cause we keep mentioning it have like developer programs. They very much want to have an ecosystem that's trustworthy, and they make it easy for developers to work with them and try to kind of like have something that sounds very respectable, Dan. I think you were maybe talking a little bit about how the advantages of hooks and filters and what's unique in the wordpress space about that? Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

DANIEL DAYTON:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that's one of the coolest things about the Wordpress community, especially, you know, with plugins that are really well built is they expose most of their logic to places you can inject your code.

So those are called hooks and filters and wordpress and that's actually how the plugins get implemented in the flow of how the pages load. So Wordpress plugins themselves, tap into these hooks and filters that Wordpress runs, and then most of the really good plugins will have these hooks and filters where you can inject your own logic into what the plugins doing.

So, you know, at Carimus we do a ton of that with different plugins. And you know it's just. It's one of the coolest things about Wordpress 100%. You have this opportunity to leverage what

other people put out there and then kind of make it your own as need be. So yeah, that's just really amazing.

DOC POP:

Yeah. During my presentation I talked a little bit about the red flags that I have the things that I'm checking for when I'm looking for plugins are that I wanna make sure that they're recently updated. And they're compatible with my version, and that they have maybe a large number of reviews and positive reviews. These are what I look for in a plugin. I'm kinda curious if maybe anybody has any red flags for plugins, Dan, maybe I'll toss this back to you. Do you have anything that if you are looking at a plugin you're like, no, this is something I'm not gonna install on my plug at my site.

DANIEL DAYTON:

Yeah, I mean, like we've talked about. Here are a bunch already, like, if it hasn't been updated a couple of years like that's red flag right there. I'm not gonna not gonna touch it. We do. I mean, sometimes I get you know you're saying you kinda do have to go that route, but the other one is like we will. We will take a look at like hooks and filters, and like what we can actually customize. I feel like there is not a lot like for us in particular since your agency, and there's probably something we need to tweak. If there's not really much opportunity within the Plugin we're we'll probably search for another one.

So like, for instance, a couple of events plugins, we, you know, we went through kind of got that of like assessing which ones were the best. And you know we kinda end up choosing the one that kind of has the most like ability for us to kind of, you know, check some code that we needed without having to kind of roll around. So for us personally, that's that's one route that we kind of take a hard look at. And then, you know, outside of that, like you're saying the stars. It's just like if you were there, if you were responding into support. And you see like constantly that the plugins moving forward, that's that's another one like, Yeah, we just will go ahead and roll with that one instead of something that maybe has sitting with a bunch of issues that aren't being addressed.

DOC POP:

Angie. Do you have any green flags, any anything that when you see in a plugin, it is exactly what you're looking for, you know, to trust it.

ANGIE MEEKER:

Well, okay. So I would say 2 things. Number one, look at their reviews right? Like, if you look at their reviews and you see just a bunch of terrible reviews specifically about their service. Right? If you see reviews about the developers are not responding quickly, and when they do, you can see how the developer responds. If they're not trying to address issues, then I think that's a pretty good red flag for me.

And the other, it's not as much a red flag as the other way around. It's the green flag is once you find a plugin that a plugin developer that you trust. So let's say that we're looking at [gravity](#)

[forms](#) right. If you find that you like gravity forms, be sure to explore their other options. Their other offerings right? A lot of times you'll get a plugin that's in a niche. And they solve one problem. But they also understand other problems that you're that you have as their type of customer. And so they have other plugins that address other problems that you have too. And instead of going and looking way outside of that, that ecosystem, or that company you can look within that company to see. Do they offer other products?

Ask them, what do you recommend? What Plugin do you recommend for this? You know, because if you trust that person or that developer who built the plugin you really like and enjoy. They very well have a good recommendation for you, for what other products you can use that you would trust.

But as far as red flags for sure. Support is really is a big one for me, and not just the number of support replies because of, here's the thing. You can't just look at the number of support replies. Optinmonster is a good example of this. We didn't. We haven't. A lot of our support doesn't even flow through .org. It comes directly into our own help scout ticketing system. So we've been around for 10 years, we have 40 maybe 40 tickets on .org.

And so if you look at that, you think, oh, this is not a supported Plugin, when in reality we've had tens of thousands of tickets right over that amount of time. You just don't see it on .org. So make sure that you actually like to pay attention. Where does this company provide support so that you can get a better idea there. So yeah, I would say, definitely support and reviews and that type of thing. But you don't necessarily pay attention to just the number on .org. It doesn't always tell the whole story

DOC POP:

In the chat. Marie Kolanda says a no go for her is a poor response, time and forms for support which goes along with what you're saying. And then, Peter Bailey also says, a general rule of thumb for me is no plugin or theme should be larger than Wordpress Core. Just saying, Yeah, I think I think I could go with that.

Let's talk a little bit. We talked about the WordPress repository, which is wordpress.org/plugins.

That is not the only place to get plugins. That is the place that you could easily access from within your dashboard. That's a great place to see, like a large hub of free plugins, but should users only be downloading from wordpress.org, or should they should they occasionally check out other sites as well? I'll let Travis answer this one.

TRAVIS TOTZ:

Yeah, I mean, it's a great question. I think the repo on [on.org](https://wordpress.org) is a great place to start for a lot of folks, whether it's people that are just getting started and their beginners. Or maybe it's something specific you're looking for. You're looking for a free option.

You know. Of course I will. I will argue for premium paying for premium plugins, you know. [Gravity forms](#) has always been a premium plugin. So we are not located on the.org but that has been since the beginning, you know, and for us it really allowed us to create both a plugin as well as a support system for our customers a long time ago. That we've been able to stand by and and stand true throughout our history. So yeah, it's tough, you know. I mean, I think. Look at sites. [WpBeginner](#) is a great, a great resource. Right?

See what the 5 or 10 best x are. Search, Google, like, do some research to find out what is best for you in those given scenarios, where you need something that does something specific, add functionality. Or maybe it does something on the front end that applies to the project, or the work that you've got in front of you.

You know, premium plugins are certainly something that you have to pay for. But in a lot of cases it's worth it. Right? I mean, you're paying for the support, the updates, and of course, you know, helping to support the people that build these tools that are allowing you to accomplish your task and and projects as well.

A lot of things exist outside of.org. You just have to look a little bit and then be comfortable to spend a little bit, or making sure that you take care of those expenses and pass them on to your clients as a part of your project. So that yeah, you're allowing those projects to happen the best way that they can. And you're finding the best resources.

DOC POP:

Yeah, I tend to think that's at least my personal experience. You know, it's an open source software, and I got it for free. And the first batch of plugins are all free, I think somewhere in my mind I got locked into this, you should only be free. And then, you know, not really thinking about it like there, we need to sustain these things. And maybe you know, maybe there's something that works for me that's free. But maybe a larger company might need something a little more reliable like, or someone who has a store they rely on might want to spend more money to get stuff.

So it was actually a mental shift for me. I feel bad admitting that right. But, like 10 years ago, the idea of paying for something seemed like rude, or, you know, asking to charge for it. Dimi, I know that you have some opinions on this, so like I'll ask you should plugins be free by law, or paying for the plugin, especially right?

DIMI BAITANCIUC:

The short answer here is no, haha. But let me talk a bit around it. Its a very good question, and a good point. And 10 years ago, like the point you made, paying for a plugin, especially because we are in this free ecosystem. This is what Wordpress grew on and was built on on this free stop, this free the part, and there is a case to be made for free and also for paid, and I think, plug in whether a plugin is free or paid, is a factor of multiple things like the business model of the developer. The plugin complexity, for example, right, or what the features that are in there, the premium support that you are getting.

But I think this looking at it as a free and as a pro might be maybe a bit too binary. I think the middle ground might be something that it is sort of in between, which is the premium model. This is something we are practicing on [Brizy](#), and how this work is we give you a lot with free, enough for you to create your website.

But the more advanced features like more advanced elements, I don't know. Contact form or integrations with different CRMs or the bells and whistles, we sort of lock in in the paid version of the Plugin.

I think free is great. But if you are basing your business or your website on something more advanced. It might be it might be very interesting for you to open up and go on that paid version or pro version, especially for this. Advanced features get professional support usually right from from the Plugin developers, you get regular updates.

This is something that you also get, and the one important factor that is not the last, but not the least important factor that I think, is not discussed. A lot is sustainability. This is very, very important for developers, because pay plugins provide us developers with an income stream that lets us sustain right ongoing development, the supports putting more features in, and so on and so forth. So the longer answer is, no, not only free plugins.

Maybe the answer is somewhere in between, I think so. Yeah.

DOC POP:

Yeah. So we are gonna pivot to the Q&A. From the audience. I think one of the first ones that stands out. We have some great questions here. Can we hear your must have Plugin of choice. Does any of the panels have an opinion on that one must have Plugin of choice?

DANIEL DAYTON:

Yeah, for us. I mean we use [advanced custom fields](#) all the time on every site. So that's one of the biggest ones for us. We had the pro version of that, and you know we leverage it on every site we build.

TRAVIS TOTZ:

I would second that. Daniel. It's a fantastic plugin, fantastic tool.

We use it on gravityforms.com to I mean, I have to shout out for gravity forms. Obviously it's a great tool. And you can accomplish a lot with forms and beyond. Right? I mean you, you really can do so much with gravity forms, building full infrastructure, and app application type interfaces. And workflows right on top of wordpress. So little bit more goes from basic to advanced.

But you know, as a panelist, I'll kind of have to throw out the tool that is what we do every day.

DOC POP:

I wanna get to this next question. It was a popular one, when to upgrade to premium versions. And this is related to what we're talking about earlier, where there actually, I don't even know if we really got into this.

Let's talk about this for a second in the Plugin Repository. You have free plugins, but many of them have the option to upgrade to a pro, and so the free Plugin is gonna offer you maybe 3 of the 7 things, and it might be the 3 most requested things totally for free.

But then, if you need some of these extra features, or if you just want to support the developer. Oftentimes there's that upgrade to pro. So when do our panelists think it's good to upgrade? They can tell it's time to upgrade to a premium version. And, Angie, I'll let you start that one off.

ANGIE MEEKER:

sure number one, I think if you need support. That's probably the absolute first thing. If you are someone who, you have questions, and you expect to get an answer to that question. Upgrade for support, because the developers behind that, That takes time. Right? Time is money. We all know time is money, and that's the way to show them that you want some of their time, even though most good developers provide some level of support even for free users.

It is your way to say I respect the time that you're giving to me, and I'm gonna pay you for this support. That's probably number one.

Number two is simply, do you have a business need that upgrading solves? If you don't have an actual business need that an upgraded feature or access to a new solution is going to provide for you. Don't upgrade. But once you realize that I have something I'm a goal I'm trying to accomplish in my business, that maps to money and the way to get there is to get access to additional features. Then upgrade. Because that's when you can start looking at. I'm gonna be able to get a return on this money that I invested by getting access to these extra features. So that's how I would look at it.

DOC POP:

Right on. And Dan, I'm gonna ask that same question to you. When is it a good time to go? Premium?

DANIEL DAYTON:

Yeah, I mean, I really echo what Angie said, and I just also mentioned like, just go ahead and take a look at what the premium features, features, features are. I feel like a lot of times, you know. You might get yourself into trouble where you didn't realize that certain aspects were in the premium version of it. But, for instance, like with, we have, you know, like one thing, I'll just call it sometimes email sending for a wordpress site will get shut off depending on your host provider.

So having another way to send email is important, especially for us, but not having a way to like having log tracing, or when that stuff happens, or that's some stuff that is most of the time and buying a premium tier of the plugin. So just things like that, being very aware of, like what the Plugin offers at the premium level. And then, like Angie said, If you do need that.

or is that something that makes sense for your for what? Your use cases, and just go ahead and get it. But yeah, I think just like, once you download a plugin, take it. Peruse what the options are. If you go that premium route, and then and then from there kind of make a decision

DOC POP:

Right on.

We have a question here. How can I tell what all of my plugins do after they've been installed? Do I actually need them? How can I easily see if all of my plugins are in use?

And as far as that last question. I don't have the screens slide handy, but if you go to your dashboard and you go to Plugins, and you look at your your list of current plugins, so not the add new, but just a list of plugins, you will be able to see which plugins are in use, so it'll say active or I think, de-active, I think, is what it says, and so from there is where you can see what's in use.

But as far as the question here, do I actually need them? That's something that's kinda up to you. You might be working with a web developer who installed it, or maybe that maybe it was part of a theme that you got, and if you did get a theme and they installed a plugin on there that you don't know. There's a chance that that's probably something crucial like contact form 7 or something right. It's probably something that's built into the theme.

So you know, delete it at your own risk. But you can kind of you. Can, you know, play around, deactivate things and reactivate them, and check and see what works and what breaks your site?

And as far as how can I tell what all of my plugins do after they've been installed? Well, there's 2 things. First off, when you look at each of your plugins. You'll also be able to see, you know whether it's active, whether it's up to date. You can check all those things. Last time it was updated, I think, shows up. And there's 2 extra things. One is the settings. It's a hyperlink in there that if you click on settings it usually takes you to the control panel for a plugin, so if it's something like Yoast it'll take you to the Yoast plugin on the dashboard so you can go through and customize things.

But you can also click on, I believe, a more info which will bring up basically the Plugin repository description for those. So everything you're kind of asking there. How can you tell what the plugins do after they've been installed? Do you actually need them, which are in use, that's all on your plugin page. I hope that helps.

TRAVIS TOTZ:

I will pop in here real quick and say there is. It looks like there is a plugin in the repo. It's called [plugin notes plus](#) That actually does, is a plugin to solve a plugin problem. But it is a plugin that essentially will help you answer the question. Why did I ever install this? Plugin might give you a little bit more. A little bit more information. If you add some, add some notes, and obviously it's an additional thing to manage, but might help out.

DOC POP:

Yeah. And I think we have a follow up coming here, alright. And the follow up question here. And, Travis, I'll let you kind of continue this just because a plugin is active. Does that mean it's in use? If it's marked active, is it in use?

TRAVIS TOTZ:

Yeah, I mean, that's a great question. There are a couple of different ways. If the question is about figuring that out, there are a couple of different ways to probably figure that out.

If you go and are familiar with inspecting a site, you can go to the front end. You can inspect a site with web dev tools, and you can actually see in the WP Content folder if anything's being loaded. That might be a way. If you're familiar with doing something like that.

yeah. Does that help answer that question, Doc? Sorry. The, I was trying to trying to post the plugin notes plus the link, might have missed the specifics.

DOC POP:

So we have. We have a question here. Has anyone had success in monitoring performance and configuration of active plugins.

In other words, how can you? How can you tell if something's not great for you, you know, for your server load is. Is anyone interested in in taking stab at that Dimi or Dan or Angie? Have any thoughts on how to monitor, you know, performance based on plugins. Dimi looks like you got something?

DIMI BAITANCIUC:

no, actually don't. I was thinking, how would you? How would you do that? And I was wondering if there is a plugin that can help you with that right? There is always a plugin that can help you with something. So it's a very good question, actually. And guys, if you know, if you know, please jump in. And I'm interested to test that out as well.

DOC POP:

Yeah, that's a question that I think a lot of. Well for me personally, it's just a lot of intuition. It's a lot of hunch I'm like, oh, these plugins really bloated. I'm gonna you know it. But I have no science. I have no nothing to back it up. I've never done, you know, a speed test, for instance, where I deactivate a plugin. Dan, Do you have any thoughts on this?

DANIEL DAYTON:

We now we don't have anything so great that usually I'll kind of like just getting the dev tools and look at kind of the waterfall like what's loading, and just try and figure out, you know, is this coming from? You know the Javascript, for instance, from this one Plugin? You know, that's kind of how we usually go about it. Personally, I don't really have a great tool, I know, like [query monitor](#) is a plugin that some people would use for kind of assessing some of that stuff. But yeah, I don't, I guess. Don't have the perfect answer there

DIMI BAITANCIUC:

on the other on the other, if I might jump in a bit here on the other flip of the coin. There are a couple of things you can ensure. You can do to ensure your performance like 1) great wordpress hosting, 2)like doing caching right, 3) like CDN networks. They can deliver your content very fast, based on the so there are. There are some things that you can do.

Of course this doesn't doesn't put out the performance monitoring and trying to always, always be better. But I wanted to, because I feel that, monitoring is great. But if you don't do the first step right, like good hosting, caching, CDNs and everything you put yourself in a bad situation and spend a lot of time on analyzing performance when you didn't do the first 3 steps right

DOC POP:

Tight on. And you know we've had a ton of great questions we are at time. So I'm gonna pass the mic to our host. Lexi.

And before I do, I just wanted to say it's been a real pleasure talking to all of the guests here. Thank you so much, and thanks to all the questions in the chat. Now, Lexi, thank you for putting together this awesome webinar, and I'll let you take it from here.

LEXI MOSTEK:

Yes, thank you, and thank you again to all of our panelists that were able to join. I know there were a ton of questions about what's your favorite plugin for security, or things like that? Feel free to go check out WP engine's most recent social posts on Twitter and LinkedIn, where we've kind of started some threads on plugins.

I think that's a slippery slope. We all have our favorite plugins, but there's also so many plugins out there. Which is why we're here today. In addition, just wanna remind everyone. This is a 3 part series. We don't often do huge series of webinars, but we know there's a lot to talk about. So next week there will be a webinar on everything ecommerce and woocommerce. And then, following that, we've got a webinar on artificial intelligence plugins.

I know we saw a lot of questions on those throughout the webinar today. But we kind of save those questions for those webinars. If you're registered for this session, you'll get the reminder emails for the following sessions, so stay tuned for some following emails. And then we will be sending out the recording after we transcribe it today. Other than that. The ultimate guide to Wordpress Plugins is a Wp. Engine publication that has roughly a hundred pages of kind of

every plugin that you should need to know, including plugins from everyone that is on the panel today.

You will get that in an email as well as that's on our resources page relaunched as a 2023 edition other than that. Thank you to everyone. Happy Tuesday, and we will see all soon. Thank you.