

How To Choose Quality WordPress Themes

There are tens of thousands of WordPress themes available, some free and some “premium” (which just means paid). These are a huge asset and one of the main reasons for using WordPress as they allow vast amounts of time to be saved when setting up a site.

With so many themes to choose from there are huge disparities of quality. A bad theme can do your site a lot of harm; a decent theme can be okay; a brilliant theme can make a huge positive impact.

Whether you're installing your first or thousandth WordPress theme, being able to quickly spot quality is an invaluable skill which can **dramatically cut the time** it takes to get a site together.

With so many themes to choose from, how do you choose a quality WordPress theme? We'll run you through what to look for and what to avoid.

What to avoid when choosing a WordPress theme

There are some red flags you'll always want to avoid:

1. Theme reviews and roundups need to be taken with a heavy pinch of salt.
2. “Kitchen sink” themes that do it all can be a lot less appealing than they first appear.

We'll look at these both in more detail now.

Theme reviews and roundups

Don't take theme reviews, roundups or recommendations at face value.

Theme companies offer affiliate programs and the companies with the most generous referral payments get recommended the most. Theme companies will pay significant sums to the blogs with the highest ranking posts for popular search terms to appear on their recommended lists – the recommendations aren't typically made on merit. Bear this in mind when reading roundups.

Individual theme reviews suffer from the same problem and rarely tell you anything insightful, offering at best superficial analysis. Best to just come to your own conclusions.

We'll show you how to spot genuine theme recommendations and what to look for when evaluating themes later on.

'Do it all' themes that do a lot less

Some of the most popular themes are uber-flexible "kitchen sink" or "do-it-all" themes. The appeal is obvious: buy one theme and have it do everything.

The caveat is themes which offer to do everything "without customising code" make it very hard to make changes *outside* of what the theme offers, especially if you want to customise code. It takes longer learn how to customize what looks like a less flexible theme, but once you've learned, you'll have a lot more control (we'll cover this in detail in a lesson later this week).

The need to cater for all circumstances also typically makes these themes much more bloated. With page speed a major consideration for visitors and Google a leaner theme is the much better option.

Kitchen sink themes are often complex to customise and can take a lot of time to look the way you want. The demos are set up by people with fantastic design skills who know the theme inside out. Most users don't have the knowledge to reproduce these things - at least not without investing a lot of time.

What to look for in a WordPress theme

Once you know what the red flags are they are easy to avoid. We can now run through your easy checklist for finding a really good WordPress theme.

The WordPress theme essentials

There are a couple of essentials you'll want to always tick off and then some more subjective items. The essentials include:

Check out the documentation. Most theme providers will let you see documentation before you buy. Is it thorough? Does it look well written and useful? Are there video tutorials? Solid documentation is generally a good sign the rest of the theme is sound too. If the documentation isn't publicly viewable, ask if you can see it.

Check ongoing support and update costs. You should expect to receive support and updates for at least twelve months and to then pay a reduced fee for continued updates. If it's anything other than this, make sure you're aware of the ongoing costs when making your purchasing decision. Not paying an annual fee

can be bad as it's much more likely the developer will cease to find it financially viable to update your theme. Those updates are key for security, as we'll discuss in a future email.

What support is included? This is a really important one. Good support can save you a ton of time (we'll show you how to get the most out of premium theme support in the next email) so it's important to know what you're getting. Is just theme setup covered, or will you get customisations too? What if you need help with something "above and beyond"? A good test is to ask a pre-sales question (even if you know the answer) to check the response rate and quality. You don't want to be waiting too long for a response.

Check the refund policy. Does it exist? What time period does it offer? There's always a chance a theme just doesn't work out in practice – being able to get a no-queries refund straightaway is useful here. You'll be able to tell if this is the case immediately so seven days is ample here.

Is the theme GPL? WordPress is released under the GPL license. This means that the code is free to use as you wish. Since themes make use of WordPress they should also be GPL. If theme shops do not mention this or try to hide the fact, then it's possible they are hiding other things as well.

Bonus: Google common problems. This extra check can be helpful: do a quick Google search for "theme name" broken and see what comes up. Issues showing up isn't necessarily a problem if they're fixed promptly; it's recurring issues with no fixes that you want to be on the lookout for.

Extra bonus: search or ask for discounts. Most theme shops have sales from time to time. Before you buy do a search for discounts. If you can't find any and there's a discount code box on the checkout, ask for one. Be reasonable – 20% off is fine, 50% off is unreasonable – but you may get what you ask for.

These are all technical points but going through the essentials first lets you eliminate the bad themes straight away, rather than being seduced by badly made themes that manage to look good.

The WordPress theme subjective features

Once you've covered off all of the essentials, it's time to think about **design**. You want a theme that looks good, but "good" means different things to different people. A couple of things to think about:

- Is the theme suited to your kind of content? Imagine your posts on the site, not the specially crafted and carefully edited content of the demo. Do you

have suitable imagery for a media-heavy theme?

- Is content readable? Look for a decent font size and good line spacing.
- Is it easy to publish content? Or is the theme adding lots of extra bits of content you'll need to add each time. Be wary of adding extra time to publishing content.

Theme demos are the place to try out all of these things. If possible remove any layover boxes and see the theme as visitors will see it on your site. Whilst you're doing this, resize your browser window to test the responsive design features. Test for tablet and mobile devices; in a well made theme everything should work flawlessly.

The final thing to consider is **SEO**. This is subjective as it's difficult to measure without seeing any code.

Running the demo through [Google PageSpeed](#) is a good starting point; you want to be looking for a decent score there. Otherwise, any well-built theme will do a good job when coupled with some speed improvements and SEO plugins (we'll cover both of these in future emails).

A general rule of thumb is if the theme has passed all of the checks up-to now, it's probably fine. Look out for audits by SEO agencies but take other alleged SEO benefits with an awareness that, as they are difficult to prove, they may just be marketing speak.

Where to find quality WordPress themes

Where do you go to find all of these feature rich, well engineered and good looking themes? Generally independent theme shops run by a small team of passionate developers are the places you want to be looking.

Marketplaces such as Creative Market or ThemeForest don't have a guarantee of quality across all their themes and should thus be avoided.

We have personally used and can recommend:

- [ProThemeDesign](#)
- [Array Themes](#)
- [WPZOOM](#)
- [Elmastudio](#)
- [Themetry](#)
- [Theme Foundry](#)
- [Anariel Design](#)

Otherwise, theme shops who sell on wordpress.com tend to have good quality themes since the wordpress.com team reviews all of the code in the themes they sell, so the standards will be high. In addition the WordPress.org Commercial

Themes page are usually pretty good (although make sure to consider the checks).

Good themes provide solid foundations

It is worth spending some time getting the right theme. As you work through your journey to become a WordPress Master you'll get faster at choosing quality themes – and you'll find that picking out the right theme saves time and money down the road as you don't have to swap your mediocre theme in six months as you run up against its limitations.