

## The Author Toolbox - Website Set-Up and Game Plan

### **1. Decide on your hosting company, set up an account, and get your domain name.**

(While I will assume for these instructions that you are starting from scratch, I'll also include a few tips if you already have a host from a previously attempted website.) Like mentioned in the blog article about websites, a hosting company will rent you the space on their giant computer for you to park all the files relating to your website. They all charge different amounts of rent and some are more helpful than others when you have questions.

I personally use and recommend [BlueHost.com](http://BlueHost.com) because of their competitive prices and their out-of-this-world customer service. (The custom link [www.bluehost.com/track/candee fick/](http://www.bluehost.com/track/candee fick/) tracks how many referrals I send their way if you want to check them out.) Currently, I believe they charge \$3.95 a month if you pay for at least a year's hosting in advance. Click on "Get Started" then pick a plan. The basic plan should be plenty to get you started, especially since you can always upgrade later.

The next step is selecting the domain to use (i.e. the address visitors will type in that will get assigned to your rented Internet space so they can see your website using the files you stored there). If this is a new account, you'll be finding a domain name that isn't already taken by someone else. If you already own a domain name (like from GoDaddy), you would click that option instead. If you are interested, there are a few additional cost options such as for domain privacy that would mask the database information to list BlueHost instead of your name, address, and phone number.

Part of the BlueHost plan, includes a free domain name for a year so even if you bought your domain name somewhere else, I recommend going through the steps to transfer the domain registration to BlueHost so that all of the pieces for your website are under one company umbrella. (Just find "Domains" under the options along the top or call those very helpful customer service people for information on how to do it since it will involve unlocking your domain privacy at the previous company and then approving the transfer through a series of email verifications.) If you choose not to transfer the domain name registration, you'll need to customize the settings at the existing company to point to the correct hosting company server and then make sure to watch your email for renewal notifications so you don't accidentally lose ownership of your website's domain name.

Write down your hosting account login and password information in a safe place. You'll use it often to access the c-Panel (control panel) for some of the following steps as well as to set up any email accounts associated with your new website. And whenever you call BlueHost's customer service, they'll ask for the last few characters of your password for verification.

What if you already had a website or hosting company? If you had a previous website, copy/paste the text from those pages into Word and save any pictures or video links in order to make the next steps easier when you build your new website pages. If you had a previous host and have switched to BlueHost instead, remember to go back to that old company and cancel that account so you don't have to pay more.

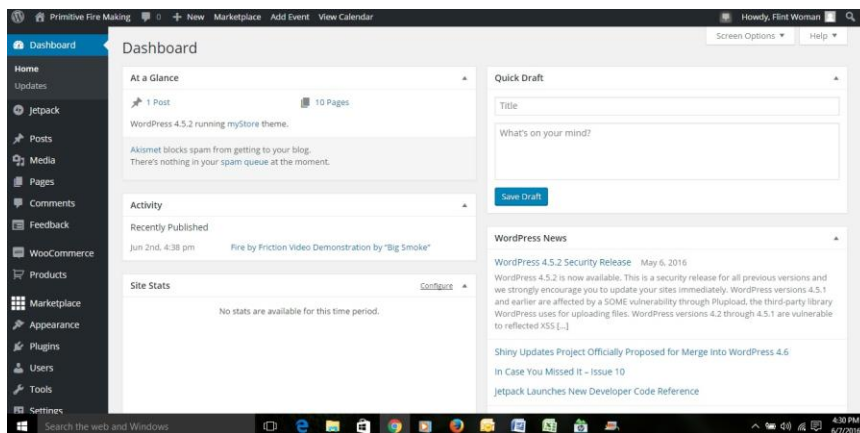
## 2. Install the WordPress.org software.

Assuming you make the switch to BlueHost, you should next be prompted with the option to One-Click Install WordPress. If you've needed to exit their normal stream of placing an order (for instance with the domain name or contacting customer support for help with the above...), you'll need to access the home page or "cPanel" from the menu across the top of your BlueHost account page. Scroll down to find a blue-rimmed box labeled "website" where you'll see a button that says "Install WordPress." Depending on the day, there might be additional programs available, but just stick with WordPress for now and follow the steps to install WordPress.

If you stayed with a different host, you may need to go to WordPress.org and download the software, then upload it into the files of your existing host using a FTP (file transfer protocol) program. However, as WordPress is gaining in popularity, more hosting companies are offering a one-click installation process.

## 3. Log in to your WordPress administrator dashboard.

Congratulations! You're now ready to move from your hosting company's cPanel over to your site's administrator dashboard. You would access it at [www.YOUR\\_SITE\\_NAME.com/wp-admin](http://www.YOUR_SITE_NAME.com/wp-admin) and then login with your account information. Unless you have questions about your hosting account, billing, transferring domains, or setting up email accounts, most everything else to do with your website is accessed from the dashboard. So after you log in, you'll see something like this.



The left vertical column in black lists the main sections of settings for your website including settings for plug-in programs. (More about those later.)

Across the top black bar from the left: Hover over the website name to click and "visit" your site to see how it looks (and then return to the dashboard), quick add a "New" post/page/image/etc., or furthest to the right make changes to your user profile.

The rest of the dashboard gives an overview of how many posts you've published, recent comments, number of daily visitors (stats), an area to "quick draft" a blog post idea, etc. These boxed sections can be dragged around to rearrange if you'd like.

#### **4. Pick a WordPress theme.**

Like the blueprint to a house, this is where you decide the basic structure of how you want your website to look. Will you have a big banner picture across the top or a smaller header so articles can be seen? Did you want a sidebar of other things and if so, which side and how many? Did you want three columns with smaller images on the home page? You've seen enough other websites to know what you like personally and what will represent your brand best.

There are a lot of free themes available to pick from so don't worry about the Premium themes. Within the WordPress dashboard, you can scroll down to Appearance in the left side bar, then click Themes. Click "Add New." This allows you to then browse available themes for a one-click install. You can browse themes by most popular or sort them by preferred features. Click on one to preview it, read more about features, and one-click install if you like it. (You can always change themes later and WordPress will shuffle your content files and pictures into the similar spot in the new theme.)

There are also a lot of other free (or paid/premium) themes available on the Internet. Just search for free WordPress themes to find a few of the top sites that list them. Like within your WordPress dashboard, read the descriptions, click on "details" to learn more, or even check out a "demo" of what it would look like in action. If you decide to use one of these, you would download it onto your computer, remember the file name, then inside the "Add New" Theme page in your WP-admin dashboard, you would click "Upload Theme" and select that file.

When you're looking at themes, keep in mind that just like you cannot change the position of walls inside your house, you cannot change the font styles, header size, and how posts are labeled inside the theme so make sure you like the look of the words. However, just like adding furniture or paint colors, you can add multiple pages in your menu and nest them into subpages as well as customize your own images within the basic structure of the theme. A theme is a starting place for those of us who don't want to (or know how to) change the code of the website.

Once you have selected a theme to use, you can start with some of the basic customizations that are available for that specific theme. Some have different color families available. Many have the option to upload a custom header or banner image. There is also usually an option to display a static front page or to have the blog "posts" page be the first page that visitors see. Often you can see how the theme will appear on mobile devices and pick spots for the navigation menus.

#### **5. Add a few key plug-ins.**

Plug-ins are additional pieces of software that will help your website do exactly what you want it to do beyond the basic WordPress software. Email list sign-ups, social sharing, security, calendars, video-embedding, and shopping carts are just some of the things plug-ins can do.

Here are the top few plug-ins that I recommend for you to find, install, and set-up. In the left sidebar of the wp-admin dashboard, scroll down to "Plug-ins" and then click "Install New" at the top to find the following. For each one, you can read more about it, see the ratings, and then click to install. Once installed, for many you will then need to click to activate and possibly tweak additional settings.

1. Yoast SEO – Search engine optimization (SEO) helps with Google and other search rankings and this free plug-in makes it easy for non-technical people like me. It allows you to set a key word for each page and each individual post. It also gives suggestions on how to improve the search rankings with images, titles, content, etc. along with a red-yellow-green light system to let you know when your SEO is good or needs help.
2. JetPack – In order to activate this plug-in, you will need to create a WordPress.com account so make a note of that log-in information somewhere. This free plug-in allows self-hosted WordPress users to access some of the same features available for WordPress.com users (while keeping the door open for countless other plug-ins that the .com crowd can't due to the "HOA" list of rules). JetPack features include Publicize (automatically share all new blog posts to your selected social media sites), Sharing (adds tiny buttons for visitors to share the blog post to their social media accounts), Site Stats (to track number of visitors and most searched for terms), Shortlinks, Faster image download speeds, security, and more. (To use the Publicize option, you will need to connect your social media accounts under the left-hand side bar Settings→Sharing tab.)
3. Akismet – This is an amazing spam filter that will automatically remove suspected comments in foreign languages, strange grammar, or containing links to RayBan sunglasses from your comment stream without you needing to add a CAPTCHA or other humanity detection step to your comment protocol. Once you have JetPack, this spam filter should activate relatively pain-free without needing to find and copy/paste a long code/key. You can pay a minimal amount or chose a free account.
4. MailChimp – If/when you decide to start collecting email addresses so you can directly contact readers with the news that you have a book coming out, I'd recommend going to MailChimp (just google it) and opening an account. (It's free up to 2000 addresses with a limit on how many emails you send per month but I figure by the time I have more than that, I can afford a monthly fee from the increased sales.) Then go to the Plug-ins page, install new, search for MailChimp, find a plug-in with a ton of downloads and reviews so you know it'll work, then install and activate using your MailChimp account log-in information. Next, go to the Widgets page under the Appearance heading in the left sidebar, find the new MailChimp widget, add it to your sidebar, and customize the number of fields.

## **6. What's next?**

Now that the basic software, theme, and a few key plug-ins are in place, it's time to start adding content, pages, and other pictures before making the website "Live."

If you go to The Author Toolbox page and the post about Establishing a Website as a Home Base, there is another free download available with 8 pages of instructions to help you navigate inside WordPress. That download includes instructions on how to add or edit a post or page, change what's included in the navigation menu, where to add widgets to the sidebar, and more suggested plug-ins specifically for authors.

If you need additional help, BlueHost has many informational tutorial videos available under "Resources" when you're logged into your account there or you can always search for YouTube videos. I also offer personalized coaching via Skype and/or email to answer specific questions.