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WordPress Academy

WordPress

Quick Start Guide

Your first site in 3 hours!



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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
<i>What you will learn from this eBook</i>	3
<i>How to find out more</i>	3
2. What is WordPress? (Start here)	4
3. WordPress Hosting options	4
<i>Understanding “self-hosted WordPress” sites vs. WordPress.com</i>	4
<i>Understanding domain and hosting</i>	5
<i>Choosing a domain registrar</i>	5
<i>Choosing a webhost</i>	5
<i>Additional Notes on web hosting</i>	6
<i>How to assign a domain name to a hosting account (understanding “name servers”)</i>	7
<i>Installing WordPress on your domain</i>	7
<i>Creating email accounts with your domain name</i>	8
4. WordPress basic concepts & layouts	9
5. Theme Selection	10
<i>Finding a good theme</i>	10
<i>Free theme or commercial theme?</i>	11
<i>Best (recommended) commercial themes</i>	11
<i>Best free themes</i>	12
<i>Installing and activating your theme</i>	12
<i>How to customize (style) a theme</i>	12
<i>Special instructions for Atahualpa theme users</i>	13
6. Understanding Posts, Pages and Links	14
7. Basic WordPress configuration	15
8. Using the WordPress built-in Visual Editor	16
9. Sidebars and Widgets	18
<i>Additional help on Widgets and navigating the WordPress User Interface</i>	20
10. Installing a recommended Plugin set	21
11. Creating a header (banner) for your website	23
12. Windows Live Writer	30
13. Conclusion	31
14. About the author & Contact Details	31

1. Introduction

What you will learn from this eBook

The “**WordPress Quick Start Guide: Your first site in 3 hours**” is an eBook and companion video training course designed to teach you how to get your first WordPress website up and running in three hours, without any prior knowledge. It will save you dozens of hours in research and avoid having to go back and redo anything later, as your site grows and becomes more refined (which it will).

Topics covered in this eBook include

- ✓ WordPress hosting options
- ✓ Basic concepts: site elements and layout
- ✓ Theme selection: your best choices
- ✓ Configuring WordPress for a business website
- ✓ Understanding Posts, Pages and Links
- ✓ Using sidebars and widgets
- ✓ Creating content: the WP built-in Visual editor
- ✓ Installing plugins, and a recommended plugin set
- ✓ Using the free Atahualpa theme framework
- ✓ Creating rich content with Windows Live Writer
- ✓ Graphics editing software (how to make an attractive header for your site)

How to find out more

WordPress Academy offers a full course in WordPress website design and internet marketing designed specifically for busy professionals and self-employed people without a technical background. Hundreds of people have already taken our high-impact, super-affordable courses and had their businesses and lives transformed. For more information on this and for much more free content, see <http://wpacademy.tv>

2. What is WordPress? (Start here)

- **WordPress is a Content Management System (CMS):** it allows you to create and maintain a website through an administrative interface, including an automatically-generated navigation structure (page menu bar etc), without needing to know HTML or learn any other tool. It is simple enough for a beginner to learn in a few hours, without sacrificing any power or flexibility. *You can do virtually anything with WordPress.*
- **WordPress is an Open Source Software:** created by thousands of programmers all over the world and put into the public domain, so you do not have to pay to use it.
- **WordPress is a web-based application, written in PHP and MySQL,** and optimized for **Linux servers.** Meaning: PHP is a programming language for web applications, MySQL is a relational database (such as Microsoft Access), and Linux is an operating system for web servers – all of these are also open-source.
- **WordPress is, by far, the most popular CMS:** over 60 million sites worldwide as of late 2011.
- **WordPress is an excellent platform for creating a small business or professional website.** Even though it was originally designed as a blogging platform, it works very well for creating ordinary (static) websites as well. It's also great for membership sites (sites where you sell your content for a fee).
- **WordPress comes with thousands of free themes (templates or styles) and plugins (add-on applications).** Changing your theme or adding a plugin is extremely easy.
- **Many WordPress users and developers consider it the “shangri-la” of website development** – the elusive goal of simple and powerful website development for non-technical people is now here. Previous platforms were either too difficult to learn (Joomla and Drupal CMS's), proprietary and too limited (Godaddy's “Website tonight”), or expensive.

3. WordPress Hosting options

Understanding “self-hosted WordPress” sites vs. WordPress.com

You can create a free WordPress blog at WordPress.com, and then assign it to your own domain name for about \$20 per year. The content will be hosted on the WordPress servers, and as such you need not worry about hosting.

WordPress.com is not recommended for hosting professional websites, because it has a limited number of available themes and plugins. In particular, commercial themes are not supported, nor even the free Atahualpa theme framework that we recommend. You will further be limited in terms of your ability to really customize the site as Wordpress.com does not give you access to your PHP code.

It's much better to host your WordPress site yourself using the so-called “**self-hosted**

WordPress”.

Understanding domain and hosting

Properly hosting a new, self-hosted WordPress site is challenging for beginners, however if you read carefully below and follow the instructions you should be good.

To host a website (any website including self-hosted WordPress), you need a **Domain Name Registrar company** (e.g. [GoDaddy](#)) and a **Hosting Company** (e.g. [BlueHost](#)).

Occasionally, the same company handles both, but we recommend that you keep them separate, e.g. register your domains through your domain registrar, not through your hosting company. Hosting companies are sometimes known to include one free domain name in the hosting plan but then charge a premium fee for additional domains. And domain registrars (such as Godaddy) often do not provide great hosting service.

Exception to this rule: if you are just starting out your first site it's ok to register your first domain name when you first purchase hosting, for instance from [Bluehost](#) (see below); however you should register additional domains through your registrar and then point them (assign them) to your hosting account as described below.

Any good hosting company will allow **unlimited domain hosting**. This means you can have multiple domains with separate websites under one monthly hosting fee. *You really should never need more than one hosting company.*

Be aware as well that transferring domains from one domain registrar to another, and websites from one host to another, can be an administrative nightmare. Save yourself from this by having *only one hosting company and only one domain registrar from the get-go* (see below for some good choices). Failure to understand this has been the cause of endless headaches to my students.

Choosing a domain registrar

The companies below are all excellent domain registrars and more-or-less equivalent in terms of pricing

- [Godaddy.com](#)
- [Domain.com](#)
- [NameCheap.com](#)

Resist the temptation to buy hosting from your domain registrar, and most certainly do not purchase any additional domain services such as private registration, traffic, etc. They are very rarely useful or necessary.

Choosing a webhost

Your hosting company holds (or “stores”) the files on your website to anyone who asks for them anywhere in the world. Hosting companies run banks of **web servers**, which are essentially big computers that are always turned on, connected to the internet, and monitored 24 hours in case of failure.

The leading hosting companies are listed below. They are all quite similar in terms of pricing, service level and reliability. Prices range from \$6 to \$12 per month, depending

on the contract duration, options, and whether the domain name is included or not.

BlueHost, Hostgator and WordPress Academy are all **cPanel** style hosts, which are recommended for user-friendliness and stability.

- [BlueHost](#). Perhaps the best all-around value, particularly for newbie's. It does require a year prepay, but includes one domain name, and uses the easier cPanel interface.
- [Hostgator](#). Also a great company. Unique among companies listed here, it offers so-called “reseller hosting” plans, where you can set your clients up with their own hosting control panels and charge them for it. This can be especially interesting for website designers.
- [WordPress Academy Hosting](#). If you are primarily planning on hosting WordPress sites, you should consider a specialized WordPress hosting service. Most hosting companies treat WordPress as an “application” which means that you are responsible for maintaining and debugging it – e.g. if your site gets hacked or starts getting PHP errors, you are on your own (good luck ☹). WordPress Academy hosting is very price-competitive with traditional hosting providers and you will have greater peace of mind knowing that your WordPress sites are fully supported.
- [GoDaddy](#). World's leading domain name registrar and hosting provider. *Godaddy is not recommended for WordPress hosting as their control panel interface is difficult to navigate.* If you must use them, make sure you buy the **Deluxe** or **Unlimited** plan so you can host multiple sites.

Additional Notes on web hosting

- Remember that even if your hosting company allows you to host unlimited domains, you still need to pay the yearly registration fee for each domain you are hosting, which is currently about \$10/yr.
- It's preferable to install WordPress on a **Linux hosting server**. This is usually not an issue since all low-cost hosting accounts are Linux-based. If you already have Windows hosting, WordPress will run fine on it, though.
- Never purchase hosting based on price alone. There are other elements in the equation, like server speed and reliability. If you have email accounts attached to your domain name (you@yourdomain.com) the email is managed by your web server (hosting company), and if the server goes down so does your email (sometimes for days)
- If you are just learning, and/or programming websites in PHP, you could use [local server hosting](#) instead – it only takes a few minutes to install on your computer (and is a fun exercise to do anyway).
- Moving WordPress sites from one host to another is tricky, so its best if you build your sites on the host and domain that is going to ultimately hold it. If you must move your WordPress site after it's complete, see [this article](#).
- If you are building a new version of an existing website, intending to replace the

original, build it in a subdirectory i.e. <http://mycompany.com/new>, and then move it to the root directory when you are done.

How to assign a domain name to a hosting account (understanding “name servers”)

Pairing webhost and registrar is also called “hosting your domain”.

1. If you don't yet have a hosting account, sign up for one (see above).
2. If you are hosting the primary domain of your site, your domain is automatically hosted when you open your hosting account, so skip directly to step 6.
3. If you want to create an additional website in your hosting plan (assuming that your hosting plan allows it), do the following:
 - If you have a **cPanel hosting account** (such as BlueHost or Hostgator), open your **hosting control panel** and choose the “**add-on domain**” function, which assigns the domain name to a sub-directory of your site. For more information see [this article](#).
 - If you are using **GoDaddy**, open the domain in your control panel and then select the “Hosting” option for that domain, and create an additional hosted domain.
4. Go to your **domain registrar control panel**, and from there set the **Name Servers** of your domain as instructed by your hosting company (i.e. if you are using BlueHost you would set your Primary and Secondary name servers to NS1.BLUEHOST.COM and NS2.BLUEHOST.COM respectively). GoDaddy will do this for you automatically if you follow the previous step.
5. Your website will typically be visible on the web (“resolved to your domain name”) within 5-10 minutes – overnight maximum (this delay is called “domain propagation time”). If you have not yet installed WordPress or put any files on your site you will see either an “empty directory listing” or else the default landing page for your hosting company.
6. Once your site is hosted, use the automated WordPress installer on your hosting control panel to install a fresh WordPress site to your domain. If all goes well, you will now see the default WordPress installation at <http://yourdomain.com>

Tip: it is generally easier to assign your name servers when you first purchase your domain name rather than after you have bought it. This also eliminates the domain propagation delay, allowing your site to come online immediately. If registering your domains at GoDaddy, look for a little box that says “**Set name servers**” during the purchase cycle.

Installing WordPress on your domain

Once your domain is “hosted”, you can install WordPress on it. Almost all hosts have a 2-click WordPress installer program. Google “Installing WordPress on [your hosting

company]” for instructions, or else review the [Installation tutorials on WordPress.TV](#). If you have a cPanel-style hosts review [this article](#).

A WordPress installation consists both of PHP files and a MySQL database. Backing it up fully will require both backing up the PHP files and the database. See below for how to backup your site’s database (use plugin WP-DB-Backup). Most of your site’s configuration is kept in your database, so failure to backup your PHP files is generally not a big issue in the case of failure (but do it anyway for precaution). You can also backup your entire site through your hosting control panel.

Creating email accounts with your domain name

Once your domain is hosted you may want to create email addresses attached to your domain e.g. [you@yourdomain.com](#). This is done within the hosting control panel.

There are two ways you can create an email address attached to your domain name:

- A **Forwarding email address** just forwards to another email (i.e. your Gmail)
- A **POP3 email address** stores the email on the server and downloads to your computer through your email client program (i.e. Microsoft Outlook etc.)

Both have advantages and disadvantages over the other. Generally, it is faster to read and process email in an email program (email client) rather than a web-based client (e.g. Gmail). The trade-off is that web-based email allows access to your email from anywhere, and may have better spam filtering.

We recommend that you use Gmail as the email server for your domain through the free Google Apps service, which provides the best of both worlds. This is a bit technical to setup, however. It is explained in [this video](#). If you can’t do this, it’s perhaps best to forward your mail [you@yourdomain.com](#) to a regular Gmail account, which is easy to do.

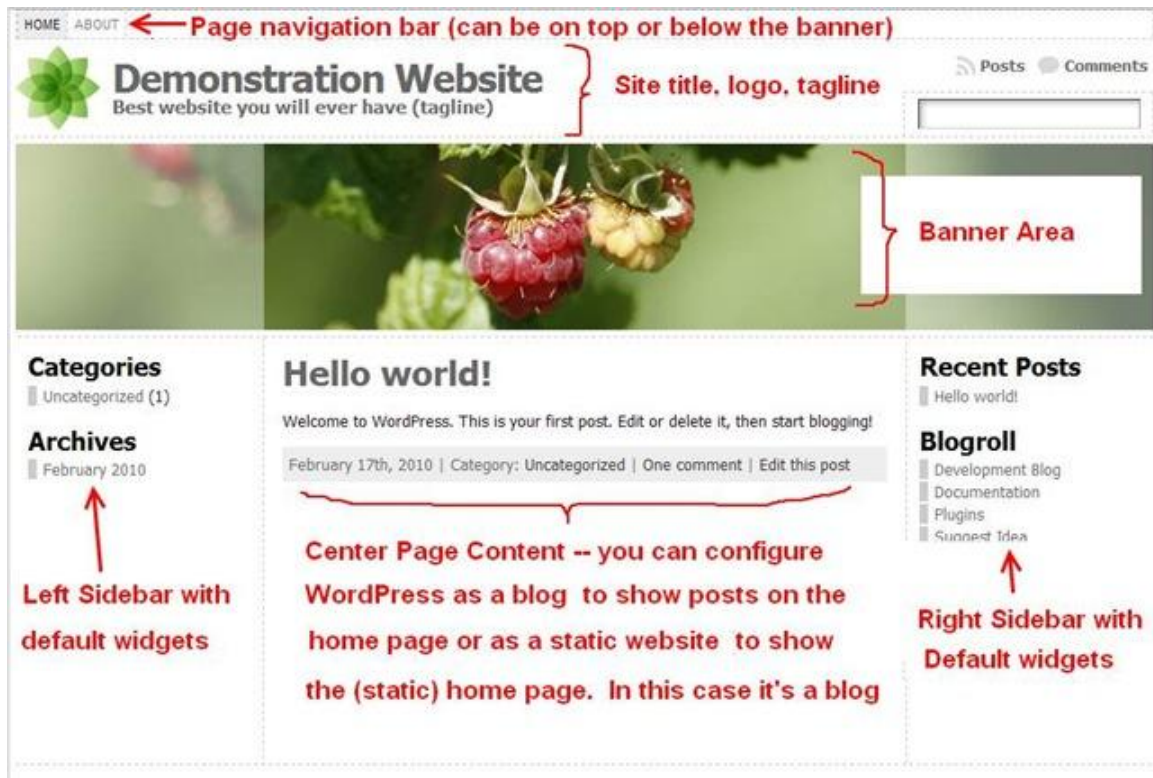
Note: all major web hosting companies provide Webmail interfaces to their POP3 email accounts, so you can still read your mail via POP3 at home and access it from the road. However, once your POP3 email is downloaded to your computer (once it is read), it is no longer accessible through webmail.

4. WordPress basic concepts & layouts

Once you have successfully hosted your domain and installed WordPress on it, you are ready to begin creating your content and styling your site.

Here is what WordPress looks like after installation of one our favorite free themes, Atahualpa (see below about themes and installing themes). You need to understand this basic layout (which is the same or similar for all WordPress sites) in order to design your site's layout and navigation.

Every theme looks different but they share all or some of the elements below.



Notes:

- When you first install WordPress, the installer automatically creates a page called “About”, a Post called “Hello World”, and a set of links in the category “Blogroll”. The first thing you will typically do is to delete these and create your own content. See below for the difference between Pages, Posts and Links.
- Your center-page will display content from your most recent posts (if you have configured your site as a blog) or it will show a static page called “Home”, if you have configured your site as a business website (static site) – see below.
- Until you put content (widgets) into your sidebars, WordPress will populate them with default widgets. In the example above, the left sidebar is automatically filled with a “Categories” and an “Archives” widget, and the right sidebar has a “Recent Posts” and a “Links” widget. To replace these with your own content, see below.

- The page navigation is usually located on a horizontal bar (with or without drop-downs to sub-pages), above or below the header image (or website banner). If you prefer, you can put your top-level navigation on your sidebar by placing a “pages widget” there (see below for what a “pages widget” is)
- The page navigation bar normally contains only your static pages (WordPress “Pages”) and is auto-generated, but you can link to pretty much anything you want, like blog categories or external links.
- In the Atahualpa theme, the Title and Tagline can overlay the banner image. Or, you may remove the Title and Tagline altogether and place them in your banner as image text (see below “Making a banner using Paint.net”).
- You must think about your sidebar configuration. Depending on your theme, you can have up to 4 sidebars. Some themes and theme frameworks will also allow you to selectively set visibility of sidebars according to page type (Page or Post) or by Page ID (i.e. turn off side-bars for the home page).

5. Theme Selection

Finding a good theme

This is your most important initial decision after you have first installed WordPress. Here is why:

- Your site’s appearance and initial impression is determined largely by two things: your theme, and the *graphic density* of your site (number and quality of graphics, such as your header). A good theme will make the difference between a professional-looking site and one that isn’t. So start with a good theme and then add professional (or semi-professional) graphics – see below.
- You should choose your theme fairly soon after you begin your site, since it has an impact on how you create your content (i.e. two or three-column layouts, screen width, etc). In WordPress, content is mostly separate from presentation, so you can always change your theme later. However, if you do this, you will lose most of the work that you have put into styling and customizing your theme (you will need to start fresh making stylistic adjustment to the new theme).
- Themes are customizable to differing degrees. Modifying the PHP theme files directly is possible in all themes, but you want to avoid this if you can (unless you want to learn PHP programming). You are better off choosing a theme that already has the functionality and look that you want. You are also typically better off choosing a **Theme framework** over a regular theme. A theme framework allows you to customize many directly through the theme options page. A good theme framework will allow you to select the number of sidebars, width of sidebars, all your fonts and colors, and much more through the WordPress dashboard. This may save you hours (or days) of wandering through stylesheets (CSS files) and PHP.

Free theme or commercial theme?

As a professional WordPress educator, I used to work a lot with free themes and recommend them to my clients (particularly the very powerful free Atahualpa theme framework). However, recently I have been working almost exclusively with commercial themes for many reasons:

- Very few free themes are actually *Theme Frameworks*. What this means is that if you want to add another sidebar or even change basic things such as the width of the site, you may need to hire a programmer. On the other hand, most recommended commercial themes below are already fully-developed theme frameworks.
- It's difficult (or impossible) to find a free theme that both looks good out-of-the-box, and provides a high degree of customizability (ie a theme that operates more as a *theme framework* than a theme). Many commercial theme families, however, do both really well.
- Most commercial themes cost in the range of \$60-\$80. It's usually not worth saving \$80 in order to spend an extra dozen hours styling your site (and then possibly failing to get the look-and-feel you want anyway and having to start again).
- All commercial themes provide some degree of support, usually through a forum. Free themes, on the other hand, may not be supported at all (Exception: free Atahualpa theme support is excellent)

Best (recommended) commercial themes

The following themes / theme frameworks are all recommended:

- [StudioPress](#): one of the best choices overall. Very rich theme family with a lot of customization power.
- [Woothemes](#): another excellent, very diverse and powerful theme family
- [Thesis](#): A very solid, highly customizable theme, and one of the most popular themes on the web. Thesis themed sites generally look alike unless you do some serious customization, however the flexibility and performance makes up for that (and they are designed to be easily customized in a number of ways)

If you can't find anything you like from the above, try the following:

- [Theme Forest](#): a large commercial theme collection. Many are quite attractive but note that you will be getting a *theme*, not a *theme framework*.
- [iThemes](#) (Builder or Flexx especially)

Last, consider:

- [Artisteer](#) (\$50). This is Windows software that allows you to design the layout locally and provides a lot of options. When you are done, export the theme files and upload to your site with FTP. It creates visually rich sites, although a bit on the simple side. Also works for Joomla and Drupal content management systems.

Best free themes

If you are just starting out you can check some of the attractive free themes available for download from the WordPress.org theme directory. All of the themes below can be installed to your site directly in a few clicks from WordPress.org (see how below).

1. Start with [WordPress' most popular \(free\) themes](#) – you may find a bull's eye theme there, and if not, you might get some ideas. Remember that there are disadvantages to using a regular theme vs. a theme framework, even if that theme is great from a visual point of view.
2. One of the best free theme frameworks is [Weaver](#). It looks pretty good and has a lot of customizability.
3. Consider [Atahualpa](#) as probably the most powerful free theme framework. It rivals commercial products in its sophistication. However, it looks a bit dull out-of-the-box (be prepared to tweak it)
4. If you are looking for a theme for a specific business type, try searching the [WordPress.org free themes directory](#) site or else Googling it directly (i.e. “WordPress theme for therapist”).
5. Other suggestions: [White House](#), [Hybrid](#), [Thematic](#), [Revolution](#) and [Lysa](#). These are all clean, uncluttered themes, suitable for any type of professional site.

Installing and activating your theme

If you are using a free theme, install and activate it directly through your dashboard: **Appearance > Add New Theme**, search for it by name, then install and activate it.

If you purchase a commercial theme, you will need to upload it to your web site and activate it. The easiest way to do this is via the **Theme > Add New Theme** command (in your WordPress dashboard). Select the "**Upload**" tab, find and upload the theme zip file provided by your theme vendor.

The second way is to unzip the theme files and upload them via FTP. You will need FTP client software for this (e.g. [FileZilla](#)), and you will need to know your hosting account username and password. See [this article](#) for additional instructions.

How to customize (style) a theme

The first thing you will usually do is add a company banner (site header) and logo. See below for making a header using the free image editing software Paint.net (available only on Windows).

You will usually need to upload your banner image to your website using FTP, and place it inside the correct directory of your server. Some themes (such as the recommended Weaver theme) have a dashboard interface for adding a header (you won't need FTP)

Once your theme is installed, check out your customizable theme options (in *WordPress Admin > Appearance > Theme Options*). If you are using a theme framework, you will be able to set the width of your site, the presence of sidebars, and many other options.

The best themes and theme frameworks also give you control of the styling of every element of your site, such as background color, font, margins, etc. You need to know a little CSS to do this, but this is quite simple and if in doubt you can Google “CSS background color” for the precise syntax, or to go to [W3Schools CSS tutorial](#).

If your theme options page doesn't expose all the CSS styles, you can still modify the CSS file directly. This is a bit technical, and not recommended for regular users. If you want to try it, however, you can access your site's CSS file in **Appearance > Edit** and then edit the CSS file from there.

If you are modifying your site's CSS, you might want to take a look at [Firebug](#), a Firefox add-on that lets you examine each element of another site you like, view the underlying CSS code, and modify the CSS code on the fly and see the results. You can use it, essentially, to copy the styling of any site on the internet (and it's legal!).

Note: CSS styling commands need the hex color code, something like **#AA0944** – this is hexadecimal notation, two hex digits each for the color values: Red, Green, and Blue (00 to FF). You can find / detect color settings on another website using the Firefox [Colorzilla](#) add-on.

Special instructions for Atahualpa theme users

We have made a 30-minute video on YouTube to teach you specifically how to style the very powerful free Atahualpa theme framework. [Check it out.](#)

Understanding Posts, Pages and Links

You need to understand the basic WordPress data elements.

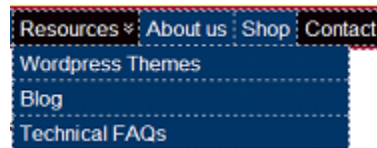
- **Posts** are time-sensitive articles, and are normally listed on your “Blog” page in reverse chronological order. You may choose not to have a “Blog” page at all (e.g. your site could have only static pages or “Pages”), OR you may choose to configure your WordPress site as a blog and to have your home page display your blog posts (this is the default configuration). Posts allow comments, although you can close or disable comments on individual posts.

Posts have **categories**. You set up your post categories in the **Posts > Categories** menu. If you create a post but don’t assign a category, it automatically gets assigned to the “Uncategorized” category (which you can rename to something else). Categories can show up on your sidebar with the “Post categories” widget.

- **Pages** are so-called **static pages** – they display content that isn’t time-sensitive, such as your Home page, About Us, Services page, and so on.

Pages do not normally allow comments, nor are they part of your RSS feed (content distribution).

Pages do not have categories, but can be created in a hierarchical structure. Depending on your theme, this could allow you to create drop-down menus in your navigation bar.



“Resources”, “About us” are top-level pages (no parent). “WordPress Themes” etc are child pages of the “Resources” page.

- **Links** are just that – URL’s to other pages on your site, or to external web pages. Links have **categories** too, albeit different from the post categories. The beauty of link categories is that you can use it to automatically populate your sidebars with groups of links, just by placing a single widget in your sidebar – see below.

Additional Notes:

- Posts, Pages and Links are each created from their own menus in your dashboard.
- There are “widgets” (see below) that allow you to automatically put your list of Pages, Recent Posts, Posts by Category, Posts Archive, Post Comments, and other content directly into your sidebar(s).

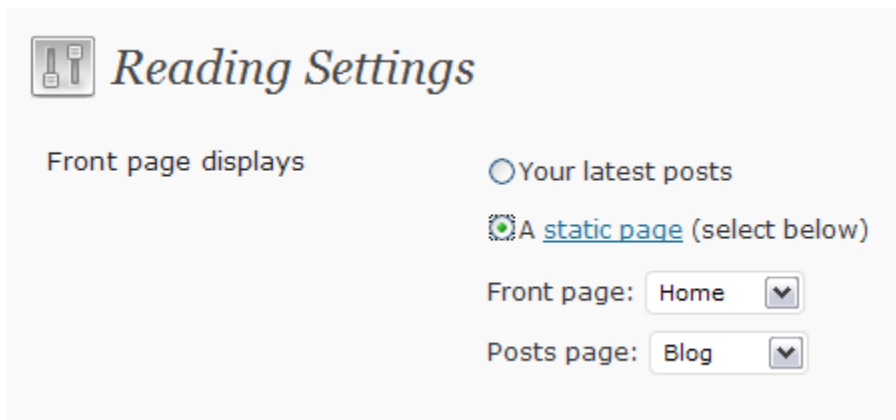
6. Basic WordPress configuration

Many of WordPress' default settings are good, but you will want to change the following. If you are setting up a static website (meaning a site that display a home page, such as virtually all business sites), this step is required.

Do this from your site dashboard, at <http://yoursitename.com/wp-admin>.

- **Settings > General:** Your blog name and tagline (tagline may appear on your header)
- **Settings > Writing:** Check the box “**Enable the WordPress, Movable Type, MetaWeblog and Blogger XML-RPC publishing protocols**” in order for Windows Live Writer to work (see below)
- **Settings > Reading:** This is where you decide if you are making a blog (posts on home page) or a static website (static home page). WordPress is configured as a blog by default. A company website will often have a static landing page, and a blog subsection of the site. Here's how you configure it.

Create two pages called “**Home**” (this is your home page), and “**Blog**” (this is a “place-holder” page – WordPress will fill it with your latest posts). Then select **Front Page displays > A static home page** and put “**Home**” and “**Blog**” in the drop-down menu.



Now go back to your site, refresh, and select your “Blog” page in your top page navigation bar – you will see it filled it with your most recent posts.

- **Settings > Privacy.** Select “**I would like my blog to be visible to everyone**” (this modifies your robots.txt file – informs search-engines of your intentions).
- **Settings > Permalinks.** Makes your URL's (links to your articles) friendlier by putting the post or page title in the URL. Generally, you will select **Month and Name**.

Permalink Settings

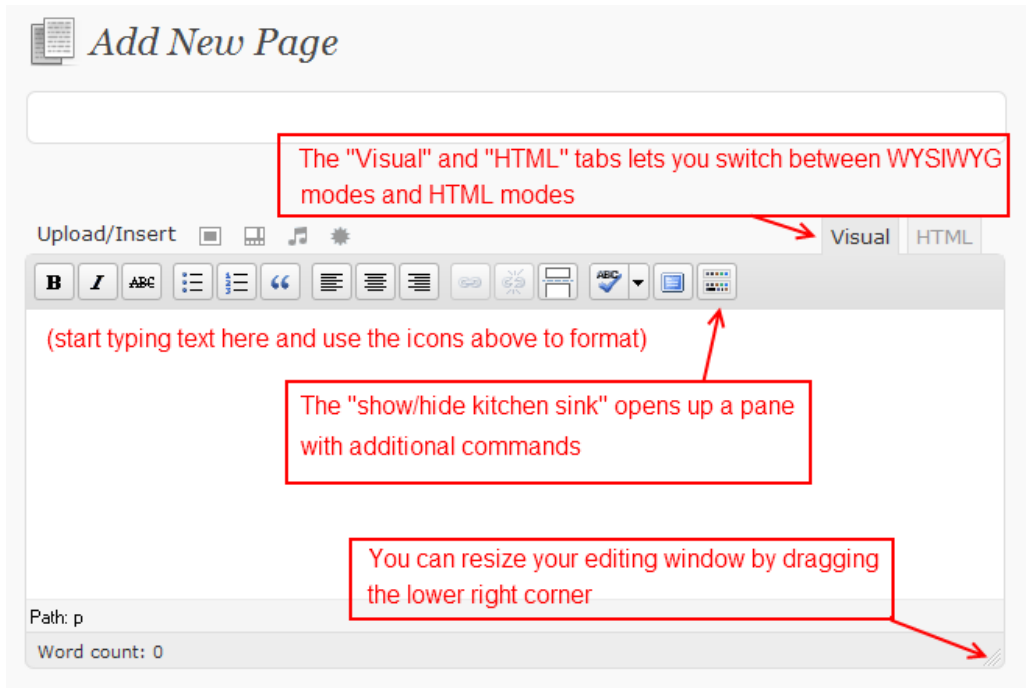
By default WordPress uses web URLs which have question marks and lots of numbers in them, but the aesthetics, usability, and forward-compatibility of your links. A [number of tags are available](#), and

Common settings

- Default `http://warrior-coach.com/demo6/?p=123`
- Day and name `http://warrior-coach.com/demo6/2010/02/17/sample-post/`
- Month and name `http://warrior-coach.com/demo6/2010/02/sample-post/`
- Numeric `http://warrior-coach.com/demo6/archives/123`
- Custom Structure

7. Using the WordPress built-in Visual Editor

To create a new Page or Post, use **Page > Add New** to **Post > Add New**. This will open up the WordPress Visual Editor. Make special note of the following:



The screenshot shows the 'Add New Page' editor interface. It features a title field at the top, a toolbar with 'Visual' and 'HTML' tabs, and a main editing area. Three red boxes with arrows point to specific features: the top right corner (Visual/HTML tabs), the 'More' icon in the toolbar, and the bottom right corner of the editor window.

The "Visual" and "HTML" tabs lets you switch between WYSIWYG modes and HTML modes

(start typing text here and use the icons above to format)


The "show/hide kitchen sink" opens up a pane with additional commands

You can resize your editing window by dragging the lower right corner

Path: p
Word count: 0

The editor is pretty straightforward and easy to use. For a more extensive introduction, check out the video tutorial [How to format content using the WordPress WYSIWYG editor](#).

Notes:

- Add an image to your Media Library (and post it automatically in your article) with the “Upload / Insert Image” icon on the top left: **Upload/Insert**  .
- Alternatively, use Windows Live Writer to create your posts, as described below.

As an alternative to the above, I recommend that you upgrade to the [Tiny MCE Advanced editor](#)

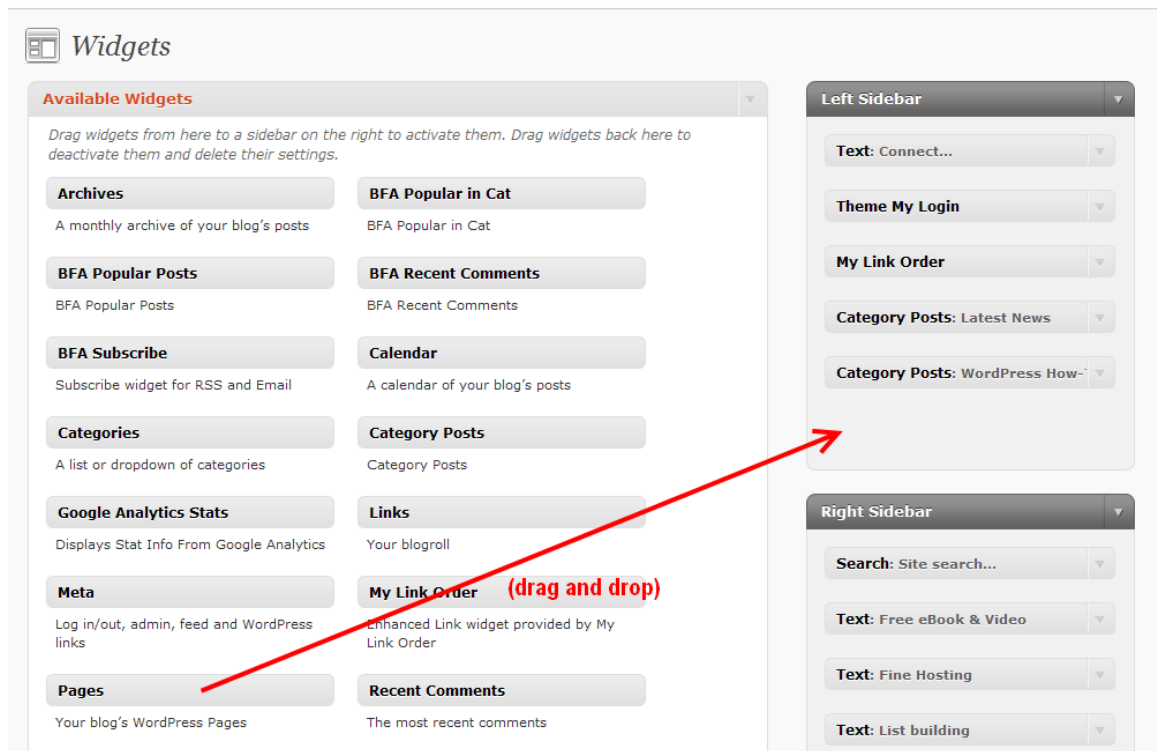
8. Sidebars and Widgets

Widgets offer new and exciting ways to remix and display your site's content, often in one of the sidebars. For more information, you may want to begin with the [Widget Overview video on WordPress.TV](#)

To configure the widgets for your site,

1. Go to **Appearance > Widgets** in your WP Dashboard.
2. On the left you will see all your available widgets. Some of these may be standard widgets that are installed by default in WordPress; others may be created by plugins (see below). For example the “My Link Order” widget is automatically created when you install that plugin.
3. To insert a widget into a sidebar, first expand the sidebar by pulling it down (arrow on the right). Then “Drag and Drop” your widgets from the center-page onto your sidebar and click “Save”.

In the example below, we are putting a “Pages” widget into our left sidebar, right below the “Category Posts” widget. This will automatically populate your sidebar with the list of static pages on your site.



The screenshot displays the WordPress Widgets management interface. On the left, under the heading "Available Widgets", there is a list of various widget options. A red arrow points from the "Pages" widget in this list to the "Left Sidebar" area on the right. The "Left Sidebar" area is currently expanded, showing a list of existing widgets: "Text: Connect...", "Theme My Login", "My Link Order", "Category Posts: Latest News", and "Category Posts: WordPress How...". The "Pages" widget is being dragged from the "Available Widgets" list to the space below the "Category Posts: WordPress How..." widget in the "Left Sidebar". The "Pages" widget is highlighted with a red border and the text "(drag and drop)" is written next to it.

To illustrate this idea further, it's best to use an example – below is an example page from the WordPress Academy “How-To” page, a blog type page.

Read this diagram carefully, and the next diagram as well, as it explains how to setup your sidebars however you want.

The image shows a screenshot of a WordPress blog page with several widgets and annotations. The annotations are as follows:

- CONNECT...:** This "Quick Links" is a Post that has been tagged as "sticky" so that it shows above other posts. This whole page is a "blog" page.
- WELCOME, MARC:** This is a Text widget. I have put an HTML table with images.
- SEARCH:** This is a "search" widget (it shows a search box).
- FREE EBOOK & VIDEO:** This is another Text widget. It has (1) The text "get ..." and hyperlink (2) The image for the ebook in an tag (3) The html signup code (<form> tag).
- MOST POPULAR:** Below this is my second (reverse chronological) post "WordPress 101 Quick Start". Introduction the program.
- LINK WIDGET:** This ONE link widget that is populated from TWO link categories:
 - Link category "Friend, Mentors...", containing 5 links
 - Link category "Member Content" containing 9 links
- HOSTING AD:** This is another Text widget with the affiliate links that were given to me by my affiliates. In some cases I uploaded my own images and linked.

Here is what the right side of **Appearance > Widgets** looks like in order to generate this layout:

The image shows a screenshot of the WordPress 'Appearance > Widgets' interface. It is divided into two main sections: 'Left Sidebar' and 'Right Sidebar'. Red arrows point from text annotations on the left to specific widgets in the sidebar panels.

Left Side-bar

- The "Connect" box -- . Expand it to see the HTML inside
- This is a special widget that creates a login box
- The Links widget (actually, this is a special widget that came with the "My Link Order" plugin that is similar to a regular Link widget but allows link ordering)

Right Sidebar

- Search box
- First Text widget. Expand it to see html code inside
- Second text widget

Note extensive use of Text widgets. This is the one widget you can't live without

The 'Left Sidebar' panel contains: 'Text: Connect...', 'Theme My Login', 'My Link Order', 'Category Posts: Latest News', and 'Category Posts: WordPress How-'. The 'Right Sidebar' panel contains: 'Search: Site search...', 'Text: Free eBook & Video', 'Text: Fine Hosting', 'Text: List building', 'Text: Themes', 'Text: Membership system', and 'Text: Worthy Google customers'.

Note that this layout (as most WordPress layouts) makes extensive use of the **Text widget**. This widget allows you to put arbitrary HTML text and images onto your sidebars (or even, in the case of the Advanced Text Widget, PHP code!)

Additional help on Widgets and navigating the WordPress User Interface

For additional tutorials see the [WordPress.TV How-To section](#). If there is anything that you find particularly helpful there, just drop me an [email](#) and I will update this document with the link.

9. Installing a recommended Plugin set

A WordPress “**Plugin**” is a piece of software that is designed to perform a specific function and integrates seamlessly with your blog. Most plugins are free and can be installed directly through your dashboard.

Until you specifically “activate” them, plugins do not work on your site (they appear in your plugins menu as inactive, and have no effect). So, if a plugin starts giving you problems, just deactivate it. An inactive plugin can also be deleted, which physically removes the plugin files from your site.

The following is the recommended minimum plugin set for all WordPress self-hosted sites. Install each of them from **Plugins > Add New**. Enter the name in the search box, followed by **Install** and **Activate**:

- **My Link Order** lets you order links and link categories by drag-and-drop.
- **Subscribe to Comments** allows users who comment on your articles to subscribe to follow-up comments, so they get notified when someone replies to them.
- **SI Captcha** requires people who comment to fill-in a “captcha” code (4 digit computer-generated number) to make sure they are not spambots. This is advised to protect you from spam comments. Note: you can also install Akismet (spam filter) but Akismet sometimes sends legitimate comments to your spam filter.
- **Redirection** allows you to redirect one page to another. Useful when you change the URL for an article, and for putting easy-to-remember affiliate links to your site (i.e. <http://everymanmarketing.com/bluehost> redirects to a Bluehost affiliate link – only a programmer can see the actual redirected link)
- **All-in-One SEO** gives you fine-grained of all your meta-tags and site description. Some themes (particularly Thesis) have their own SEO and you won’t need All-In-One.
- **Google Analyticator** is easy interface to free Google Analytics service.
- **XML Sitemap** automatically generates an XML sitemap
- **WP-DB-BACKUP** allows you to backup your site.

Notes

Some plugins automatically create new widgets. For example the “My Link Order” plugin (above) creates a widget that lets you put ordered links and links categories to your sidebar.

Don’t install plugins from untrustworthy sources, as plugins directly execute PHP code, which could even take your site down. Anything you can see in your dashboard from **Plugins > Add New** comes from WordPress.org and is probably ok, albeit not guaranteed to work.

Also note some very cool plugins (**PHP Execution** or **Advanced Text Widget**) that can directly execute your own (arbitrary) PHP code inside your pages and sidebars. If you know PHP, this will give you programmatic control of your sidebars content.

10. Creating a header (banner) for your website

Every website needs a decent header. Here's how to create one yourself in a flash.

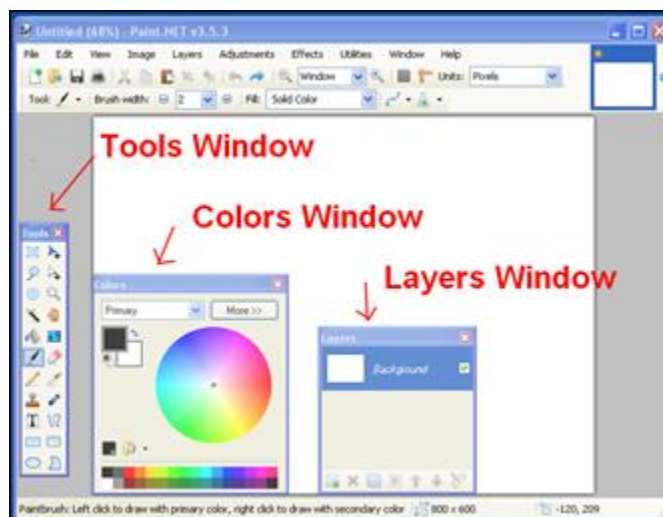
I love the free image editing software [Paint.Net](#). Unfortunately it only works on Windows. If you are on Mac, try the free [Gimp](#), which is also very good but harder to use. Alternatively, you purchase Photoshop elements for about \$100 or use the free (and excellent) online graphic editor [Sumo Paint](#).

Although the instructions below apply specifically to Paint.Net, the concepts are applicable to any image editing software.

Here is the final result we are going to produce.

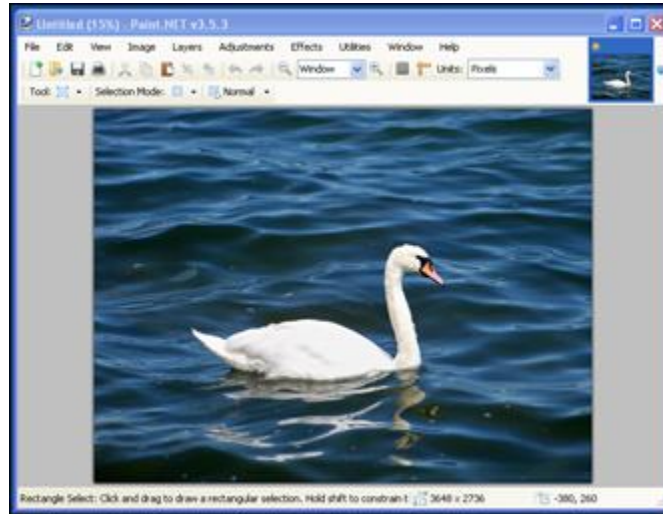



1. Start [Paint.Net](#). Make sure the **Tools window**, the **Layers window**, and the **Colors window** are visible. If not, enable them from the **View** menu.

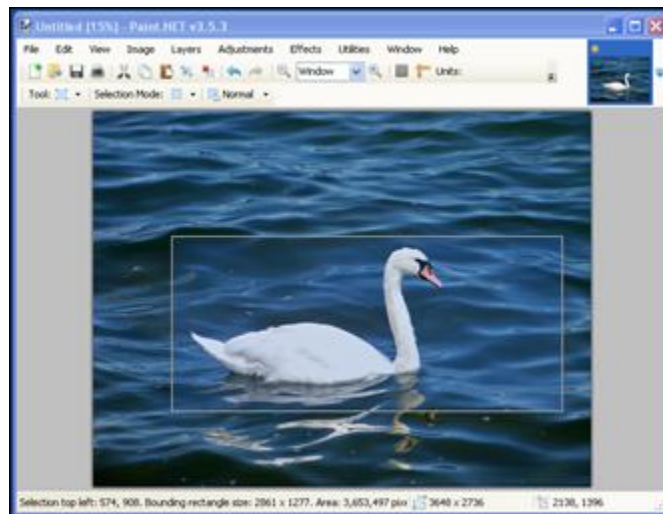


2. Go to your favorite free stock photography site (Google “free stock photography” or check [Stock.XCHNG](#)), find the image you want for your logo, view it at the largest possible resolution, then **Right-Click > Copy**

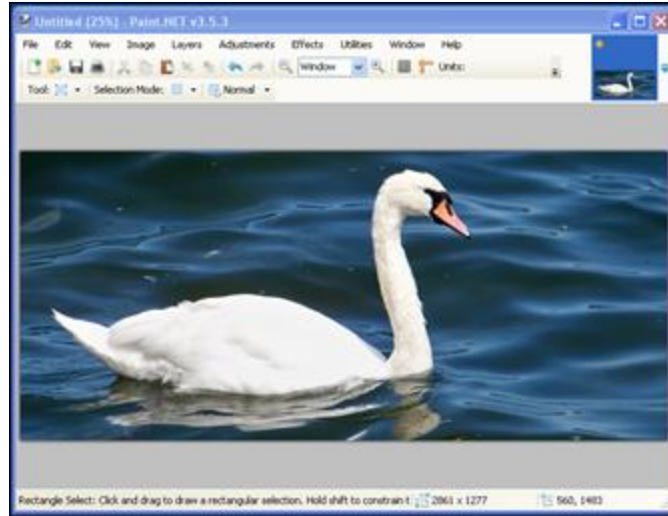
3. Edit > Paste in to New Image



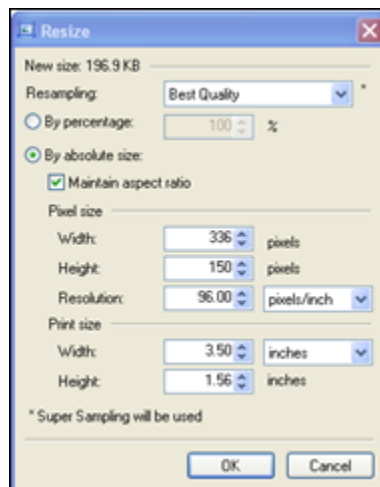
4. Click on **Rectangle Select** on the **Tools Window** (top left)  and use it to select the part of the image that you want. Leave some space at the right to do the image fade-out (see below).



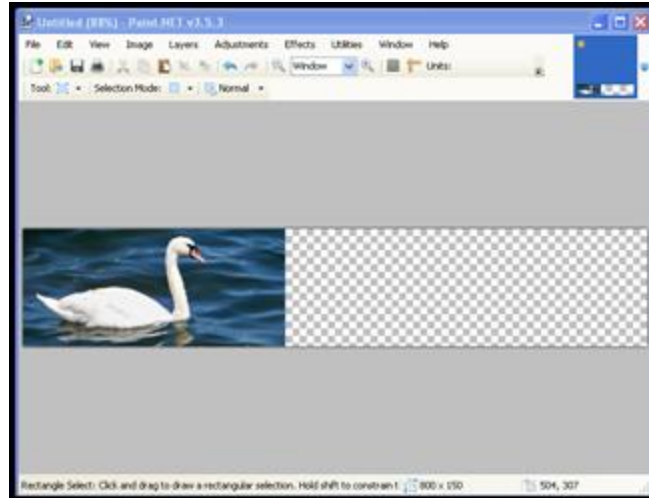
5. Do Image > Crop to Selection



6. Decide on the banner height: 150 pixels is a good height. Do **Image > Resize** and enter a Height of 150 and **OK**.

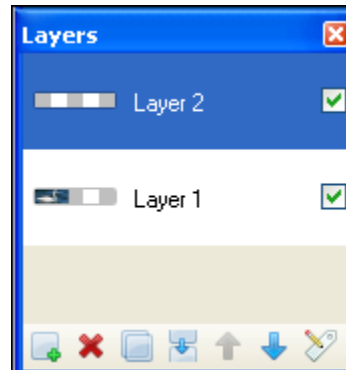


7. Choose your width depending on the width of your website (normally either 800 or 1000 pixels). Then go to **Image > Canvas Size** and put in a Width of 800. Do not check **Maintain Aspect Ratio**

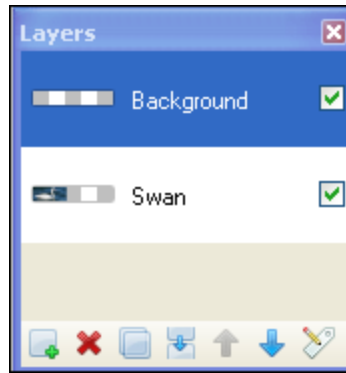


Notice the right of the image has filled with empty or transparent pixels. If you are using a variable-width theme or template and using the image for the background image of the header area, you need to make it at least 1800 pixels, even though most browsers will only see the first 1000 or 1200 pixels of width.

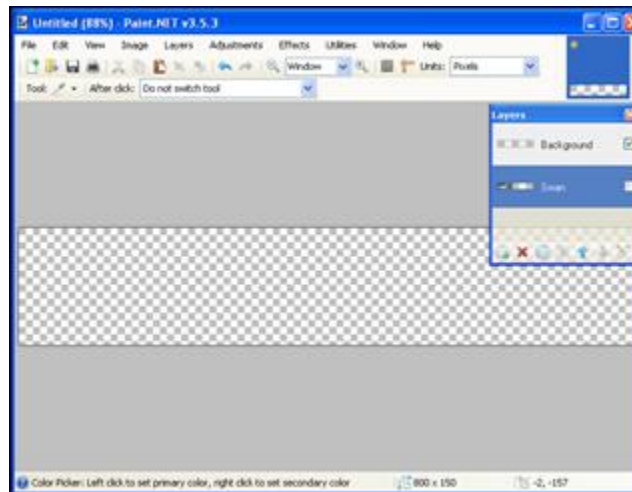
8. Now let's insert a background color / layer. Go to Layers > Add New Layer. The Image will remain unchanged but note the Layers window now shows a new layer, "Layer 2".



9. First, for clarity sake, double click on "Layer 1" in the Layers Window and call it "Swan". Now double-click on "Layer 2" and call it "Background"




To understand layers, uncheck the box next to “Swan” on the Layers Window. This makes that layer not visible. Now you only see the empty (transparent pixels) “Background” layer




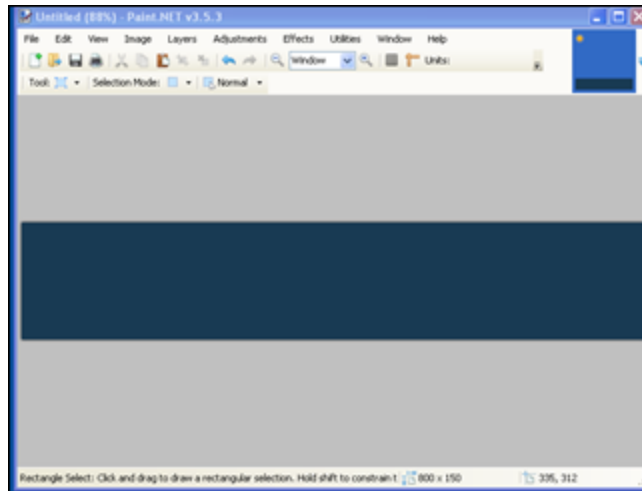
Within our image-editing program, every layer is a separate image. Images show up in a top-to-bottom layer order. The only reason we can see the layers ‘beneath’ is because there are transparent pixels on the upper layer(s).

The only reason the swan was showing at all is because the topmost “Background” layer is filled with empty (transparent) pixels.

10. Let’s fill this background with a blue color closest to our original picture. First, make the Swan layer visible again and the Background layer invisible. Then select the **Color Picker** on the Tools Window  and click on a darker area of the swan picture.

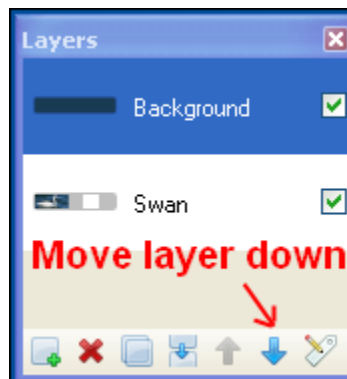
Notice the **Primary color** on the **Colors Window** has changed to a dark blue.

11. Go back to your background layer (click it in the Layers Window), select the Paint Bucket Tool  and click anywhere on the image. The entire image goes dark blue!

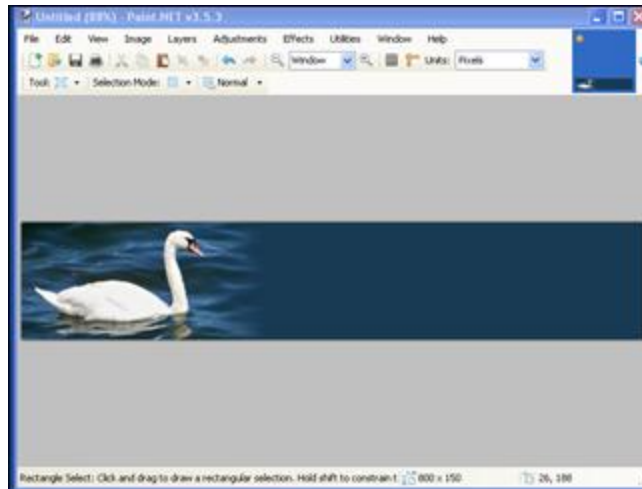


The reason, of course, is that the “Background” layer is on top of the “Swan” layer.

12. Move the Background layer down below the Swan layer. Click on “Background” in the layers window and then the down arrow:



13. Next, go back to the Swan layer and select part of the overlap between the two layers. Go to Effects > Blurs > Gaussian blur to create a fade-over effect.



14. Now use the Text tool  to write your banner text.



15. You can insert any other image by following the same procedure: add a new layer, crop and resize. Remember new layers won't be visible now unless they are on top.

Hint - You can increase the screen resolution (visible size of your image) in the **View** menu, or else by putting your mouse over the image and **Ctrl** + move the mouse scroll bar.

16. Now save the .pdn files, with all layers intact, in case you want to work more on it later. Then **File** > **Save** and save it as jpg to upload it to your website.

11. Windows Live Writer

[Windows Live Writer](#) is a marvelous tool for creating rich content on your blog offline. It is much more powerful than the built-in WordPress visual editor and is particularly useful when publishing text with a lot of images or video. With Live Writer, you create your content offline and publish it using WordPress' built-in XML-RPC protocol (this must be enabled for your blog – see your Settings menu).

The normal way to publish text and images to WordPress is this:

1. Capture or save the source image to your hard-drive.
2. Upload the image in the WordPress visual editor, crop and resize from there.

This can be a lot of keystrokes and a lot of navigating file directories. Using Windows Live Writer, you can cut both of the above steps short. What you do is:

1. Copy the image from any web or disk location (from your web browser, just right-click > Copy); or else use a free screen capture utility such as [Cropper](#).
2. Paste into Live Writer. You can resize, hyperlink or apply effects (shadow-borders for example) to the image directly
3. Publish your post. Live Writer will connect to your host and publish the image automatically to your wpcontent/uploads directory

You can also use this technique to generate pretty newsletter emails to your customers. First, set up any RSS-to-email service such as Feedblitz, Feedburner or Aweber. Then just publish a post. For more information see [Using Feedblitz or Feedburner as your newsletter system \(mailing list management\)](#).

12. Conclusion

In this guide I have tried to lay out the basic concepts and knowledge you need to design an attractive and functional website using WordPress. Hopefully this has been useful to you (obviously it has, if you have read this far ☺)

Of course there is much more that you can learn and do with WordPress – unlike most any other content management system ever produced, WordPress is not only free and easy enough for a beginner to use, it also allows infinite degree of customization and control.

If you enjoyed this eBook, I hope that you will consider joining one of our [webinars](#) that will teach you a great deal more and may allow you to really create a killer site that will both attract traffic and make you some money.

Mazel Tov! This means, if I understand it correctly, “Good luck has occurred”. I think the development of WordPress is, in fact, a great good luck for all of us self-employed people, small business owners, budding entrepreneurs, non-profits and world-changers.

13. About the author & Contact Details

Marc Beneteau is a website developer, trainer, internet marketer and entrepreneur. He lives in Philadelphia where he spends his time coaching clients on how to build attractive and effective websites, writing, teaching, parenting two teenagers, and making sushi (well, not yet – but I really want to learn!).

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