

4 lessons from WordCamp DC that will improve your website

This past weekend, I attended my sixth WordCamp (!). This time I only had to travel as far as Washington, D.C., which (finally) was hosting its first WordCamp. The past few times I've been to Baltimore and Philadelphia. In case you don't know, WordCamp is a volunteer-led conference featuring talks and workshops on various WordPress and website/blog related issues. Since this website/blog is built on WordPress, and WordPress is also a platform for so many other websites big and small, I find it extremely useful to learn more about WordPress and attend WordCamp.

This time, I made it to about 11 presentations out of a total 60. As usual, some of the presentations were really useful and/or interesting. Although I picked up several nuggets, I had four big take-aways.

Be generous

Have you ever clicked on a blog post that promised you some good information, but found out instead that the post was a sales pitch for the book/webinar/course where you could pay to access the information? I hate that and so does Tracy Schorn, who is the author of the very popular Chump Lady blog. Her main advice from "How to Build a Popular Blog and Master WordPress Even If You Are a Liberal Arts Major" is to be generous. Tracy says you should offer solutions, help people and be a resource for your readers.

Of course, Tracy works hard at her blog too. She writes a post every weekday, and answers her readers' questions. Tracy is definitely on to something, as she is living the blogger's dream. Her blog became so popular that she was able to write a

book, get it published and then get it optioned for a TV series! Oh, and she makes money off her blog too.

Many ways to improve your SEO

John Victoria runs a SEO/digital marketing agency and his talk was “10 Reasons Why Your Site is Nowhere to be Found on Google (and what to do about it).” The answer to getting your site to be found on Google is SEO—search engine optimization. Being in the first page of Google’s organic search results is crucial if you want potential customers to find you.

Among his suggestions:

- Check your site loading speed—a slow load will turn off readers
- Submit your URL to Google
- Backlinks to your site matter. But, do not, under any circumstances, pay to get lots of backlinks to your site. Focus on quality not quantity.
- Submitting an article to a leading publication/site in your field is a great way to build quality backlinks and third-party credibility
- Use your keywords judiciously—do not keyword stuff and think of other ways of saying the same thing (e.g., dentist, dental practice).

Take a step now toward enhanced website security

Websites get hacked all the time. Sometimes the hackers are trying to make money by redirecting your traffic to another site. Sometimes they are trying to spread malware. Whatever the reason, this is something you, as a website/blog owner, need to work hard to avoid. And it does take work and know-how. According to Adam Warner of SiteLock, from his talk “5 Steps to Personal and Website Security,” even taking one step helps. Some of what he recommended:

- Have strong passwords, do not repeat them and consider

using a password manager

- Install SSL on your website, which, as a bonus, gives you an SEO boost
- Use a plug-in to limit the amount of logins into your site
- Do not use public Wi-Fi networks that are not password protected

Design matters

I really liked Annie Smidt's talk "Easy Design Tips for Non Designers." She says (and I completely agree) that design can make your site look credible, and can also help visitors like your site. We all know how important it is to make a good first impression.

Some things Annie suggested non-designers should consider:

- Have a hierarchy—the most important message must stand out
- Consistency is important
- Your color palette should match your audience and the mood you are trying to create (Annie provided some great sites/ideas on how to come up with palettes too)
- Typography increases comprehension, so choose typefaces carefully and don't use too many fonts (she says having two is good: one serif, one sans serif)

One important tidbit I learned from Annie was how to make em-dashes on WordPress. All you have to do is use the Omega button to access special characters. I've already done it in this post!

You can read her slides [here](#), and see her excellent suggestions on where to get color palette ideas.

There were dozens of other sessions on three different tracks. Some were targeted to developers and some to those who work in government or big institutions. Most of them should be available on WordPress TV.

I highly recommend attending a WordCamp in person. It's fun, you'll learn new stuff and great hacks, meet new people, and not to mention, you'll get a t-shirt. For a list of upcoming WordCamps, just check WordCamp Central. There are WordCamps everywhere!