



JULY 27

ONLINE EVENT

# WORDPRESS PUBLISHERS PERFORMANCE SUMMIT

SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS

Sponsored by MULTIDOTS



# INTRODUCTION

WordPress is, by far, the most popular content management system (CMS) in use the world over. As of 2022, 43.1% of all websites on the internet were built using WordPress. There are several reasons for this.

1

## FREE AND OPEN-SOURCE

WordPress was, and remains, open-source and free to use. It is owned by the non-profit WordPress Foundation, and released under the GNU Public License (GPL). This means that anyone can download, customize and even sell the WordPress software under the GPL license. Users only have to pay for additional features such as premium themes, premium support or certain plugins.

2

## VAST LIBRARY OF PLUGINS AND ADD-ONS

WordPress has over 59,000 plugins and add-ons to choose from, perhaps the largest of any CMS. These plugins and add-ons cover a wide range of functionalities, from SEO to security, making WordPress flexible and easy to scale.

3

## EASILY CUSTOMIZABLE

WordPress comes with tens of thousands of themes, with a little over 11,000 of these being free to use. These themes can then be further customized. This allows users to create their own distinctive website with very little technical expertise

4

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Since WordPress is open-source, it has a thriving and proactive support community to help users troubleshoot issues.

5

## MOBILE-READINESS

WordPress helps build websites that are mobile-friendly, and provides easy integration with social media platforms, analytics tools such as GA4, and marketing solutions such as Mailchimp.



# WPPS 2023

The WordPress Publishers Performance Summit 2023 (WPPS) was held on July 27, 2023. A completely online event, it featured 11 panelists who shared their expertise on WordPress best practices over three hours.





**8 WORDPRESS**

**BEST PRACTICES DIGITAL**

**PUBLISHERS SHOULD KNOW**

# 1

## HOW TO DO LESS:

### EVALUATE YOUR WEBSITE'S

### PERFORMANCE AND METRICS

WordPress has one of the biggest libraries of plugins and add-ons. However, using too many of these can cause a website to bloat, eventually impacting performance.

The solution is for publishers to take a minimalist approach to building their tech stack, such that they can effectively track performance without impacting performance.

To do this, they need to focus on the following areas:

- Performance
- Usability
- Security
- Extendability

Pointers publishers need to keep in mind when planning from the beginning:

**Needs assessment:** Be clear about the problem you are looking to solve, and the outcomes you expect when expanding your tech stack.

Keep in mind that adding new plugins or integrations can also have unexpected unintended consequences and benefits. For instance, a monetization solution can impact editorial workflows and/or end user experience in both positive and negative ways. Be as clear about these potential impacts as possible to avoid surprises later on.

**Collecting baseline data:** Baselines are important for measuring progress. Baseline data includes metrics such as active engagement time, search traffic, recirculation rate, conversion rate, etc. Start collecting baseline data from the planning stage itself rather than waiting till the launch or integration of the proposed change to the website. This helps with getting a clearer picture of the before and after situations.

**Research:** This includes taking in the opinions of all the related stakeholders involved – end users, readers, customers, etc. The advantage here is that it highlights the areas on which the proposed project will have an impact.

**Set goals and outcomes:** Set measurable goals before the start of the project. While doing this, it is vital to understand that not all outcomes will move up or increase in a desired direction. For instance, a change implemented to improve page speed may have no change on newsletter signups. It is still important to set down this “no change” goal at the outset to ensure that even if newsletter signups are not increasing, they’re not being negatively impacted either.



## 2

## TOOLS AND EXECUTION

Three things publishers need to focus on:

**Evaluate current tools:** Talk to your partners and team members to assess the current state of tools you're using. Software gets updated fast, and it is easy to miss an update that could do the job but which you aren't aware of.

**Create a plan:** Create a plan on how to achieve your goals. Set timelines and assign tasks to relevant stakeholders.

**Execute, measure, iterate:** Remember that the task is not done once the project is launched. You need to continuously evaluate the impact of what you've achieved, then iterate till the desired outcome is achieved.

## 3

## EDITORIAL WORKFLOWS

Highly technical projects have impacts across the organization and it is important to be mindful of this. For content-based websites, editorial is at the heart of the publishing process, and is often the department with the least familiarity with tech. For this reason, ease the transition for those departments and users who may not have much exposure to the new tech. This can be done using the following means:

- Provide context for the new changes that have been implemented along with the expected outcomes.
- Provide continuous training.
- Implement new solutions to tech stacks that users are already familiar with to avoid abrupt transitions.

## TIPS ON CHOOSING WISELY

We've had a top-level view on how to build a strategic plan for implementing changes to your WordPress tech stack.

We now get down to looking at the nuts and bolts of things in a little detail.



### THEMES

Make a decision on whether you'd require a custom theme or a ready-made theme.



### PAGE BUILDERS

Take the following features into consideration:

**Theme compatibility:** Since WordPress is open-source, many different developers have contributed to its library of themes and page builders. This means that not all page builders are compatible with all WordPress themes.

**Community support:** Good page builders have thriving support communities where other users and developers help troubleshoot the most common issues.

**User interface:** The page builder should have an intuitive, easy-to-use interface.





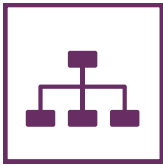
## PLUGINS

**Validate authenticity:** Make sure all plugins you download are authentic and do not contain any malicious code. There are a couple of ways to do this. The [WordPress Authenticity Checker](#) is a plugin that does it automatically. Other options such as [Jetpack Protect](#) and [WPScan](#) can scan an entire website including plugins and themes to detect vulnerabilities.

Those with coding knowledge or with a coding team at their disposal can [implement it manually](#).

**Minimum plugins:** As a general rule, keep plugins to a minimum to avoid bloating your website. Further pay attention to the following factors:

- How old is the plugin? Outdated plugins can negatively affect a website's performance.
- How many reviews and active installs does a plugin have? The more reviews and active installs, the more it is trusted by its users.
- Who are the developers? If you see a developer you've never heard of listed under a plugin, it would be good to do a quick Google search to make sure of their credentials.
- How often is the plugin updated? Needless to say, the more frequently a plugin is updated, the better it will perform.



## CONTENT ARCHITECTURE

Content architecture refers to the way content is structured on a website. Good content architecture allows content to be easily discoverable and shareable across platforms and devices on the internet.

Here are some content architecture best practices and plugins that can be used for them.

- **Use of WordPress multisite:** WordPress multisite allows users manage to multiple sites that share the same theme, plugins, and installation files. This is beneficial for businesses who run multiple websites as all websites can be managed and updated from a single dashboard. Examples of multisite plugins include [User Switching](#) and [InfiniteWP](#).
- **Custom post types:** Post types are identifiers that WordPress uses to classify content. It has certain in-built post types such as Posts, Pages, Attachments, Revisions, Navigation Menu, Custom CSS and Changesets. Users who find these inadequate can create their own custom post types using plugins such as [Custom Post Type UI](#).
- **Taxonomies:** Taxonomies are ways of grouping WordPress posts together. Taxonomies can be hierarchical or non-hierarchical. An example of the former is a table of contents, while an example of the latter are tags. A plugin for easily adding taxonomies is [Simple Taxonomy Refreshed](#).

To the extent possible, it is advisable to go with native plugins that operate from a website's own server and are not dependent on third-party services.



## HOSTING PLATFORM

When choosing a good hosting platform, keep the following in mind:

- The platform should be enterprise ready
- Managed WordPress is better in the long term as it provides greater security and better uptime.
- Make sure the hosting platform offers SSL/HTTPS for enhanced security along with guaranteed uptime of 99.9%.
- CDNs or content delivery networks are a group of servers that complement a good hosting platform that enable additional servers to deliver a website's content faster to its users. Cloudflare and Sucuri are among the most commonly used CDN services among WordPress users.



## HIRING ENGINEERS

If you envisage the proposed tech integration to be too complex to handle in-house, you might want to consider bringing on external help.

A few things to consider when you hire engineers to implement changes to your tech stack:

- Do they have relevant experience and subject knowledge with the specific plugin, theme or page builder?
- Are they familiar with [WordPress Coding Standards](#)?

## 2

# CORE WEB VITALS

Core web vitals (CWVs) are a set of metrics used to measure page experience. Better page experience leads to increased time on site, more return visitors, and eventually, higher conversions.

CWVs include:

**Largest Contentful Paint (LCP):** This is a measure of the load time of the largest element of a website in a user's viewport.

**First Input Delay (FID):** This is a measure of the response time to an interaction.

**Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS):** This is a measure of how stable a webpage is during loading.

From March 2024, Interaction to Next Paint (INP) is set to replace FID as a CWV. While FID only measures the input delay in the first interaction, INP measures all interactions during a user's visit to a web page and reports the longest one.



## 1

### RECOMMENDED OPTIMIZATIONS FOR IMPROVING CWVS

- Ensure the LCP resource is discoverable from the HTML source. This can be done by preloading images instead of lazy loading them, or using `<img>` tags instead of `<img src>` which is loaded using Javascript.
- Ensure the LCP resource is prioritized. In versions of WordPress 6.2.5 or older, this can be done by using the “fetchpriority” element in the HTML code and setting its value to “high”. However, starting from version 6.3, WordPress automatically sets the fetchpriority attribute to high for the image it determines to be the LCP image.
- Use a CDN
- Set explicit sizes on any content loaded from the page. This can be done by adding attributes such as “width”, “height”, “aspect ratio” etc, in the page’s HTML code.
- Avoid or break up long tasks. This can be using ChromeDevTools which highlights long tasks ( of over 50 milliseconds) in red in the performance panel.
- Avoid unnecessary Javascript.

## 2

### TOOLS TO CHECK WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

The two most commonly used tools to measure website performance are:

- **Page speed insights (PSI):** PSI is a free tool from Google that assigns a single score between 0 to 100 for a webpage’s user experience.
- **Google search console (GSC):** GSC is also a free tool which differs from PSI in that it offers separate scores for each of the three CWVs.

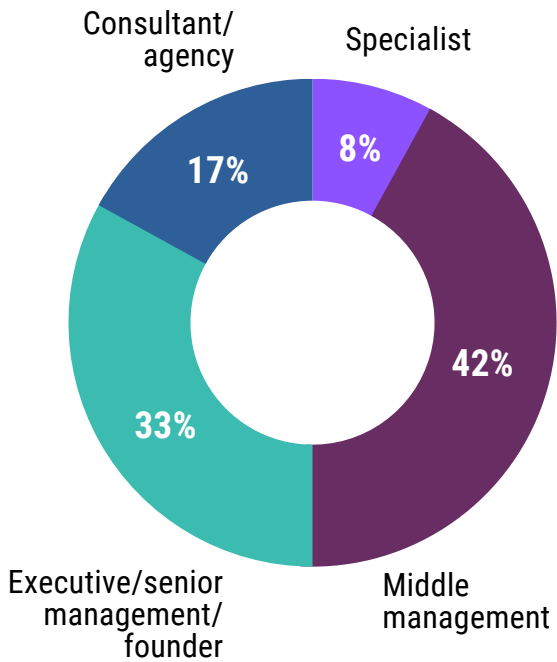
# 3

## SECURING AND SCALING

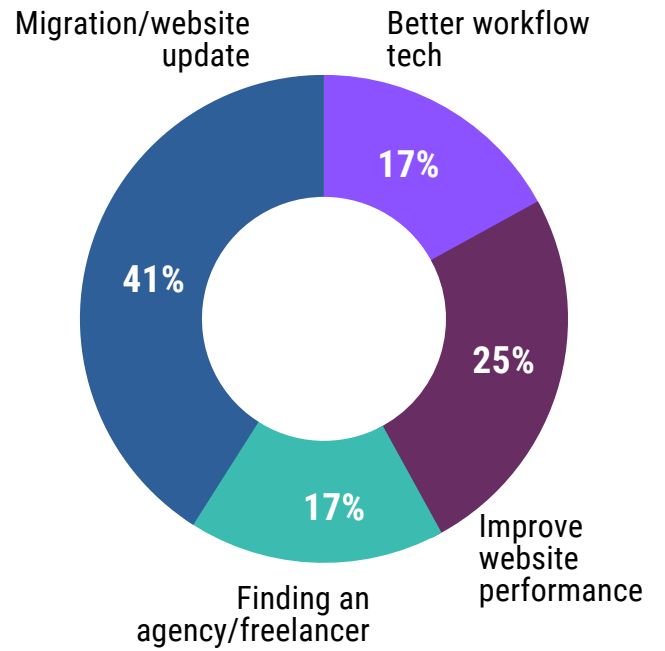
## WORDPRESS

We put the audience of WPPS to a poll to get a better understanding of where our listeners were coming from in terms of their experience and skill with using WordPress. This is what the results looked like:

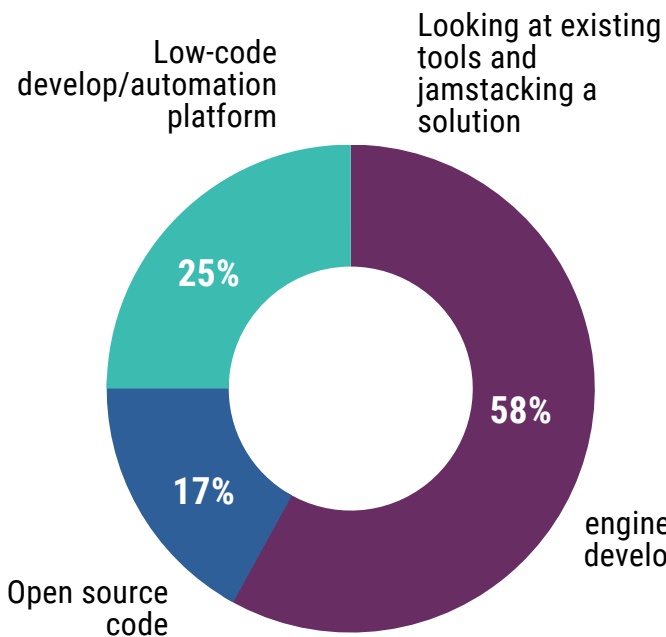
**What level do you classify your role as?**



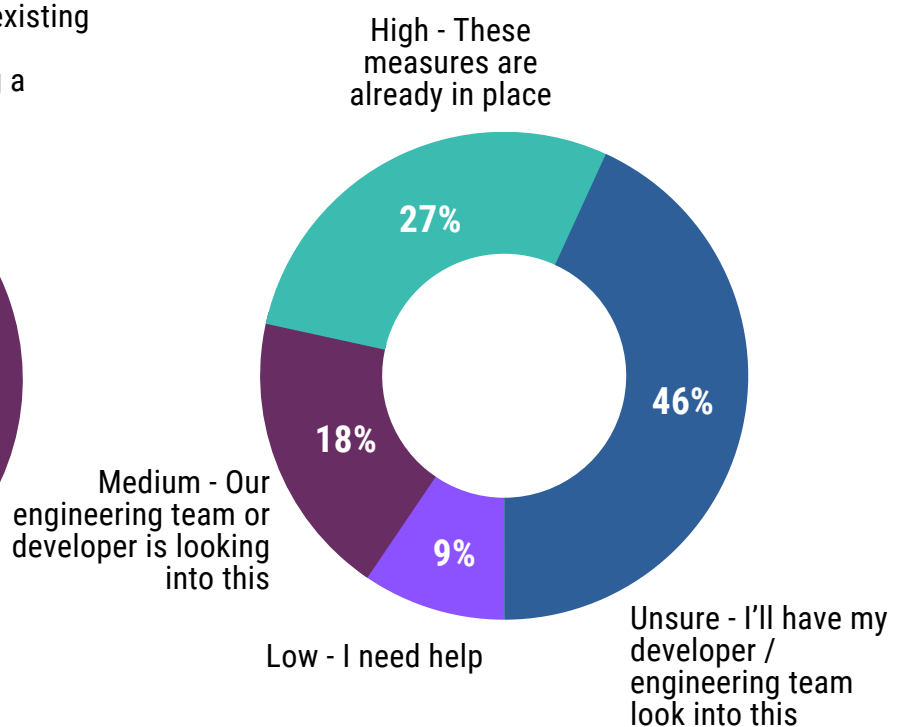
**What's your WordPress site priority for this year?**



**What frameworks/inspiration do you rely on for custom tool developments?**



**How comfortable are you with enhancing the security of your WordPress website and the options available?**



## CUSTOMIZING WORDPRESS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

One of the panelists illustrated how they went about managing customization and stakeholder management. Theirs was a simple three-step approach consisting of:

1. Running tests at a small scale
2. Measuring results
3. Seeking approval to scale up.

So, for instance, they would use Gutenberg reusable blocks to run small tests and create a minimum viable product (MVP), and then would get approval to create a more customized solution such as a deep linking interstitial tool. They followed a similar approach for customized email tools.

Another panelist explained that they took a different approach to customization.

- Surf the market for customization tools, then brainstorm about how this product can be improved and customized.
- When it comes to SEO, publishers should look for out-of-the-box solutions that go beyond just Yoast.
- When faced with a build vs buy decision, opt for homegrown CMS wherever possible. Build by borrowing as many WordPress features as possible.



# 5

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

## WORDPRESS VIP FOR

## SECURITY AND SCALABILITY

WordPress VIP is the enterprise version of WordPress' CMS. It is built to handle the highest volume of traffic without compromising on security. Some of the most-visited news and content websites in the world are built on WordPress VIP.

Here are some of the features that make it secure and scalable:

**Agility:** WordPress VIP is built on top of the WordPress platform and retains all the features of its popular version. This is unlike several other enterprise products that tend to be clunkier and heavier versions of their consumer version.

**Advanced security:** WordPress VIP is FedRAMP authorized – a security standard used by US government websites. It also comes with features such as code scanning and advanced authentication.

**Scalability without performance loss:** WordPress VIP runs in a fully containerized environment. This allows it to scale up when needed while isolating customer environments from other organizations. This in turn allows it to scale without performance degradation.

A good case study in point is [sneakernews.com](http://sneakernews.com) – a news website for sneaker enthusiasts. Launched in 2006, the website today receives over 7.5 million unique visitors. To handle its rapidly growing traffic, the website partnered with Multidots to transition to WordPress VIP.

### **Multidots delivered the following features:**

- A custom theme to sync with its existing database
- Customized plugins and integrations such as eBay API integration
- AMP integration
- Unified logic for streamlined content update

### **The result:**

- Page load time decreased from 5.0s to 1.2s.
- Editorial team's operational efficiency increased by 65%.
- Page views increased by 20%, with 50% of all new traffic coming from organic searches.
- Downtime reduced to almost zero.
- Global Alexa rank increased by 1,418 positions in just three months.



# 6

## IMPROVING PUBLISHER

## WORKFLOWS

Content typically needs to flow past several stakeholders in an organization before it is ready to be published. Collaborating for editorial workflows is an exciting area that is likely to see a lot of developments in the near future.

Collaboration extends beyond just editing – it also includes publishing and content distribution. At present, publishers use systems such as Gutenberg, Editorial Collaboration Software add-ons, and Headless CMS to collaborate. This has primarily been due to WordPress' limitations when it comes to collaborating for workflows.

Gutenberg Phase-3, however, is set to introduce Google Docs-style collaborative editing capabilities to WordPress, possibly obviating the need for third-party services and the all potential risks associated with them.

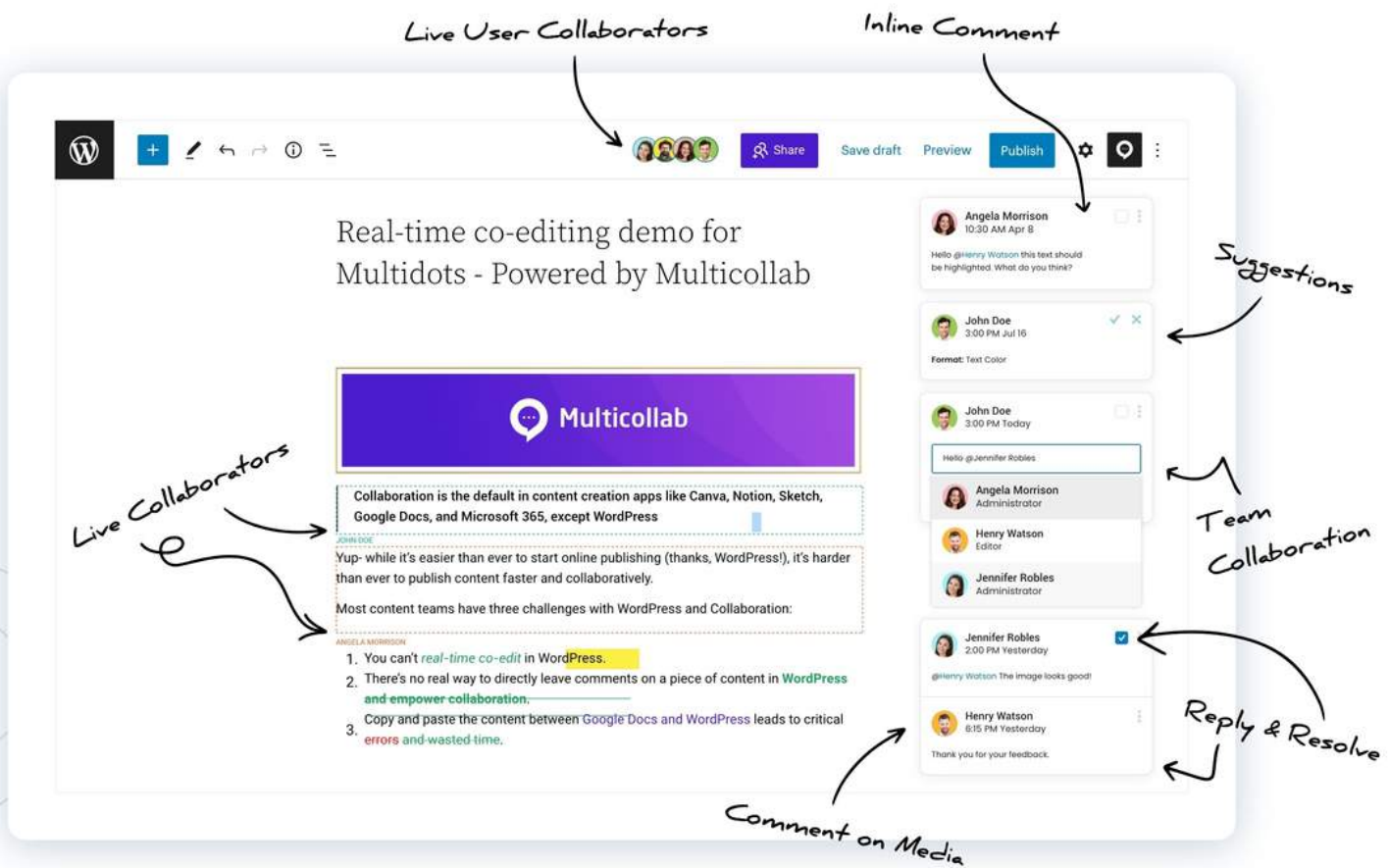
In this section, we examine some aspects related to workflow and collaboration in WordPress.

## STREAMLINING WORKFLOWS IN WORDPRESS

Most publishers use some kind of editorial collaboration add-on such as Multicollab or BuddyPress for managing workflows.



### Google Docs-Style Collaboration in WordPress



These come with several advantages and disadvantages of their own.

The advantage they offer is the breadth of functionality. Different add-ons come with specialized features that publishers can leverage.



The drawback, however, is an impact on website performance and security as eventually, these third-party add-ons become another addition to already heavy tech stacks

The flow becomes even more important for news publishers who deal with time-sensitive content. For them, it is critical to figure out how teams can collaborate in real time to get a trending story done in a shorter period of time – from sourcing to templatization to going live.

Three editorial best practices that you can use to achieve better editorial collaboration are:

- Internal linking
- Leveraging open graph tags for better headline optimization
- Using Google Trends for insights

Finally, knowledge sharing is important to improve editorial collaboration and reduce friction for adoption. Constant workshops to repeat and address issues are a strategy to deploy to this end. It also helps to designate dedicated internal resources to manage internal knowledge centers.

# 7

## GUTENBERG PHASE 3:

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Gutenberg Phase 3 will allow Google Docs-style collaborating editing capabilities within WordPress. However, it also comes with its own set of challenges.

Here's how Gutenberg Phase 3 will revolutionize publisher workflows:

1. Reduced dependency on third-party tools
2. Ease of managing permissions even for a large number of collaborators
3. Simultaneous review of dynamic content including image carousels, videos and call to action (CTA) blocks.
4. Shorter review cycles
5. Better organizational data security as publishers will be able to restrict access and manage permissions for members external to the organization.

### GUIDE

## Building Blocks of Collaboration in Gutenberg Phase 3 (Roadmap Extended)



That said, from what we know about the proposed capabilities of Gutenberg Phase 3, we also foresee the following challenges it may face:

- The proposed Google Docs-style collaborative capabilities will need to deploy socket programming and high-performance servers, both of which are resource intensive.
- Managing edit history of documents can become complex and cumbersome.
- Some training would be required to shift teams used to working with Google Docs or third-party plugins to WordPress.

These challenges mean that even with the introduction of Gutenberg Phase 3, third-party plugins such as Multicollab will not go away.

Multicollab, for instance, solves the data security issues associated with third-party plugins by restricting permissions for external stakeholders.



# 8

## HEADLESS CMSs AND OTHER

## IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

## IN THE PUBLISHING SPACE

A third approach to editorial collaboration, besides Gutenberg and third-party plugins, is headless CMS. A headless CMS disentangles content from the code to which it is tied in a traditional CMS, allowing it to be deployed easily across multiple devices and platforms, while automating changes. Boston.com has relied extensively on headless CMSs to distribute content to regional partners effectively.

Boston.com is also bullish on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the publishing process. While concerns remain about AI's limitations, especially its tendency to produce factually inaccurate or infringing on copyrighted content, it does have useful applications for automating news articles that are repetitive and not critical.

Another important trend to look forward to is personalization of an existing article in a local context.



**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**FOR PUBLISHERS**



## MULTIDOTS

Publishers interested in exploring the complete potential of WordPress would do well to get in touch with [Mutlidots](#), a WordPress VIP Gold Partner selected by Automattic – the company behind WordPress.com. Multidots specializes in WordPress migration and helping organizations maximize their web-based monetization by optimizing website performance and implementing efficient workflows.

## READING

1. [Building Blocks of Collaboration in Gutenberg Phase 3 \(Roadmap Extended\)](#)
2. [10 Website Performance Metrics That Publishers Should Track](#)
3. [How to Improve CWVs for WordPress Websites](#)
4. [Gutenberg for Publishers With Jeremy Fremont](#)
5. [Your Guide to the Brand New WordPress Gutenberg Editor](#)
6. [The 14 Best Headless CMS Platforms in 2023](#)

## CWV MASTERCLASS SLIDES

[Reasons Why Your Core Web Vitals Are Not Passing](#) – Presentation slides by Jeremy Fremont (Multidots) and Barry Pollard (Google)

## WHAT LIES AHEAD

WordPress is constantly evolving and expanding. While the publishing industry is excited about Gutenberg Phase 3, WordPress is already planning out the roadmap to roll out Gutenberg Phase 4 by 2025 which would support multilingual sites.

In fact, according to Matt Mullenweg, the CEO of Automattic, the company's vision for Gutenberg is to become a solution independent of WordPress, eventually overshadowing WordPress itself as a platform agnostic, multilingual collaboration tool.

Whatever the future, the best strategy for digital publishers to stay prepared is staying abreast of the latest trends, and quickly adapting to technological shifts. We hope this ebook has been a small step forward in this direction.

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