Build with WordPress.

TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP

WP engine®

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Summary.

It's for good reason that a growing number of businesses, from large enterprises to SMBs, are choosing WordPress over other Content Management Systems (CMSs) to power their digital strategies.

As these organizations adopt WordPress—often because of its ease-of-use, extensibility, and agility—many of them run into an initial hurdle when trying to determine the best way to install it and set it up.

Without the proper guidance, some businesses pursue an outdated, on-premise, "DIY" model to run their WordPress sites. Others outsource the management of their sites to generic hosting providers who lack extensive WordPress-specific expertise.

As the use of WordPress continues to expand, an increasing number of organizations are turning to a third option—a WordPress-specific digital experience provider—to optimize their sites and ensure best practices when it comes to performance, agility, analytics, and integrations.

Because the costs associated with each option vary greatly, a thorough total cost of ownership (TCO) analysis is a good way to help you determine the best choice for your business.

This ebook will give you the tools needed to understand why a growing number of businesses are using WordPress to power their websites, how they're finding success, as well as a full TCO analysis associated with each of the three most common hosting options available.

What is WordPress?

WordPress is an open source CMS that has grown immensely in popularity since its launch in 2003. Today, WordPress is the web's most popular CMS—it powers **more than 34% of the Internet** and **60% of CMS users choose WordPress** over other CMS platforms.

This popularity is due in part to the **ease-of-use** WordPress has become known for, as well as the dedicated community of WordPress developers that constantly contribute to its core software and provide security fixes, designs, maintenance, resources, and support.

Because WordPress is open source, that community is also able to contribute to an extensive and growing list of **plugins** and **themes** that give users endless ways to customize and add new features to their websites.

The functionality of WordPress itself has also greatly expanded over the years, and the CMS has become the go-to solution for many businesses looking to build out content hubs, eCommerce stores, corporate sites, and a wide range of other digital experiences that help differentiate their businesses online.

More than 34% of the Internet and 60% of CMS users choose WordPress over other CMS platforms.

The limits of WordPress hosting.

WordPress is a framework that powers websites, and as such, users face a choice when they decide to put it to use—where will their WordPress site be hosted?

The first option for getting a WordPress site online is to do it yourself. This is commonly referred to as the "DIY" or "on-premise" model, in which a site owner provides their own server, their own connection to the Internet, and the technical expertise needed to set their website up and get it online. The on-premise name comes from the fact that the server(s) usually live on site at a company's office or other location. DIY can also refer to site administrators who work directly with a cloud infrastructure provider to set up their hardware.

As we'll explain below, the on-premise or DIY option can become expensive quickly, and it's fraught with complexity, particularly as a business grows, its web presence expands, and an increasing amount of traffic begins coming to its site(s). When migrating over from a non-WordPress site to this type of deployment, the cost and complexity, as well as sheer time spent transfering over massive amounts of data can also add up fast.

For a more affordable option, other WordPress users can choose a web host that provides the basics: a server, Internet connection, and assistance setting up a domain and basic WordPress (or other platform) installation. This option can be considered "generic economy hosting" as it usually won't offer expertise for any one platform, and while it's economical in the sense of a low upfront price, customers may find themselves paying more down the road in hidden or unexpected costs due to service issues or security vulnerabilities.

While the generic hosting option will get a WordPress site online, users are often left on their own from that point on. The provider typically offers a shared hosting environment with lots of different types of sites and platforms running on it. Optimizing a particular site beyond its initial state is generally left up to the user, and things like backups, updates, and security patches may or may not be included in the service plan—the extent of each provider's involvement varies. Assistance with analytics, SEO optimization, and other performance enhancements, if available, are generally a separate cost at this level of service, and acquiring those "extras" often means purchasing them from a variety of different vendors.

Another option, which builds on the generic model but offers more specialized WordPress support, is called Managed WordPress Hosting. This level of service can mean different things depending on the vendor providing it, nonetheless, a provider at this level should be able to offer customers an environment that's optimized for WordPress, as well as a handful of other amenities such as backups and staging environments.

Growing into WordPress digital experiences.

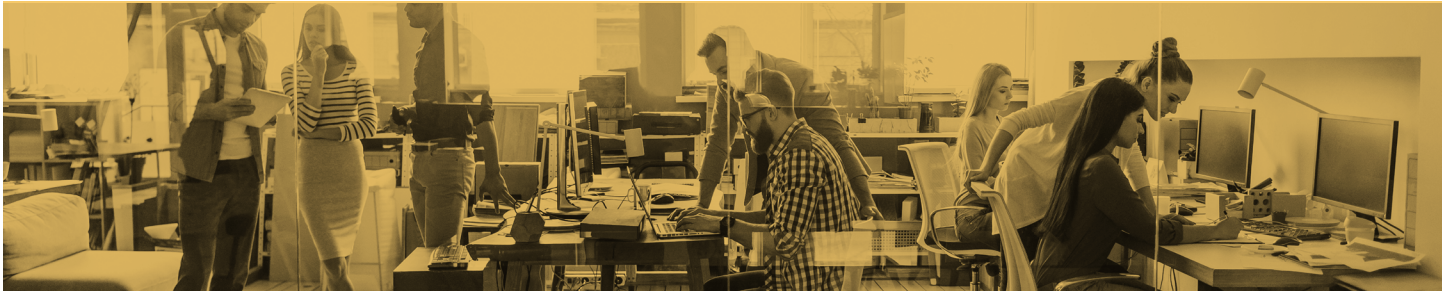
Because the above options can still leave a lot to be desired, an increasing number of organizations turn to another choice when it comes to powering their WordPress sites.

A WordPress-specific digital experience provider such as WP Engine builds on the the Managed WordPress Hosting model and adds another layer of value—a Digital Experience Platform (DXP). In addition to offering superior technical infrastructure, WP Engine brings a deep understanding of the WordPress ecosystem as well as the business landscape that translates into the resources and development tools customers need to gain an edge in their markets.

In addition to providing an integrated platform that streamlines the various touchpoints across the customer journey, a DXP provider should be able to offer 24/7 live technical support for everything from simple questions to more complex, performance-related issues that help customers get the most out of the digital experiences they're providing to their audiences. If the DXP is built for WordPress, this level of technical support should also provide access to WordPress experts who are not only proficient in the infrastructure systems that support the WordPress application, but the WordPress application itself.

At WP Engine, we believe a digital experience provider—and its platform—should also make it easy to integrate with other business applications and platforms, such as those found within a company's **martech stack**, its analytics tools, and ecommerce solutions.

With WP Engine's WordPress **Digital Experience Platform**, for example, getting a WordPress site up and running is simply the first step in an overall optimization process that combines agility, performance, intelligence, and integration solutions to help you build and deploy a range of online experiences, from campaign sites and content hubs to ecommerce extensions.



Snapshot: Today's enterprise.

Today's enterprise organizations face a growing list of challenges. Chief among them is agility and the ability to adapt to new market trends quickly and effectively. If you can't move fast, your competitors will overtake you. Often times, the marketing department inside a large organization will correctly identify a new trend or message they wish to capitalize on, only to watch it fizzle out in the internal bureaucracy they face while trying to get it to market.

One reason for this is that a sizable amount of corporate websites are built with complex architecture that requires a large investment of time and money to update. Going to market within a matter of weeks is usually not an option, and in the slowdown that inevitably occurs during this process, the marketing campaign that should have been grows stale or is taken advantage of by another party.

This isn't a new phenomenon, however, some enterprises are finding new ways to combat it. WordPress, because it's easy to use and fast to install, and because it can integrate well with existing platforms, is seeing increased adoption among enterprise organizations that wish to go to market faster, and respond to market trends more rapidly than they could using their original web architecture.

There have been plenty of successes to fuel this trend, and as more large-scale companies become aware of the benefits of WordPress, getting the most out of the CMS is now where businesses are truly differentiating themselves.

Generation Z: Convenience and personalization are necessary.

According to an **in-depth, annual study** conducted by WP Engine and The Center for Generational Kinetics, Gen Z, the generation born after 1995, is expected to make up 40% of all consumers by 2020, and their expectations for digital experiences show a significant departure from those of generations past.

In order to tap into the vast purchasing power of this demographic, businesses must be able to meet these wants and needs online. According to the study, chief among Gen Z's expectations is that digital experiences are not only convenient, but highly personal and even predictive. Otherwise, respondents said, they will take their business elsewhere.

WordPress offers incredible flexibility when it comes to catering to Gen Z, and when used properly, it can help businesses go to market more quickly, and often at a lower cost than other proprietary options. Those costs, however, must be managed closely.

At no added cost, WP Engine offers personalization through **user segmentation**. **Geotargeting** services are also available.

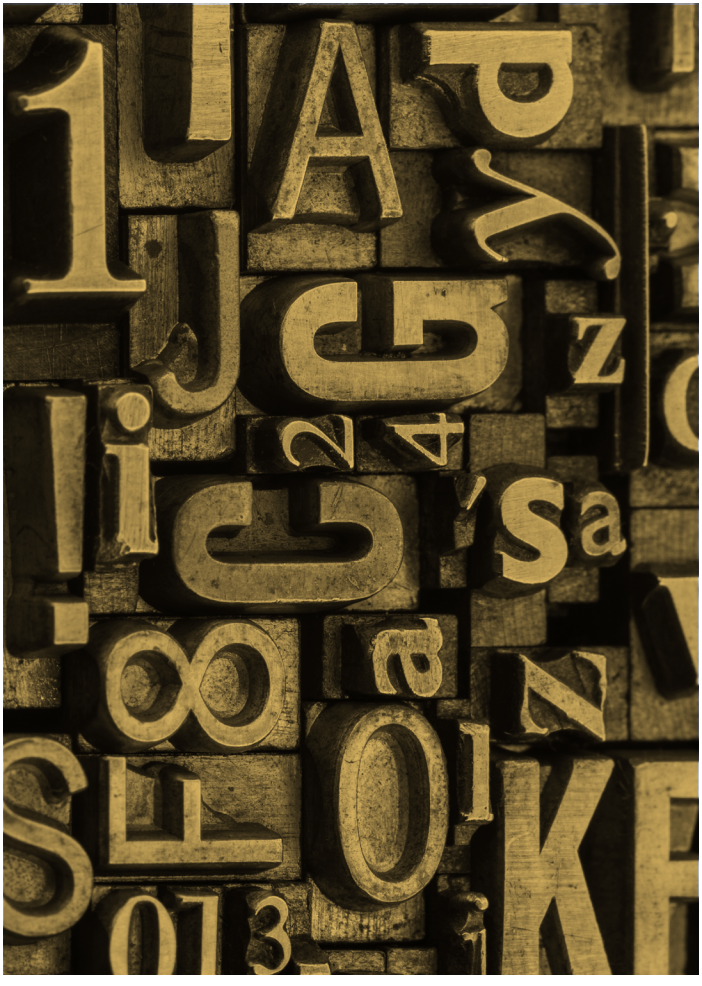
The Gutenberg effect.

With the release of WordPress 5.0, the WordPress editing experience has undergone a major change. Gutenberg, which has become the new default post editor for all WordPress versions moving forward, replaced the classic editor with a more modern platform that makes it easier to create rich post layouts.

Rather than relying on custom HTML, embed discovery, and shortcodes to add dynamic content, Gutenberg lets users add text, images, videos, and a slew of other elements through the use of content blocks, which are added (with a click or keyboard shortcut) as a post or page is being built.

This ability to move dynamically has revolutionized the editing experience—it's not just the future of WordPress, it's the future of the web. But getting the most out of Gutenberg is not a guarantee. Taking advantage of the content-rich editor and using it to make great-looking websites is much easier with the advice and support of a WordPress-specific digital experience provider like WP Engine, which has the in-house expertise readily available to help with things like Gutenberg.

WP Engine has even released its own suite of Gutenberg-optimized themes to its customers for free. With these world-class website themes, all built using the Genesis Framework, users can dive in and begin building with Gutenberg right away.



Cost components of running a WordPress site.

Before we begin the cost analysis of each hosting option, here are the components that make up our analysis.

SOFTWARE PURCHASE/LICENSING COSTS

Because WordPress is an open source software product, there is no upfront cost required to license it. The CMS runs on an entire stack of open source technologies from its operating system (Linux) to the web server (Apache or Nginx), and the database system (MySQL).

Some larger organizations may explore hosting WordPress on their on-premise servers, such as a Microsoft Windows server running IIS. While this is technically possible, there are additional licensing fees required for the operating system, and additional costs that go up when you take IT support into account.

All that said, WordPress at its core will always be free of licensing fees, regardless of where it's being hosted. For this component, all options remain equal in terms of costs for purchasing or licensing the software.

HARDWARE COSTS

When it comes to hardware, we begin to see some differentiation between the various WordPress hosting options.

Following the DIY model, the associated costs with purchasing hardware can quickly skyrocket, and will include purchasing a server as well as related hardware, configuring it all, keeping the server online and then keeping up with the ongoing management it requires.

In the DIY model, you are your own systems administrator. Keeping your site online is solely your responsibility, even if you or your product goes viral, and an excess amount of traffic suddenly floods your site. The business consequences of an offline site when qualified traffic is coming in are difficult to put a price on, but they are most certainly not good. On the flipside, if you've set up architecture that auto-scales, you would still be on the hook for a potentially unpredictable bill if that viral traffic comes through unexpectedly.

While they may offer some cost savings, a generic host is usually not much better. In this model, you are still responsible for figuring out how much hardware you need and you may not have access to WordPress-specific architecture. If your site goes down due to a WordPress/application issue, there's no guarantee when it will be back

online, and tech support at a generalist host may not be able to help (and if they are, it will most likely come at additional support costs, not included in the upfront hosting costs).

A WordPress hosting provider, on the other hand, should include the necessary hardware, fully-configured for WordPress, as part of their offering. Where their troubleshooting or support capabilities begin and end, however, will vary depending on provider.

WP Engine provides customers with the basics for starting a website or a blog, as well as high capacity and dedicated environments for larger organizations with mission-critical sites, all depending on a customer's specific needs. Our tech support will help you troubleshoot application errors, as part of our monthly plans, and we tap into our in-house WordPress expertise to make sure customers' hardware is configured the best possible way from the start.

With a generic host, the time and effort needed to manage the configuration alone can be immense, not to mention routine maintenance and updates. With a WordPress-specific provider, added support, even for hardware configurations, may not be considered part of your monthly plan. When it comes to the hardware component for hosting a WordPress site, the lowest TCO is found with a digital experience provider such as WP Engine.

DISASTER RECOVERY/BACKUP

As businesses find more ways to put data to use, the value of that data is higher than ever. Combine that with today's compliance regimes and ransomware attempts, and disaster recovery (DR) and backup strategies for critical data are more important than ever.

At the most basic level, DR is about finding the right strategy for protecting your business data should you suffer a data breach, an outage, or other loss of potentially critical information. For many businesses, having solid backups and a strong DR strategy means they know they can "push a button" should anything go wrong and their site and their data is restored within minutes.

Backups, which should be the cornerstone of any DR strategy, use redundancy and replication technology to create copies of the data on your server should something go wrong. It's worth stating upfront that successful DR and backup processes can be prohibitively complicated and time consuming, as well as expensive.

This is certainly true in the DIY model, where all backup and DR is up to you, and if anything goes wrong, there is little recourse for retrieving important company data that may have been lost. Most generic hosts also refrain from offering backups or DR outside of a separate product or cost that is tacked onto the final bill.

Because WordPress core has a regular schedule of backups and patches, a hosting provider with WordPress experience is certainly a plus here, although how often they undergo updates and the extent to which they can help with DR planning will vary.

WP Engine includes automatic backups as part of all account plans. Additionally, account representatives work with customers to find adequate DR solutions, regardless of the size and scope of their data backup needs.

For DR and backups, it's important to find a hosting provider that can go a bit deeper than a generic host or simple WordPress host. In this scenario, working with a WordPress digital experience provider like WP Engine again offers the lowest TCO.

SECURITY

Security has understandably become a top concern for organizations around the world as data breaches and other malicious attacks blanket the headlines. Because WordPress makes up more than 34% of the Internet, it has become a common attack vector. With an increasing number of businesses turning to WordPress, they often face the question,"Is WordPress secure?"

The answer is yes, but with conditions that are true of any software. WordPress is secure if it's kept up-to-date and managed properly. But neglecting updates and security patches, even for a short period of time, can invite a slew of unwanted security issues that will create negative consequences for your site.

When it comes to security, the different hosting options covered here truly begin to separate from one another.

In the DIY model, again, you are your own security expert and all security precautions fall to you. Some of this includes keeping up with the patches and backups mentioned above, or researching and vetting the right security solutions, but it also includes mitigating spammy comments on your site, detecting unusual user behavior, and remedying any and all security issues when they occur.

More complicated security measures, such as data encryption or **defense-in-depth**, become significant cost factors here, and in an on-premise setup, this may require the ongoing attention of employees with security-specific expertise.

With a generalist host, your security configurations are usually handled from a hardware or data center perspective, but anything beyond that is up to you. Because you're in a shared hosting environment with little or no siloing, your site can be exposed to security vulnerabilities from other sites

on your shared server. Additional products and fees can always be added to your hosting plan for different "security management" services, but those are generally not included in the upfront costs, nor are they easy to select from, based on your particular needs. Assessing those needs can be a complicated process on its own, and when site security hangs in the balance, failure often comes in the form of devastating consequences.

With a WordPress-specific provider, application-specific security controls should be included in your plan. These can include steps such as disallowing certain WordPress plugins which are prone to vulnerabilities or limiting code that can be written to disk, offering added protection against faulty themes or plugins.

WP Engine provides the above as a part of its **overall secure environment**, and additional security measures can be added to any plan, such as WP Engine's **Global Edge Security** package. This solution, which was created together with Internet security leader Cloudflare, is the world's first complete edge security solution for WordPress and integrates WP Engine's platform with added security features such as:

- A managed Web Application Firewall (WAF)
- Content Delivery Network (CDN)
- Advanced DDoS mitigation
- SSL/TLS encryption

WP Engine also offers stand alone options for **SSL/TLS certification** (which secures sites with HTTPs and prevents pages from displaying the "not secure" label per Chrome v.68 updates) including **Let's Encrypt**, which is completely free of charge.

It's for all of the reasons above that security management sees the lowest TCO with a digital experience provider that can offer in-house, WordPress-specific security expertise. WP Engine provides customers with access to our in-house team of WordPress security experts so they don't have to become experts in WordPress and web security on their own—or hire someone else to do it full-time.

ONGOING OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

Ongoing operational support means prompt and easy access to expert advice that can troubleshoot a minor issue or solve a large, complicated problem. This level of support is the trademark of first-class customer service and is an invaluable asset, particularly when downtime or other issues affecting a website's performance can mean damage to a brand or lost revenue.

At the DIY level, finding any operational support at all literally means doing it yourself, or absorbing the added cost of hiring employees to provide needed support for you. At this level you're truly on your own, and while you might not think about

it until you need it, great customer support is something that is difficult to put a price on.

A generic web host might offer some ongoing support, although finding WordPress-specific advice and expertise will likely be a challenge. Other providers may not offer any support at all—each hosting company is different and knowledgeable support is not a given.

WP Engine offers 24/7/365 **award-winning customer support** for every single customer. There are multiple channels of technical support available, including telephone, email, online chat, and social media channels where customers can reach out to support technicians at any hour of the day. Furthermore, customers with higher-level plans are able to benefit from dedicated Customer Success Managers, specific to their account.

When it comes to ongoing operational support, the lowest TCO is clearly with a WordPress-specific provider that can offer high level 24/7/365 support, included as part of an account plan.

HIDDEN COSTS

The final component of this TCO analysis is hidden costs, that is, costs that will become apparent after your website is up and running, but not necessarily at the onset. By definition, these costs are difficult to fully prepare for—by studying some of the most common ones, you won't be caught off guard.

Onboarding - setting up or migrating to a WordPress site can be a frustrating process if you're doing it all alone. Outsourcing the initial setup to an IT pro can be an unaccounted for cost in the DIY model. While a generic host will offer help setting up a domain, help setting up your WordPress site is not a given.

A WordPress-specific digital experience provider should include this assistance as a part of its account plans. WP Engine offers customers a dedicated onboarding team as well as a Launch Readiness Assessment to make sure new websites are live and running smoothly.

Developer Tools - developer resources come at cost. Your highest rate of return comes when your web developers are working to address features and functionality on your site, not figuring out a new toolkit. WP Engine offers a suite of tools already familiar to many developers to help them set up an efficient workflow, such as version-controlled code (Git), SSH

Gateway, isolated environments for development and testing purposes, and more.

Bandwidth - preparing your site for a sudden spike in traffic is a big part of this hidden cost, but another, often-overlooked facet is optimizing bandwidth so that you aren't paying for too much.

In a DIY setup, you have to figure bandwidth out for yourself, which may require hiring an additional employee(s). With a generic web host, you may find yourself in a "pay-as-you-go" scenario, in which you pay what are essentially overage charges for spikes in traffic and extra bandwidth used on your network (this includes unwanted spikes in traffic, such as a DDoS attack).

At WP Engine, customers set their pricing plans based on the traffic their websites generate. WP Engine also uses best-in-class infrastructure from Google and AWS, so you can rest assured your site will be up and running when it's needed most.

AWS Dynamic Scaling, for example, is an auto-scaling solution geared towards websites that experience unexpected traffic spikes. Dynamic Scaling provides websites with up to 200% of their original capacity for up to 30 days, and generally removes the need for manual infrastructure upgrades. This not only saves time, it prevents unexpected costs from surging out of control. Once a particular traffic peak has subsided, the increase in bandwidth is returned to a lower state, so websites never use more server power than they actually need.

Overall WordPress Expertise - WordPress enjoys immense popularity because it's easy to use and made of web technologies that are well proven at scale. That doesn't mean there aren't WordPress-specific issues that can arise, which require knowledge of the platform and methods of remedying certain problems.

At the DIY and generic hosting level, WordPress-specific expertise is not a option, unless it's something you're providing yourself. At WP Engine, everyone who works on our support team is a WordPress expert, available 24/7/365 to help with WordPress-specific questions.

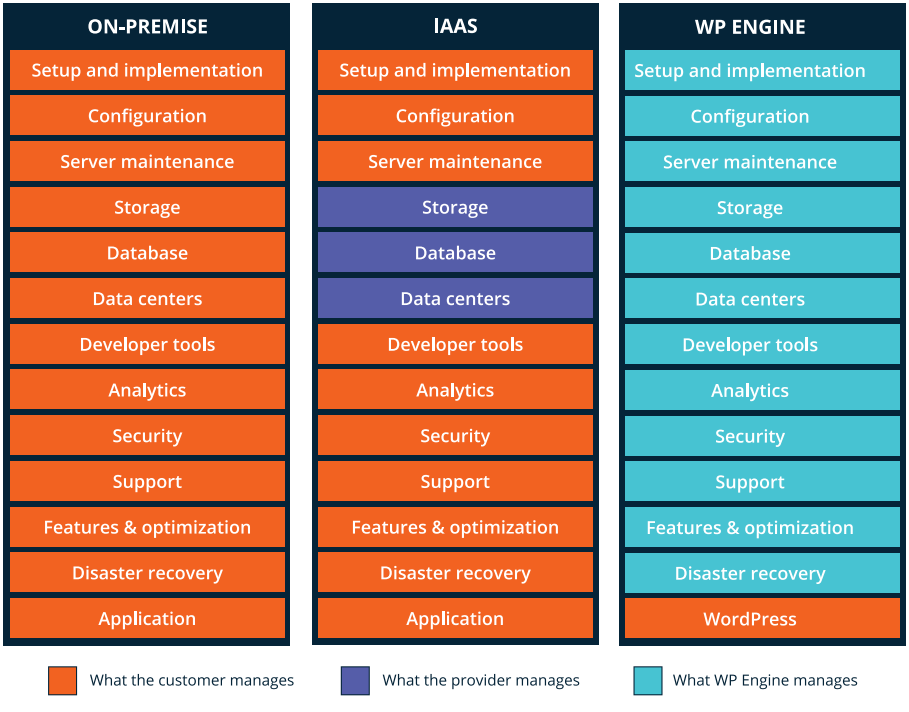
Total cost analysis.

	COST COMPONENT					
	SOFTWARE, PURCHASE/LICENSING Fees (one-time or recurring) that relate to the use or redistribution of software. Because WordPress is an open source software product, there is no upfront cost to license it.	**HARDWARE** Costs associated with purchasing a server as well as related hardware, conꝼguring it, keeping it online and then keeping up with ongoing management.	**DISASTER, RECOVERY/BACKUP** Strategy for protecting critical business data should website(s) suffer a breach, outage, or other loss of valuable data.	**SECURITY** Strategy for protecting website(s) against breaches or other malicious attacks. Should include WordPress-speciꝼc security patches and updates.	**ONGOING OPERATIONAL SUPPORT** Prompt access to expert advice for troubleshooting minor issues or solving large, complicated problems resulting in downtime.	**HIDDEN COSTS** Costs that become apparent after a site is up and running, but not necessarily at the onset: onboarding, integrations,bandwidth, repairs, etc.
ON-PREMISE	Included.	$1-4K for initial set-up; additional, recurring cost, depending on size and scale of website.	Backup strategy costs vary depending on amount of data, size of website, etc.	Security costs vary widely depending on type of website, level of security needed.	$65,000 average annual WordPress developer salary to provide 24/7 expert support.	In DIY model, user feels the brunt of hidden costs with little to no recourse from outside arbitrators. Integration with third-party technologies completely up to user.
GENERIC HOST	Included.	$9/mo - $200+ /mo recurring fees for hardware rental or maintenance up to dedicated servers.	$3/mo for basic backups (5GB) up to 25% of the cost of your production environment.	$7/mo for basic plans up to hundreds of extra dollars for enterprise grade security. Neither includes WordPress-specific patches and updates.	$50,000 average annual salary for 24/7 WordPress technical support. Some support may be included in the upfront costs; WordPress-specific expertise is hard to find.	Hidden costs vary widely between different hosting providers. Integrations with eCommerce, analytics and martech may be time and cost intensive.
WORDPRESS DIGITAL EXPERIENCE PROVIDER	Included.	Included.	Included.	WordPress-specific security protocols (patches, updates, etc.) included at no extra cost. Additional, end-to-end edge security protection can be added, prices vary depending on size of environment	Included.	WordPress Digital Experience Providers should allow customers to set their pricing plans based on the traffic their websites generate, and all costs- upfront and future - should be disclosed at the onset. WP Engine works closely with third-party eCommerce providers like BigCommerce, martech integrations like HubSpot, and analytics providers such as New Relic and Google.

TCO diagram.

In order to compare WP Engine with traditional hosting you need to understand the full stack we utilize in our platform. WordPress is open-source and free, however, it involves a great deal of love and attention. The table below maps out all the areas to be considered when comparing WP Engine to both On-premise or Infrastructure as a Service (IAAS).

WP Engine removes the need for you to be your own SysAdmin by taking care of all the heavy and time consuming elements of WordPress, allowing you to focus on creating engaging content and a beautiful site for your audience.



THE CLEAR CHOICE - A WORDPRESS DIGITAL EXPERIENCE PROVIDER.

A WordPress digital experience provider like WP Engine is the culmination of today's available hosting options, and combines them in a way that makes sense for WordPress site owners of varying size and scale.

Ideally, this type of provider will offer different pricing plans tailored to fit the specific needs of an individual organization. For example, a basic or beginner plan might include a single site, with bandwidth to support 20,000 visitors per month, while the same provider might offer an enterprise-level plan with bandwidth for more than a dozen sites and hundreds of thousands of visitors per month.

What's even more important here, is that a proficient WordPress digital experience provider will also offer assistance from the setup or migration process all the way through the lifecycle of a website. This means much of the guesswork that accompanies the DIY and generic hosting models is not a factor here, saving large amounts of time and frustration.

Further, this type of provider should be able to help with the other cost components listed above, and when it comes to components such as security, where certain sites may need to go beyond the basic level of security offered as part of their plan, these types of providers should be able to serve as consultants who can help find the right solutions for different scenarios.

Finally, the right WordPress provider should be able to offer around-the-clock, WordPress-specific expertise. This is truly a priceless aspect you will only find with a top tier WordPress-specific hosting provider, and one that that will prove invaluable when something inevitably breaks at an inconvenient time.

It's for all of these reasons that a WordPress digital experience provider such as WP Engine offers the lowest TCO by far. Costs are presented upfront and the various cost components examined above are included, at different levels, depending on the needs of the website that requires hosting.

About WP Engine

WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress Digital Experience Platform that gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. WP Engine's combination of tech innovation and an award-winning team of WordPress experts is trusted by more than 85,000 companies across 135 countries to provide counsel and support, helping brands create world-class digital experiences. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; Limerick, Ireland; and Brisbane, Australia. For more information, visit **WPEngine.com**.