Is WP Engine The Right Provider For Your Hosting?
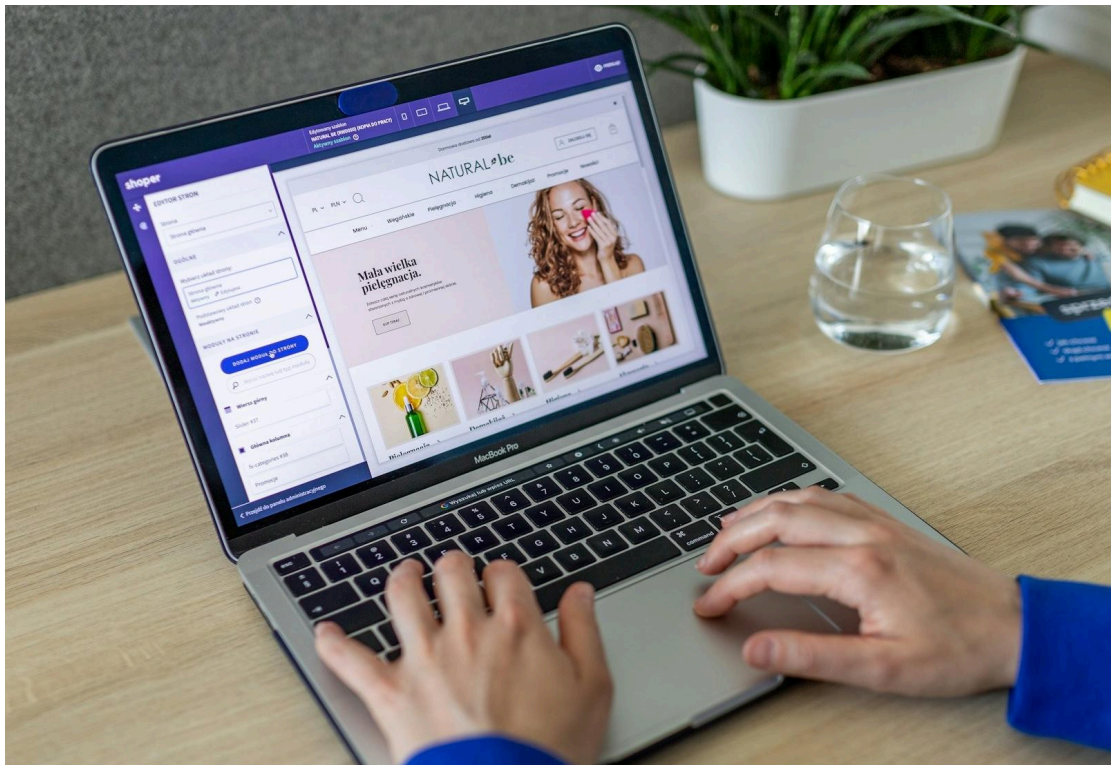

When it comes to WordPress-specific hosts, WP Engine is well worth considering. The Texas-based outfit is a relatively new entrant into the hosting market, launched just in 2010 by three visionaries: Ben Metcalfe, Jason Cohen and Cullen Wilson. The company has grown over the past decade and now has a customer base of more than half a million across the globe.

The hosting company prides itself in offering more personalized service to website owners looking for a high-performance host. Their pricing is on the higher side, but all their hosting plans are managed. This means you can focus on creating quality content for your visitors while WP Engine handles the technical nitty gritty.

Their services are more tailored to corporations and large organizations than to small businesses and individual bloggers. You also get 24/7 support from their award-winning support team regardless of which plan you choose.

Pricing

If all you want is basic WordPress hosting for your blog, WP Engine's pricing might put you off. Their lowest subscription tier costs $25 per month, and this is if you pay upfront for a year's hosting. If you pay month by month, it will cost you $30. Some may feel this to be on the higher side given that it is WordPress-specific hosting. But you will get 10 GB of storage and 50 GB of bandwidth every month. Your visitor capacity will be capped at 25,000 per month.

High as their pricing may be, WP Engine offers a 60-day money-back guarantee, which is pretty generous compared to the 30-day deal most hosting companies offer. And opting out of your WP Engine plan within the guarantee period if you're not satisfied is straightforward. Simply back up your site, go to the Cancel Account option and wait for your refund. Note, however, that the guarantee does not apply to all plans.

You also get more than 30 premium WordPress themes for your website along with some nifty security features. You will also have a selection of tools to monitor and enhance your site's performance.

If you wish to have more control over how your site is hosted and access to more automation for routine administrative tasks, you can look at the plans under Managed Hosting Plus.

These range between $28 and $310 per month depending on the resources you'll require. This is steep for the average startup simply looking to establish an online presence. But if you value automated plugin updates and auto-rollbacks if any catastrophic failure occurs, you may find these plans worth considering.

WPE's plans are categorized by the number of sites you will be hosting, the amount of storage and bandwidth you will need as well as the number of visitors you expect per month. If you pick the startup plan, your traffic will be expected not to exceed 25,000 visits. But what if a viral clip causes an unexpected traffic spike that pushes you beyond your visit limit? Will the extra visitors be denied access to your website? Not at all.

You will simply have to pay an average price determined by the plan you're subscribed to. As a startup plan subscriber, you will be expected to pay an additional $2 for any 1,000 extra visitors per month. Professional or Business plan subscribers will pay an extra $1 above their normal monthly fee for the same number of additional visitors.

Performance

There are a couple of features WP Engine has put in place to ensure optimal load times for your site's visitors. Speed tests of a basic website using the Pingdom tools revealed consistent loading speeds of below two seconds for different locations around the world. This is above the three-second threshold considered ideal to ward off high bounce rates.

- Free content delivery network (CDN), which caches your website on proxy servers in different locations across the globe so that it loads faster. Geo-specific add-ons like GeoTarget help optimize the performance of your website for visitors in different geographic locations. Besides customizing the experience for website visitors in various countries, you can restrict or reveal content to visitors by zip codes. In addition to

customizing content, GeoTarget will help you optimize your website's performance for Internet users accessing it from different regions.
- A tool that measures the performance of your site page by page. This tool gives you a score for each of your site's pages to show how effectively they're caching content.

  It breaks the page load time into the time taken to start loading the page and the time it takes the page to become fully visible to visitors. It also shows you the time it takes for the page to complete loading.

  Based on the findings, WPE will recommend changes to make content load faster.
- Optimized server settings for faster performance.
- Nineteen data centers in different parts of the world including the Midwest, London, Tokyo and Australia in partnership with Google Cloud. You can choose which of these you want your site to be hosted in to optimize speed.

Many hosting providers will offer prospective customers an uptime guarantee- usually 99.9 percent- to give them an impression of stability. WP Engine doesn't brandish this guarantee on all its plans; it is only offered to those interested in customized dedicated hosting. For this plan, you get a 99.99 percent uptime guarantee. Downtime testing on WPE sites revealed an average uptime of 99.95 percent, which is comparatively good.

But this is not to say that your site will be below par if hosted on other plans. Independent tests have shown WP Engine sites to go without any hint of downtime for weeks- even months. Load impact testing done on an independent website has further shown WP Engine sites can cope with hundreds of users trying to access them simultaneously.

WP Engine has a partnership with Amazon Web Services and Google Cloud that results in excellent uptime and great speeds for your visitors. When it comes to hardware, you will be happy to note that regardless of which plan you choose, your site will be hosted on the same servers. Yes, the amount of resources you're allocated will have an impact on the performance of your site, but the underlying hardware is the same.

Usability

You can easily create and manage your website from the WPE user portal. All it takes is the click of a button to get started. You can either create the site from scratch or apply the settings from a previous WordPress site to a new one. You cannot register your domain on WP Engine, but once you do so you can easily link it to your WPE hosting account.

WPE gives you free access to many great themes that would have otherwise cost you hundreds of dollars. Installing one of these WordPress themes only requires you to select and download it from the WPE portal and then log in to your

WordPress account and upload it. This portal is well laid out and intuitive to use but should you encounter any challenges, support is readily available.

WP Engine makes it even easier to test the user-friendliness of your website. They offer a staging area where all customers can test any modifications they make to their apps or websites at no extra charge. They even offer a free speed test tool to help you offer your visitors the best experience.

Automatic plugin updates mean you don't have to worry about keeping your WordPress plugins up-to-date with security patches and feature additions. If you would rather defer the update until you are sure of its impact on the functionality of your site, you can do so. But this feature is only available with the Managed Hosting Plus category of plans.

One of WP Engine's key distinguishing features is its one-click staging, which allows you to create a clone of your site. You can then safely test new plugins, custom code and other modifications to your site before unleashing them on your audience.

This way you can avoid giving your website's visitors a bad experience by installing a feature you thought would improve it. And one-click means just that-you can create the clone with a single click of a button. The flexibility of WPE's one-click staging allows you to have the clone website on your local machine or online.

Speaking of flexibility, WP Engine is a boon for developers who would like to have the ability to switch between PHP versions 7.2 and 7.3. You can also create manual backups if you would like to add to the automated daily backups.

If you reach a point where you feel your operations have outgrown the resource allocation of your current plan, you can easily upgrade to the next package. All you need is to write an email to WP Engine stating the plan you'd like to upgrade to and they will handle everything.

As a WPE subscriber, you will have a host of useful plugins at your disposal. This is not the only feature developers will be interested in; there are over 30 open-source technologies available for customization depending on your depth of knowledge.

Support

Any WP Engine plan you opt for comes with 24/7 support. Whether you have a billing-related query or need technical support, you can reach out to WP Engine by phone or through their website chat. From the independent testimonials of customers, the WP Engine support agents are quick to respond and highly knowledgeable. The only thing that may disappoint some subscribers is that you won't be able to get WP Engine's toll-free telephone assistance if you're on the most basic plan.

They have a robust library of resources for customers who would like to find their way on their own. Their resource center features articles, case studies, white papers, infographics, e-books and video tutorials. You can filter through this vast database of information using their simple search engine. They have also categorized their articles by roles so that developers, freelancers, marketers, site owners, etc can easily find articles relevant to them.

If you have an existing WordPress site that you want to move to WP Engine, they will help you with that at no extra cost.

WP Engine offers you an expert WordPress support team that can deal with issues specific to the platform. They will help you quickly deal with plugin configuration and compatibility challenges. If your web pages are loading slowly, they will know how to sort out the speed issues from their experience with WordPress sites.

The promptness of WPE's support team to respond and their ability to offer real solutions has contributed in no small way to the 97 percent customer satisfaction rate.

Security

Security is clearly a priority for WP Engine as every plan they offer comes with a free SSL certificate along with what they call 'advanced security'. The advanced security essentially involves regularly scanning your site's files for malware. It also includes a firewall that is updated daily to ensure your site remains protected from the latest forms of malware.

You can rely on daily backups to restore everything to order in the event of an attack on your site. Backups are done automatically every night and include core WordPress files, themes and your database. If an attack does happen, WPE will help you clean up your website of any malicious files and restore the backed-up data at the click of a button.

In WP Engine's selection of plans, there is a tier that offers more advanced security features. They range in price between $53 and $350 per month depending on the resource capacity you require. Over and above SSL and malware scans, you will have protection from malicious traffic spikes that could be symptomatic of a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack.

In addition to the above, you can look forward to:
- A comprehensive guide on how to keep your WordPress site safe from attack in the resource center.
- Security assistance at any time of day or night from the support center.
- Security checklists and guidelines for developers to ensure your new website is less vulnerable to attack.

As an extension of its security policy, WPE keeps user accounts separate on its shared servers at file system and kernel levels.

Useful Extras

One of WP Engine's best selling points is the staging area they provide to all subscribers. This allows you to have a place with a clone of your site where you can try out new plugins or updates to make sure they work ok before going live with them. While some other providers like SiteGround offer staging, this feature is reserved for those subscribed to top-tier plans.

As a WPE subscriber, you get access to 35 top-of-the-range themes from acclaimed theme-maker StudioPress, which WPE acquired in 2018. Getting to pick from these professional-looking themes for free when they would have cost you more than $100 each if you got them separately, is a steal. And you will find great variety in this collection of themes to suit the purpose of your website. Whether you're an author or want to run an online sports gear store, you will find an eye-catching theme to match.

Most popular web hosting providers include email and domain registration as part of their plans. This is not the case with WP Engine. You will have to seek these services from elsewhere. But if you were to get your domain and email from NameCheap or DreamHost, why not host with them as well? And chances are they will be more reasonably priced. Even if you want a hosting provider specialized in WordPress hosting, you can find alternatives like TMDHosting which offer domain name registration.

If you're a developer specializing in WordPress sites, WP Engine can make your work much easier with transferrable sites. You can create a site with the three modes of a regular WordPress site- development, staging and production. The site will only go live once you finish transferring it to your clients.

The advantage transferrable sites offer is that you don't have to keep creating sites for your clients from scratch. You can simply duplicate the configurations you created for one site to quickly create additional websites. And you don't have to worry about transferrable sites counting against the website limit of your current plan as they don't.

If you would like to host additional websites on your plan, you can. But it will cost you an additional $20 per site every month. However, the fact that they will be sharing the resources allocated to you as per your plan may make some website owners feel a little aggrieved.

Customer reviews

Reviews from Twitter indicate that most of WPE's subscribers are satisfied with the quality of hosting they get. More than 90 percent of the tweets about the hosting provider were positive. This should give you confidence that you're dealing with a reputable brand.

Pros
- Great support with all plans
- Access to 30+ premium WordPress themes with all plans
- Access to many WordPress tools
- Staging area available with all plans
- Good performance in terms of uptime
- Great loading speeds even when tested in different parts of the world
- WP Engine automates many site management tasks
- 60-day money-back guarantee with all plans
- Smooth scaling of your site through plans as your operations grow
- A wide array of security features, some premium
- Free daily backups
- Provides useful visitor/customer analytics data for marketing via the WPE user portal

Cons
- Not priced for individuals or small businesses
- Don't offer an all-in-one service- you have to look elsewhere for email addresses and domain registration.
- Plans limited to WordPress hosting
- Uptime guarantee only available to dedicated custom hosting customers
- Money back guarantee not available on all plans
- Traffic limits are imposed on different plans and you will have to pay a surcharge if website visits exceed your plan's limit
- The GeoTarget feature is only available as a paid-for add-on
- Limited payment options- subscribers can only pay via credit card
- Limited telephone support for startup plan members.

Conclusion

If you'd like to have one or more WordPress websites that you want to perform optimally without being too involved in their administration, WP Engine hosting is ideal for you. They are WordPress hosting experts who will take care of everything from ensuring your site is safely migrated to their platform to keeping it safe from potential threats. With WPE you will have a WordPress site that performs well without you having to worry about the technical nuts and bolts.

If you have any questions, or if something goes wrong, you will have an award-winning support team to call on. WPE's support is known to be highly responsive and knowledgeable on all matters WordPress. Besides calling or chatting with their support agents, WPE offers a robust library of resources to equip website owners and developers with the information they need to overcome challenges or enhance their websites.

However, you need to be ready to pay above what many other hosting providers will charge. While providers like DreamHost and HostGator offer entry-level hosting at below $10, the cheapest plan with WP Engine is the $30 per month startup package.

And you will be limited to the WordPress platform- you won't be able to use another CMS or website builder. However, there is plenty you can do to customize your WordPress site from choosing among several themes to adding custom code.

If you don't mind forking out a little extra to have someone else handle the bulk of the administrative and technical stuff so that you can focus on your core business, WP Engine is a good idea. And also if you don't mind being restricted to the WordPress environment. But in the rare event you desire functionality beyond what WordPress has to offer, or are working on a constrained budget, you might want to look elsewhere.