

Best Plugins for Your Blog - Part 5 of How to Make your blog

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In the previous part we had a look at theme selection. With the plethora of themes available, choosing one becomes a difficult task. Hopefully by now you have chosen your theme already. In case you have not, do so quickly, because we are moving ahead in this section.

Share the knowledge!

Today we will be looking at the different plugins which your blog needs.

Certain plugins like those for security and speed are a must have for every blog, while some others like those for beautification are optional and you can pick on them as per your requirement.

What you will Learn:

- What to keep in mind when choosing plugins
- Plugins to enhance Blog Functionality
- Comment Plugins
- Forms Plugins
- Blog Speed & Caching Plugins
- Social Media Integration Plugins
- Analytics & Tracking Plugins
- Blog Back-up Plugins
- Search Engine Optimization Plugins
- Blog Security Plugins
- Lead Generation Plugins
- Conclusion

Just like theme there are lots of options in plugins too. In the below list I have curated the most popular plugins for each aspect of blog. So lets dive in and explore the world of Plugins!

Plugins for your Blog

When choosing a plugin keep the following points in mind:

- **Compatibility** – Check every plugin for compatibility with your theme, and blogging platform. In case of incompatibility do not go ahead with the plugin, however good it may be. Compatibility issues will affect performance and end user experience.
- **Plugin size** – Too large plugin file will increase your blog size and there will be resultant increase in load time, and decrease in site speed. Hence always opt for lighter plugins.
- **Quality vs Price** – Always check the plugin reviews to gauge the plugin's quality. Price is not always indicator of quality, many free plugins offer excellent quality, especially if they are being upgraded regularly. At same time, many paid plugin are of poor quality, so always check user review to judge the plugin quality for yourself.

- **Developer's Credibility** – All plugins require some level of integration with your blog, theme, security features etc. This makes plugins a soft target for virus and other malicious codes. For this reason always make sure the plugin developer is a credible person. Do not add plugins from unknown sources, as they can compromise your blog security.
- **Plugin health** – Monitor all your plugins occasionally for their health and performance. Some plugins after installation might be slowing down your site, while some other might be performing sub-par due to integration issues. Make sure you keep an eye on how the plugins are performing and how healthy they are. This will help you keep your blog in ship shape.

With these pointers in mind, let's have a look at the different Plugins which will help your blog.

Blog Functionality

1. **Q2W3 Fixed Widget** – Traditionally when scrolling down a page/post the sidebar & its widget remain fixed at the top of the page. This leads to empty white space as the user scrolls down the page. Some bloggers like this look as it lends a feel of spaciousness. In case you would like to better utilize this place. Q2W3 widget is the thing for you. It works by fixing the positions of your chosen widgets. So as the reader scrolls down the page the widget continues to move with the page and is always displayed in the sidebar. This concept is also referred to as Sticky Widgets. You can use this to stick your popular post, contact form, subscribe button; anything that you think will benefit your audience best.
2. **Infinite-Scroll** – Pagination is a concept you see on all blogs where longer pages are split up into many pages as required by the blog. This is done by default. when you look at FaceBook newsfeed, Twitter feed, Google image search, you can just keep scrolling down endlessly. There is no need to click on next page. If you would like to have similar concept on your blog, where page after page of your blog posts can be scrolled through by your readers on one page itself, 'Infinite – Scroll' is the plugin which will help you achieve this effect. This plugin can also help you in designing landing pages, which sometimes tend to be longer than regular pages.
3. **Hello Bar / Many Contacts** – Both these plugins perform the same function. They install a fixed bar at the top of your blog, which invites users to subscribe to your mailing list. Hello Bar offers very basic functionality only. You can edit the text in your hello bar, change its colors that's it. I personally prefer ManyContacts. It offers much more functionality. You can edit the text, color of the bar. Additionally you have option to overlay text on your blog to draw more attention to your bar. Also in ManyContacts you can integrate freebies in the bar itself. This makes ManyContacts much more versatile than Hello Bar. I have worked with both these and I prefer working ManyContacts
4. **AdSanity** – If you are looking to sell private ad space on your blog, this plugin will help you with your ad management. It comes with widgets and shortcodes to display ads, you can set how long the ads are to be displayed, where and how many. It also provides graphs and stats for the ad view and clicks. Plans start from 29\$
5. **Pretty Links** – A useful affiliate link management plugin. If you are planning on adding affiliate links to your blog this is a must have tool. It allows you to make your affiliate links look pretty by renaming the display URL. Offers stats and affiliate link tracking. Also included are useful features like hyperlinking specified keywords to affiliate links and much more. It's a must have tool to make your affiliate management easier. This is a free plugin with option to upgrade to Pro version at 37\$.

Comment Plugins

1. **Akismet** – A very popular and commonly used plugin, this scans your website comment for spam comments. Larger your blog gets more comments you will receive and harder it will get for you to moderate each comment. This plugin will help you by checking and marking spam comment automatically.
2. **Comment Redirect** – This plugin allows you to redirect first time commenters on your site to a dedicated page, where you can thank them, explain more about your blog, and ask them to subscribe to your blog. This is a smart plugin which enables you to interact with first time commenters and convert them into fans.

3. [Disqus](#) – By far the best comment system I have come across. It allows for better subscription opportunity, login integration with social media. Disqus offer extra moderation opportunity and even allows featuring of related articles and discussions. I use it on my site and swear by it.
4. [OpenID](#) – Standard and most widely used comment authentication system. This allows users to authenticate themselves, without the need to create new password. Although it makes commenting fairly simple on your website, I would advise against using this plugin, as it has not been updated since last 2 years and is out dated. This might make it a good target for hackers to exploit.
5. [FaceBook Comments for WordPress](#) – This plugin can work well for your blog if most of your audience comes from Facebook. It allows users to comment y authenticating themselves via their FaceBook profile. It offers customization in terms of custom font etc. In case you get users from diverse social platform, I would advise against installing this plugin, as it will limit your users option for commenting on your blog, as a it might hamper your users experience, and the number of comments and interactions your blog receives.

Forms Plugins:

1. [Contact Form 7](#) – A simple and effective contact form for your blog. This is the most popular contact form plugin. I use this on my site.

Blog Speed & Caching

1. [W3 Total Cache](#) – A must have plugin for every blog. This is the most comprehensive caching plugin.It caches pages as well as objects and works by minifying databases with the help of CDN to deliver your content faster. It helps your server in managing load at peak traffic hours. Its one of the most popular speed plugin, and undergoes frequent updates as well.. It is a light plugin and does not impact the load time of your blog. There are various other free caching plugins, but I prefer to use this due to its all round caching functionality.
2. [Wp Optimize](#) – This helps optimize your database and keeps it clean too. For those with larger blogs this is a good plugin to manage your database well.
3. [WP Smush it](#) – Images take longer to load and reduce site speed. This plugin automatically reduces your image size and renders your blog faster. Its a good plugin to have if you use images on your site, since images cost lot of precious load time, making your blog slower.
4. [P3 Profiler](#) – A gem of a plugin this monitors all your other plugins for their performance. Provides you a report of how your other plugins are functioning and which plugin might be slowing down your website. I use this on my blog, and it's quite helpful in managing the sizeable bunch of plugin I work with.
5. [CloudFlare](#) – A great plugin to help protect your blog against hackers and other unscrupulous elements. It offers free and premium version both, I find the free version to be sufficient for my needs. It improves site load time, offers stats about your visitors, SSL protection and much more.

Social Media Integration:

1. [Pinterest Button for Images](#) – This plugin is a must have for image and media rich sites. It allows your viewers to pin your images/videos very easily. Once this plugin is installed, whenever a user hovers mouse over any media, a 'Pin it' button will be displayed overlaid on the media. Quick and easy pinning option will lead to more shares by users.
2. [Social Locker](#) – This is a good plugin to have in your repertoire. It works by locking your most valuable content, pdf, images etc behind a set of social buttons. This encourages users to share your content via the social media in order to unlock your most valuable content. It sounds like arm twisting, but believe me its quite effective means of achieving genuine social shares. Many users need this extra push to share your content. This plugin works out a win – win situation for both you and users. Users get your most valuable content and you get social shares.

3. [ShareholiC](#) – I use this plugin for adding social sharing buttons to my blog, and find it very easy to use. Additionally its a very light plugin so it does not hamper your blog's load time. It offers floating as well as fixed sharing bar, and is also mobile responsive so its the complete package.
4. [What Would Seth Godin Do](#) – Quirky name for a plugin! What this tool does is, it distinguishes between your new and returning visitors; and allows you to display custom message to your visitors based on their nature. To new visitors you can display a snapshot explaining about your blog and invite them to join mailing list. To returning visitors, you can display message about latest post/offers on your blog.

Analytics & Tracking:

1. [Google Analyticator](#) – While you don't need any plugin to install Google analytics on your website, this plugin just makes your job easier. Especially for first time bloggers, who might find Google analytics, tracking code, and all the options to be a bit overwhelming. If you are comfortable with Google analytics, I would advise against installing this plugin. Plugin however light it maybe, adds to the load time of your site, so unless essential do not install plugins.

Back-Up Plugins:

1. [BackupBuddy](#) – Offers complete backup, and easy website migration. Has option to exclude any file you don't want to backup and also offers 1GB cloud backup space. This is a comprehensive backup plugin, and comes with full backend support system. Its only drawback is that this is a paid plugin, so for new bloggers starting out this might seem an expensive investment. Plan start from 80\$
2. [BackWPup](#) – This one is free. Its a good option to BackupBuddy, specially if cost is a consideration for you. However while it offers almost all functionalities similar to BackupBuddy the only thing it lacks is support. Support is a premium feature on this tool. If you are fairly confident of your ability to use this tool to restore your website in case of need, I recommend going with this tool.
3. [VaultPress](#) – A great plugin by Automattic, this is considered by far the best WordPress backup plugin. It backs up everything from post, to pictures. Since it comes at a monthly plan it is being continuously upgraded and improved by the developer. At \$5/per month it is a very affordable and sturdy backup service.

Search Engine Optimization:

1. [WordPress SEO Yoast](#) – Most popular SEO plugin. It helps optimize most of your on-page SEO components like META title, description etc. and also generates XML sitemap of your blog, which makes it easier for Search Engines to crawl and index your blog. I use this plugin on my blog.
2. [SEO SMart Links](#) – A good plugin to add to your blog, when you have expanded to numerous posts. Primarily this plugin helps in automatically inter-linking your posts. Interlinking is an essential and healthy practice, allowing link juice to flow across your website, and also helping viewers discover related content with ease. Since this plugin allows unlimited installation, it will serve its money's worth if you have more than 1 blog to manage. (Plans start from – 149\$)

Blog Security Plugins:

1. [Login Lockdown](#) – A small and smart plugin that records the ip address and timestamp of every failed login attempt into your blog, and locks down your blog by disabling all login request from the range of ip which have had repeated failed login attempts. This helps protect your blog from hackers who try to discover your login information by brute force.
2. [WP-reCAPTCHA](#) – This plugin comes in form of a widget that you can add to your blog, forum, comment section, registration section, email wherever required. The widget adds a re-captcha code, which helps protect your blog from spambots and other automated bots.

3. [iThemes Security \(Better WP Security\)](#) – Straightforward with quick setup, this is a good security plugin. It offers lots of features like banning IP address, scanning files for changes, malware scanning, strong password generator, whitelisting your own IP and much more with 30+ ways to secure your blog against attacks.
4. [WordFence](#) – Another great security plugin, it offers lots of features. And in some terms is better than iThemes Security. It scans your blog on core level to check for any infestation, improves site speed, blocks down attackers in real time and much more.

Lead Generation Plugins:

1. [Thrive Leads](#) – A value for money plugin, which offers lots of good features. 30+ templates to design your subscriber forms, A/B testing, support for 2 step opt-in forms, option to choose your opt-in form location and some other really cool features. This is a premium plugin and plans start from 49\$
2. [LeadPages](#) – Another Premium tool but an excellent one for creating landing pages. This is a complete landing page program which offers tons of functionalities, and lets you customise smallest aspect of your landing page, albeit some HTML knowledge might be required to do so. Its a excellent tool and one you should consider investing in if you are selling some digital product/event/workshop via your blog. A/B functionality offered in this allows you to test and retest your designs for best conversion rates. Plans start at 37\$ per month, and its a expensive plugin to invest in, but well worth the money if you really need superlative landing pages.
3. [Thrive Content Builder](#) – Originally this product focussed on giving users the functionality to build custom page layout. Recently they have launched a 2 step opt-in-form feature. Since it is new in market, their features and functionality are limited. But it's a excellent light tool to work with for beginners, also it's cheaper than most other tools and offers built in API to add your own custom elements. Plan start from 59\$
4. [OptinMonster](#) – I love this plugin and use it on this blog. It offers great functionality, and allows creation of optin forms as well as pop ups. Page level targeting, A/B testing, exit intent technology are just a few of its wonderful features. Its well worth investing in, if you are looking to build a email list and generate revenue from the same.

Conclusion

Phew! the list ends finally. In no way is this list exhaustive or complete. As I keep using plugins I might add some more or detract some from this list, but based on my last 5 years of blogging experience, these are some noteworthy plugins.

Take your pick from the above or tell me if you use something different and have found it be to a great addition. I would love to know what works for you.

In the next part we will be seeing how you can setup your own WordPress blog, on HostGator. I will include a video as well as step by step instruction with images to guide you through your 1st blog setup. We will have a look at how to install your Blogging platform, theme, and some chosen plugins. I will also guide you through the basic settings which you need to familiarize yourself in order to operate your blog smoothly. So until next time, pick up your plugins and get ready to launch your blog.

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