

This column departs from a subject-based resource list to focus on the value of an open source blogging tool, WordPress.com, for an online project. I was at the University of Illinois when a colleague suggested WordPress for the project on which I was about to embark. The project entailed a collaborative space for posting and commenting on primary texts, and a mapping feature to show how ideas spread across Europe and America during the French Enlightenment. I was initially quite surprised that a blogging tool could be useful for the project, but when I returned to Ottawa and looked into WordPress, I decided to give it a try and I've been happy with the results. Below are a few notable features of WordPress for an online project.

1 Community

Although I developed my project over a year ago, the greatest imprint that is left in my mind after using WordPress is the WordPress community. There are Google Groups, Twitter Groups, and tons of online discussion groups for help and support with your project. Beyond the support, there is also a very strong community of users who call attention to new blogs and point traffic to them. This was most helpful in my case, and within three weeks of creating my blog, I already had comments from international readers who had linked to my site. This stimulates site traffic, and quite frankly helps you feel a lot less lonely.

2 Dashboard

As a new user of WordPress, the dashboard was my teacher. One of the early features I learned to appreciate was the “blog surfer” (which in the current version of WordPress is no longer available, but an equivalent feature exists), where I subscribed to other WordPress blog content to monitor based on my chosen keywords what others were posting. This encourages exchange between bloggers. For example, I chose to follow the blog of a professor from the University of Houston who writes on the 18th century, and just this one act deepened my knowledge of my own subject area tremendously, even providing different directions for the content. The dashboard also has analytical tools and can tell you how readers found your site and how much traffic your site generates day to day. According to the WordPress support site, “You can catch up on news, view your draft posts, see who’s linking to you or how popular your content’s been, quickly put out a no-frills post, or check out and moderate your latest comments. It’s like a bird’s eye view of operations, from which you can swoop down into the particular details.”

3 Ease

WordPress is probably the least intimidating online blogging application out there. Within minutes you can develop a good-looking site with a moderate amount of functionality. There are books to help with advanced features (don’t buy them because they likely deal with wordpress.org, and not wordpress.com), but for your basic site, WordPress couldn’t be any easier. It’s incredibly satisfying not to have to spend a lot of time on mastering the technical side of

WordPress before getting your content out. And it can look quite professional rather easily, thanks to the many templates available for free through wordpress.com.

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Potential for going deeper

There are two versions of WordPress available, depending on how much customization of the site is required. Wordpress.org is the site for downloading the self-hosted version and offers the greatest amount of flexibility such as being able to customize a template or add a plug-in to the site. A server with specific technical requirements is required. A local developer can also help with downloading a self-hosted WordPress site for a fee. But for many projects, this just isn't necessary. Use wordpress.com – the quickest and least intimidating way to start a project. If need be, all content can be easily transferred to something more customizable later.

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Cost: FREE!

By **Jennifer** Dekker

La pensée des Lumières WordPress site:

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LA PENSÉE DES LUMIÈRES

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- Voltaire (1694-1778)
 - Secondary sources


18TH CENTURY SITES

- 18th c. British Political Pamphlets

The project / le projet...

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La pensée des lumières: Enlightenment thinking is an experimental digital text portal designed to help students find and use the primary texts written and published in the French Enlightenment. The project is not comprehensive nor is it complete; it will focus to a large extent on a few thinker/writers, among them: Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau and d'Alembert.



[Illustration de Astrocopia compendiaria] / [Non identifié] ; Christian Huygens, aut. de texte
Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France

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