STREAMLINING WORDPRESS THEME DEVELOPMENT

WITH A CUSTOM STARTER THEME
WHO IS THIS GUY?

LET’S FIND OUT!

▸ RI native, relocated to Wilmington in 2015
▸ Front-end developer, WordPress theme developer
▸ Using WordPress since around 2006, customizing since 2007 (version 2.2)
▸ Started using & building custom starter themes around 2009
WHAT IS A WORDPRESS THEME?

THE BASICS
A WORDPRESS THEME IS THE “SKIN” TO YOUR WEBSITE

- Creates a unique look for your WordPress site. This includes all custom CSS (colors, fonts, font sizes) & template files (frontpage.php, home.php, single.php).

- Contains all custom site functionality (JS, functions.php).

- Themes are easily & readily accessible: https://wordpress.org/themes/

- These themes provide a pre-defined site style or “skin”, but are ready to go.
WHAT IS A CUSTOM WORDPRESS THEME?

THE SPECIFICS
A CUSTOM THEME IS SPECIFIC TO YOUR PROJECT

- Most of the time, existing themes don’t have or do all of what you’ll need.
- You designed (or were given a design), now make it work!
- The CSS and functionality is going to be specific to your project’s needs.
- It can include whatever you want! Images, JS libraries, icon fonts, responsive frameworks... the possibilities are endless.
- Whatever you need to create a functioning WordPress site out of your design/vision.
CAN I USE A CUSTOM THEME ON MY SITE?

PROBABLY, BUT . . .
BE AWARE OF YOUR SITE SETUP AND HOSTING!

- Know the difference between WordPress.com and WordPress.org.

- WordPress.com is a great all-in-one hosting & facilitation option, but customizations are very limited (https://wordpress.com/pricing/).

- Great solution for the limited tech-savvy crowd.

- WordPress.org - download WordPress core files to install on your hosting server. Your host may already have one-click simple installation options as well.

- Some advanced knowledge required.
I found a theme/framework that does a ton of cool things. Can I use it for my project?

Probably, but...
BE AWARE OF WHAT CUSTOMIZATIONS YOU’LL NEED TO MAKE!

- Sometimes you won’t need to customize, it’ll just work out!
- Sometimes starting with or customizing a pre-built theme/framework will be too labor intensive.
- Most will be easily editable for colors, simple styling and layout.
- If you do need to customize further, it could get hairy.
- Be careful of what you edit, if anything.
- See if the theme author offers support.
WHAT EXACTLY IS A STARTER THEME?

CLEARING IT ALL UP
A CUSTOM THEME JUMP START

- Starter themes are stripped way down for easy customization.
- Functional WordPress theme without any heavily customized CSS or functionality.
- Easy to customize and add on to.
- Very basic functions.php, little to no custom JS.
- Include helpful functionality that can be built from (registered menu, sidebar, thumbnail resizing, etc).
- Can be used for any custom project development kick-off.
- Can be added to/subtracted from as your needs change from project to project.
HELPFUL STARTER THEME REFERENCES

THESE ARE SOME OF THE GOOD ONES

- Underscores: 
  https://github.com/Automattic/_s

- Bones: 
  https://github.com/eddiemachado/bones

- _tk: 
  https://github.com/Themekraft/_tk

- FoundationPress: 
  https://github.com/olefredrik/FoundationPress

- JointsWP: 
  https://github.com/JeremyEnglert/JointsWP
WHY SHOULD I USE A CUSTOM STARTER THEME?

MAKING LIFE EASIER
STARTER THEMES PROVIDE MULTIPLE BENEFITS FOR CUSTOM DEVELOPMENT

- Easier to customize to your needs.
- More accurate time/cost estimates.
- Familiarity with starting codebase.
- Same codebase across a team.
- Documentation.
HOW CAN I CREATE A CUSTOM STARTER THEME?

THE SPECIFICS
DON’T FEEL LIKE YOU NEED TO REINVENT THE WHEEL

- Use an existing starter theme.
- Experiment with adding and removing built-in features and CSS.
- Plan to distribute? Change it enough to really make it yours.
- Make sure to give credit to original authors.
CREATE YOUR OWN, BUT KNOW THE REQUIREMENTS

- Theme stylesheet: style.css
- Main template page: index.php
- Add additional theme files and increase degree of customization: front-page.php, home.php, page.php, single.php, etc.
SOME IDEAS FOR YOUR CUSTOM STARTER

- Integrate a responsive framework (Bootstrap, Foundation).
- Integrate the use of a task manager (Grunt, Gulp).
- Integrate helpful plugins with supporting files for your customizations (Gravity Forms, Advanced Custom Fields, Custom Post Type UI).
- Think about e-commerce: add in base supporting files for a custom WooCommerce layout.
ADDITIONAL HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Interactive WordPress template hierarchy: https://wphierarchy.com/
- WordPress plugin: Theme Check https://wordpress.org/plugins/theme-check/
- Same requirements as theme submission reviews.
- Support latest WordPress theme standards and practices.