

The perfect WordPress development workflow

BY FLYWHEEL





There are a lot of steps in the development process, so to help you jump exactly where you need to be, here are the different topics we'll cover in this ebook:

1. [Different methods for developing WordPress sites](#)
 2. [Why local development is crucial for your workflow](#)
 3. [The best \(free!\) local development app](#)
 4. [Tips for an efficient development workflow](#)
 5. [How to deploy your WordPress site](#)
 6. [Tips for maintaining the site](#)
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01 Methods for developing WordPress sites

The first step in the development workflow is (you guessed it) actually developing the site! And there are a couple different ways you can go about deploying the code. The first is to start developing right on a live server, which is sometimes referred to as cowboy coding. This is a very tempting method, as it feels the most convenient. Cowboy coding includes any form of code updates that directly affect a live site, including using the WordPress admin or editing the site's files via SFTP. It's quick, it's convenient, and one little CSS tweak to the button styles won't hurt anything, right?

Not necessarily.

When you develop on a live site, you risk breaking things that are, well, live. And if people are trying to visit the site while you're in the middle of making changes, they might stumble onto some work-in-progress code that doesn't look too great yet and ruins the reputation of the site owner. Plus, there's really no great way to know what was changed each time you make an update. If you're collaborating with someone, this can quickly cause some headaches.

“When you develop on a live site, you risk breaking things that are, well, live.”

The other, better option is to develop WordPress sites locally on your machine, instead of on a live server. This is much safer way to edit the files and write custom code, and definitely the method we'd recommend. And with a local WordPress development application (of which there are several!), this method is easier than ever!

SO FIRST, WHAT EXACTLY IS A LOCAL WORDPRESS ENVIRONMENT?

The key to this phrase is local. With a local environment, you can spin up a WordPress site where all of the data is hosted directly on your own machine, instead of an external server via a hosting company.

And because all the necessary files are stored locally on your machine, it allows the browser to render the site and even allows you to access the WordPress admin to make changes. So while local sites aren't technically live yet, they look and act live in your browser, allowing you to work just as you normally would on any other WordPress site.



WHY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IS CRUCIAL FOR YOUR WORKFLOW

1. YOU HAVE NO CHANCE OF BREAKING THE LIVE SITE

When you work on a local site, you're not wasting any precious time or energy on a live server. This means that if you make a change that happens to break something, while you still have to fix it, at least your client's live site isn't busted (which could wreck their business and reputation).

While this holds true for brand new sites, it's especially important if you're making changes to an existing site. Think about it: how often do you make one single change that works flawlessly without needing a slight adjustment? Or when experimenting with new plugins, how often do you set them up without needing a few rounds of adjustments?

While it's sure great when that happens, it's just not realistic. And when you develop sites locally, you can tinker to your heart's content without fear of actually breaking anything.

2. YOU CAN DEVELOP YOUR SITE WITHOUT PAYING FOR A LIVE SERVER

Hosting sites costs money, but developing a local site doesn't (as long as you're using a free app like [Local by Flywheel](#)). This means you skip that fee while the site is in development and only pay when your site goes live.

If you're building a brand new site (either for yourself or a client) this can make a big difference. It's hard to justify the cost of a live site if there's only a "Coming Soon" page or an unfinished design to look at. But with a local site, you can skip that conversation altogether and get straight to developing.

3. YOU CAN WORK ON YOUR SITE OFFLINE

The final benefit to developing sites locally is that you can technically work on them disconnected from the internet. Because all the files you need are stored directly on your machine, you can access them whenever you need to. On a road trip? No problem. Feel like doing a little development on the beach? You go for it! With a local development environment, crummy WiFi will never slow down your workflow.



02 The best local development app

To get started with the magical process of local development, all you need is an app to help you get started. Some options include:

- **Local By Flywheel**
- **MAMP**
- **XAMPP**
- **DesktopServer**
- **ServerPress**

They all have their pros and cons, but we're going to focus on [Local by Flywheel](#), a free way to install WordPress locally on your machine. This app (available for Mac and Windows) is tailored specifically for developers working with WordPress and designed to simplify the development workflow.

A FEW FEATURES OF LOCAL BY FLYWHEEL

SSH + WP-CLI ACCESS

Local by Flywheel offers simple root SSH access to individual sites, so you can tinker around if your heart desires!

SIMPLE DEMO URLS

Show off your latest work with Live Links (shareable URLs)! They allow you to show your local WordPress sites to clients, collaborators, friends, or adoring fans before you even take it live.

LOCAL SSL SUPPORT

Any site created via Local by Flywheel will automatically have a self-signed certificate created. Green padlock achieved!





Want to follow along?

Download Local by Flywheel for free!

It's a fuss-free, cost-free way to spin up local WordPress sites, safely experiment with site changes, and speed up your development workflow. What are you waiting for?

[DOWNLOAD LOCAL TODAY](#)

03 How to develop sites in Local by Flywheel

As for building local WordPress sites on Local, it's very easy to get started, even if you're brand new to development. Some other tools will make you install WordPress yourself or require a bunch of tinkering just to create a simple site, but Local skips all that hassle. With just a few clicks, you'll have a local site up and running!

First, [download the application](#). Once you have the ZIP file, open it to install Local by Flywheel on your machine. The first time you open Local, it'll have to do just a hair of set up to create the local servers on your computer. Don't worry, this doesn't take too long!

Once everything is set up, the fun begins! To whip up your first local WordPress site, click the button to "Create a new site." Then, all you need to do is choose a few settings.

Note: For each stage of site creation, you can choose to view the Advanced settings (great if you're a seasoned developer!) or just breeze through with the basics (great if you're new at this).

Next you'll choose the environment, which includes the PHP version, Web Server, and MySQL version. If you're a Flywheel customer (or want to be one day!) stick with the Preferred option – that'll make connecting the local site to Flywheel super smooth. If you're looking for some other options, go ahead and select the Custom option. This will allow you to custom build your site with whatever environment you need!



Last, all you have to do is take care of a couple WordPress-specific options, such as your username and password. Once you're happy with your settings and you finish set up, your machine will begin setting up a local site right on your machine. This just takes a moment, as it has to configure the server and database. Then, you're set!

Once you have your local site set up, the next step in the workflow is to actually start coding and developing your site. We won't go into too much detail here (as it really depends on what type of site you're building), but here are a couple ways to go about it.

INSTALL WORDPRESS THEMES AND PLUGINS

Let's start with WordPress themes and plugins. Like we mentioned earlier, local sites behave like live sites, meaning you can still access the WordPress admin and install different themes and plugins. This works fantastically for testing things – you can try different plugins against each other, see what an update does, and so much more without worrying about breaking things.

EDIT CUSTOM CODE

If you're interested in custom development, things are just as easy. All the files and stylesheets that make up your site live right on your computer, meaning you can access them and make changes as you please! There's a link right in Local by Flywheel, making your files super easy to find.

04 Tips for an efficient local workflow

While no two sites are really the same, there are definitely some ways you can ensure a smooth development process, no matter what you're building. Here are a few things we recommend to help keep your workflow efficient:



KNOW YOUR FAVORITE TOOLS

Once you've developed a site or two, you'll probably start to identify a few of your favorite plugins, JavaScript libraries, themes, and resources. Hold on to those! Even if you're not sure when you'll need it again, keeping a list of your favorite tools can drastically speed up development time.

CREATE BLUEPRINTS FOR QUICKER DEVELOPMENT

If you're working with lots of WordPress sites and tend to reuse certain settings, themes, and/or plugins, Local by Flywheel features a great tool called Blueprints that will drastically speed up your workflow. It allows you to package up those repeatable elements as a saved template, allowing you to skip all the installation and start with those settings already set up.

For example, let's say you're a big fan of the Genesis framework and start there for all your sites. Instead of installing it on every single new site you create, simply save it as a Blueprint and you'll be up and running in no time!

IF YOU'RE CREATING CUSTOM CODE, USE GIT FOR VERSION CONTROL

Git is a version control system that tracks changes to files. It's a necessity for working on a team that needs to collaborate within the same code and great for tracking the changes that are made. GitHub is the most common host (which stores git repositories), but some other options include GitLab and Bitbucket.

Note: If you're not creating your own code and just tinkering with themes and plugins, this step isn't quite as necessary.

USE LIVE LINKS TO GET EARLY FEEDBACK

Local by Flywheel has a nifty feature called Live Links that allows you to send a link to your clients so they can review your work before the site goes live. This saves you the headache of hosting before you need to, messing with mockups just to send screenshots, or trying to coordinate a meeting with your clients in person.

The earlier you can get feedback on your work, the faster you'll be able to keep moving through the project and know you're on the right track!



JOIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Have a question? Wanna request a feature? Looking for more workflow tips? Check out the [Local Community](#), a place for Local by Flywheel users to connect and continue improving processes!

Once you're all done with development and have gotten client approval, it's time to take your site live!

05 How to deploy your WordPress site

Traditionally, taking a site live could be kind of a hassle. You'd have to backup the files, export them, upload them to a host, hope it all got transferred okay, and then repeat for any further changes. Or if you're a fan of SFTP, you could log into the server and transfer files that way, which is also a clunky process and runs the risk of moving things to the wrong location.

Those methods still work just fine, they just take a little time. If you want to host your site on Flywheel, we've made the process incredibly quick with our Connect to Flywheel feature. When you connect your Local sites to Flywheel's managed WordPress hosting platform, there's no need to mess with downloading and uploading and plugins and database exporting. Simply pair up these platforms to push local sites live with a few quick clicks, easily pull down live sites for offline editing, and sync up your tools for a simplified process.

It's seriously as easy as one, two three! Here's what the process looks like:



DOWNLOAD LOCAL

*Get started by downloading
Local by Flywheel for free
(available for Mac and Windows)*



CONNECT TO FLYWHEEL

*Navigate to the
Connect to Flywheel tab to
sign up (or log in!) to Flywheel*



TAKE YOUR SITE LIVE!

*Start pushing and pulling sites
to and from Flywheel
for a simplified workflow!*





What is Flywheel?

Flywheel is a delightful platform that empowers designers, developers, and digital agencies to focus on what they do best — building beautiful, functional sites for their clients. We make it a breeze to create and develop WordPress sites, handle hosting, manage projects, and ultimately scale your business.

Stop wasting time on server management, security plugins, caching, and all those other boring repetitive tasks that take your focus away from growing your business and jeopardize your relationship with clients. Get Flywheel and get back to doing what you love.

[LEARN MORE](#)

06 Tips for maintaining sites once they're live

Once a site is live, it's up to you how involved you'll continue to be. If it's a personal site, you'll probably check in pretty regularly. If it's for a client, you could offer a maintenance package (for a monthly fee!) that includes some ongoing updates to keep it in tip top shape. Either way, here are some of our top tips for maintaining a fast and secure WordPress site once it's live!

ALWAYS UPDATE THE WORDPRESS CORE

One of the easiest ways to keep a site secure is to stay up to date on the WordPress version. If your live site is hosted on Flywheel, we'll actually take care of this for you – you never even have to think about it. If it's elsewhere, make sure you know if your host helps you out or if that's something you need to stay on top of.



KEEP THEMES AND PLUGINS UPDATED

Along with WordPress itself, you should always update themes and plugins to protect against vulnerabilities. If you're nervous about how the update will affect your site, just experiment with them in your local environment first. For example, you can pull your Flywheel site down to Local, run the updates, and if you're satisfied with the outcome, simply push the changes to your live site. It's an easy way to experiment and move back and forth!

KEEP BACKUPS OF YOUR SITE

One of the best practices you can get into is to take regular backups of your site, just in case anything were to get a little messed up. If your site is hosted on Flywheel, we'll take care of that for you, too. We run a nightly backup of your site and save it for 30 days, allowing you to easily roll back with just the click of a button!

As you push and pull copies of your site between Local and Flywheel, we also take backups during that process so you're always able to roll back your site.

NEVER MAKE CHANGES ON THE LIVE SITE

We know, we know...we've already covered this. But it holds true even once your site is launched! No matter how small the change is, you should always make it in a test environment first before editing the live site. And with Local Connect to Flywheel, you can easily push and pull those changes as you make them.

INSTALL AN SSL CERTIFICATE

While your local site may have SSL (like Local by Flywheel offers!) you'll need to install a real certificate once the site is live. Flywheel offers Simple SSL on every site, which includes a free certificate from Let's Encrypt. Or if you need to bring your own specialty certificate, you can do that, too!



While every developer's process may look just a little different, Local and Flywheel sure do make for one efficient development dream team. Pair up these platforms today for a delightfully simple development workflow!



WORDPRESS DEVELOPMENT

This is and always will be...

FREE

-
- Speed and simplicity
 - Simple demo URLs
 - SSH / WP-CLI access
 - One-click WordPress installation
 - Hassle-free local SSL support
 - Flexible environment options

DOWNLOAD NOW



MANAGED WORDPRESS HOSTING

Plans starting at

\$25/MO

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- Free site migrations
 - Free SSL certificates
 - Free malware removal
 - Nightly site backups
 - Expert WordPress support
 - Easy collaboration

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