

INTRODUCTION TO CHILD THEMES

Boston WordPress Meetup

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The slides and example code can be found here:

<http://YourPresenceOnTheWeb.com/wp117>

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Agenda

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- How Can You Change the Look of a Theme?
- What is a Child Theme?
- Why Create Child Themes?
- Create a Simple Child Theme in 3 Easy Steps
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Themes De-mystified

- A theme establishes the **look and basic functionality of a Wordpress site**
- A theme is comprised of a **collection of files**
 - PHP files – have .php as the file name extension
 - A theme must have an **index.php** file, which is first file that WordPress tries to load when someone visits the site.
 - Most themes also have other “template” files which determine how page elements are laid out and function, e.g., header.php, sidebar.php, footer.php, functions.php, etc.
 - CSS files (Cascading Style Sheets) – have .css as the extension
 - Define how various elements on the page are styled, e.g., text font, size, color and decoration, background colors/images, spacing between elements, borders around elements, and so on.
 - *At minimum*, every theme must have a **style.css** file. Some themes have additional style sheets as well.
 - Many themes also have other files, e.g., image files, Javascript files, language files



Themes De-mystified

- Where do these files reside?
 - Each theme has its own sub-directory located in the `/wp-content/themes` directory where WordPress is installed
 - By convention, the sub-directory is named after the theme, e.g., the sub-directory for the Twenty Twelve theme is named `/wp-content/themes/twentytwelve`



How Can You Change the Look of a Theme?

- Option #1: Modify the theme configuration settings provided in the dashboard
 - Okay for the simplest changes – assuming the theme provides a setting for what you want to change
 - Many themes provide very few settings you can control
 - Even the most flexible themes don't provide the complete control that may be required
- Option #2: Utilize the custom CSS tab if offered by a theme (e.g., Custom Community), or add a plugin that supports this (e.g., Jetpack, My Custom CSS)
 - Seems to work okay, but not a complete solution – will not support changing PHP templates
 - Are there hidden potential “gotchas”????



How Can You Change the Look of a Theme?

- Option #3: Directly modify the code in the theme
 - Can be effective, but risky
 - Easy to make mistakes that could break the theme
 - An update to the theme will wipe out the custom code – you'll have to re-apply the customizations, *assuming you can find them*
- Option #4: The low-risk, most powerful solution...create your own Child Theme



What is a Child Theme?

- A **child theme** allows you to take an existing theme (called the **parent theme**), leverage the best parts of it, and extend or modify the parent theme in literally any imaginable way to achieve the specific look and behavior you want.
 - As a starting point, a child theme inherits all of the CSS styling and PHP templates from the parent theme
 - You can then modify the behavior of the parent theme by adding code to the child theme
 - The code in the child theme **overrides** the code in the parent theme
 - **Exception:** if you add a functions.php template to the child theme, the code adds to (does not override) the code in the functions.php template in the parent theme



Why Create Child Themes?

- In cases where the settings in the parent theme do not provide the control you need, child themes are **the most powerful and safest way** to modify the behavior an existing theme
- It is the **fastest way** to create several variations of an existing theme.
- It's a great way to get start learning WordPress theme development.
- It's what lots of the pros do!
 - Theme frameworks, like Genesis and Builder, utilize a parent/child theme architecture



Create a Child Theme in 3 Easy Steps

- It's very simple to create a basic child theme to alter the styling of a parent theme
 - Step 1: Create a sub-directory for the child theme files
 - Step 2: Create a basic style.css file
 - Step 3: Add some custom CSS code to the style.css file
- In this example, we will create a simple child theme that alters the styling of the Twenty Twelve theme
 - Apply a custom background color to the content areas of the screen
 - Force the text in all headings to be ALL UPPERCASE



Create a Child Theme in 3 Easy Steps

- **Step 1: Create a sub-directory for the child theme files**
 - Create the sub-directory in the **/wp-content/themes** directory where WordPress is installed
 - You can name the sub-directory anything you want. A typical practice: name the sub-directory the same as the parent theme's directory with the suffix “-child”
 - Example: If you are creating a child theme for the Twenty Twelve theme, you might name the child theme's sub-directory:

`/wp-content/themes/twentytwelve-child`



Create a Child Theme in 3 Easy Steps

- **Step 2: Create a basic style.css file**

- Use a plain text editor (e.g., Notepad, Bluefish) to create the file
- Add a comment block at the top of the file identifying, **at minimum:**

```
/*
```

```
Theme Name: Got the Blues in 2012
```

```
Description: 2012 with a touch of blue
```

```
Author: J. May
```

```
Author URI: http://yourpresenceontheweb.com
```

```
Version: 1.0
```

```
Template: twentytwelve
```

```
*/
```

```
@import url('../twentytwelve/style.css');
```

- **Theme Name:** This name will appear in the **Appearance => Themes** screen
- **Template:** Must match *the directory name of the parent theme*
- Following the comment block, include an **import** command that directs WordPress to include the parent theme's style sheet
 - The URL value needs to point to the location of the parent theme's style.css file



Create a Child Theme in 3 Easy Steps

- **Step 3: Add some custom CSS code to style.css**
 - The custom code must appear ***after*** the **import** command
- After adding the custom code, **save the file and you're done!**

```
/*
Theme Name: Got the Blues in 2012
Description: 2012 with a touch of blue
Author: J. May
Author URI: http://yourpresenceontheweb.com
Version: 1.0
Template: twentytwelve
*/
@import url('../twentytwelve/style.css');

.site {
    background-color: #C5E9E6;
}

h1,h2,h3,h4,h5,h6 {
    text-transform: uppercase;
}
```



Create a Child Theme in 3 Easy Steps

- To test the child theme, go to Appearance => Themes
 - The child theme should appear in the list of available themes
 - **Activate** the child theme, and review the results in the front end view of the site
- Optionally you can now create a thumbnail image of the child theme to display with the theme information on the **Appearance => Themes** screen
 - Capture a screen shot
 - Crop/re-size the image to approx. 600px X 450 px
 - Save the image in a file named **screenshot.png** in the child theme sub-directory



Modifying Templates with Child Themes

- With a child theme you also can modify the behavior of a parent theme, e.g., how pages are laid out, what content displays in an area of the page
- Several methods to do this:
 - **Override an existing template file** with a template file of the same name in the child theme
 - When making a minor “tweaks” to a template, common practice is to copy the parent theme template into the child theme sub-directory and make the code changes to that version
 - For more extensive/complex changes:
 - **Create a brand-new template file** in the child theme subdirectory
 - **Add a functions.php template file** to the child theme, which WordPress loads *in addition to* the parent theme's functions.php file



Modifying Templates with Child Themes

- Example: apply the “Metal Mania” Google web font to all headings
 - 1) Use a plain text editor to create a new file called “functions.php”, add the following code to the file, and save the file in the child theme sub-directory

```
<?php
function load_fonts() {
    wp_register_style('googleFonts', 'http://fonts.googleapis.com/css?family=Metal+Mania');
    wp_enqueue_style( 'googleFonts');
}

add_action('wp_print_styles', 'load_fonts');
```

- 2) Add the following code at the end of the child theme style.css file:

```
h1,h2,h3,h4,h5,h6 { font-family: "Metal Mania",Arial; }
```



Resources for Digging Deeper

- Documentation at WordPress.org:
 - General information about how themes work:
http://codex.wordpress.org/Theme_Development
 - General information about child themes:
http://codex.wordpress.org/Child_Themes
 - Template files explained:
http://codex.wordpress.org/Stepping_Into_Templates
 - Functions file explained:
http://codex.wordpress.org/Functions_File_Explained
 - WordPress PHP functions:
http://codex.wordpress.org/Function_Reference



Resources for Digging Deeper

- Books on theme development (or some material thereof):
 - *WordPress All-In-One for Dummies*, L. Sabin-Wilson, et al., 2011 (new release coming out soon!)
 - *Professional WordPress: Design and Development*, B. Williams, 2013
 - *Web Designer's Guide to WordPress*, Friedman, 2012
- Learn the fundamentals of HTML, CSS and PHP
 - <http://www.w3schools.com/> (Free)
 - <http://lynda.com> (not free)
 - <http://tutsplus.com> (not free)



Resources for Digging Deeper

- Sites with simple tutorials and code examples for child themes:
 - <http://zeaks.org/category/child-themes>
 - <http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2011/12/creating-your-first-wordpress-child-theme/>



Questions?



Thank You!

- If you want to learn more about WordPress...I teach “all things WordPress” in my **WordPress Live! Training** in-classroom training courses
 - Creating Websites with WordPress
5-class beginner-level course
 - Advanced Topics in WordPress
5-class course for experienced users
 - Creating Online Stores with WordPress
1/2-day intensive workshop
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