HOW TO RUN A

WordPress Meetup

Tips for running a successful local WordPress Meetup

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Introduction: Why Meetup?

The greatest thing about WordPress is the community. That's what allows this free software to continue being free, to continually get better and to have an entire ecosystem of themes and plugins. It's pretty awesome.

But that community doesn't have to be entirely virtual. All across the country there are WordPress groups gathering in person on a regular basis. These WordPress meetups are an opportunity to meet and connect with other WordPress fans in your area. It's not just for geeks either.

There are plenty of WordPress fans of all stripes, from eager beginners to hardcore developers. There are entrepreneurs, coders, designers, writers and more. You'll find independent freelancers, small business owners, growing startups and big tech companies. You'll find people interested in developing plugins, customizing themes, setting up websites and creating content. There might even be a few geeks.

You can learn about all things WordPress. You might see some amazing presentations that blow your mind with what WordPress can do. You might be reminded of some simple features you overlooked. You might pick up some helpful tips that can make your site better. You might learn about some new plugins or themes that offer exactly what you've been looking for. You might get the help you need. You might meet some incredible people and forge connections that will help in the future.

Yes, WordPress meetups are the place to be.
Of course somebody has to run one in your area first. Maybe that someone is you.

There are more than 500 WordPress meetups across the world, in varying states of activity. There might be one in your area. If so, check it out. They may not need helping starting a meetup, but they might need help keeping it going. If that's the case we've got some wisdom you can glean in the pages that follow. If there's not a WordPress meetup in your area, it's time to start one. We can help.

In the following pages we'll talk about everything you need to know to start and run a WordPress meetup.

Let's get together.

Ask Yourself

"If someone is looking to start a WordPress meetup I would advise them to do some soul searching first," says Tony Cecala, organizer of the Dallas/Forth Worth WordPress Meetup. "If they are looking to support the community and would like to meet like-minded people, then they should jump right in."

Before diving into the nitty-gritty how-to of starting a meetup, you need to ask yourself some basic questions. As Tony advises, ask yourself why you're doing this. If you have a WordPress-related business and you think it might be a good way to connect with customers and promote your company, that's not the best reason. Your self-serving aims are going to turn people off.

Running a WordPress meetup is a long-term commitment. Can you follow through on what you're starting? Many groups take years to get off the ground and start growing. It may be a while before all your hard work and dedication pays off. Are you ready for that?

Finally, are you the right person for the job? If giving a presentation in front of a group fills you with dread, you might want to reconsider. By default, meetup organizers often end up doing a fair amount of speaking. If organizational details aren't your forte, you're going to have a problem. Meetup organizers need to be organized (duh). They need to be responsible and follow through. They need to be able to plan and tackle mundane details. If that's not you, you're going to have a problem.

But if you're not the right person for the job, don't despair. You might not be the only person for the job.

Go Team

Organizing a WordPress meetup is a lot of work, but you don't have to do it alone.

"It's good to have two people in case one can't be there," says Lynn Dye, co-organizer of the Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group. "The other person can pick up the slack."

It's wise to team up with multiple people to organize a meetup. Pool your strengths and the group will be better for it. If you don't think you can do it on your own, find a few people willing to carry the load with you.

There's strength in numbers. It's always better to have a team organizing a meetup than just a lone person. Even if one person calls the shots, you need a few other co-organizers to help carry the load. Let's face it: Life happens. Some day something will come up and you won't be able to make it to your own meetup. You need somebody to help you out, and, preferably, not at the last minute. If a team is running things from the start, it's no problem if one person can't make it.

- Team Diversity – Make sure your organizing team has some diversity. If you're all hardcore coders, it's likely you'll attract nothing but hardcore coders. Get some diversity on your team so you can appeal to a wider group of users.

- Recruit New Blood – Organizing is a lot of work and eventually you're going to have folks who move on or need a break. Recruit some new organizing members to spread the load and keep your initial group from dwindling too low.

- Right Skills – Make sure you have at least one person in your organizing team who's good at throwing parties and organizing events. Those are skills you're going to need, and while you can learn them, it works better if you have someone who can share their wisdom.

Running a WordPress meetup is a big job to take on. But if you get some help, you'll do just fine.

Three Keys to Meetups

The three basic ingredients of any successful meetup are consistency, communication and experimentation. You need a lot of things going to make a meetup work, but if you have these three you'll be in good shape.

Consistency

For a meetup to work you have to be consistent. You need to be there every month, making the event happen and building stability. In order for people to remember it you need to meet in the same place at the same time. Constantly changing times, days and locations is a sure way to lose people. It's OK to experiment (more on that later) and it's OK to change locations as needed, but you need to protect that meetup day and time.

"When someone joins a meetup they want to know it's been around for a bit, and that it will continue," says Tony Cecala, organizer of the Dallas/Fort Worth WordPress Meetup. "There's an investment of time and energy and reputation to being part of a group. So people want to know that they are joining something of substance."

If you want people to show up every month, you need to prove that you're in it every month.

Communication

Your group won't last if you can't communicate. You need to send consistent updates and let people know what's going on. Communicate early and often. Set up a schedule for when you communicate—pre- and post-meetup emails, tweets and blog posts. You don't want to spam people, but you do need keep people informed. Especially as any change happens.

Without regular communication people won't know what's happening and all your work is for nothing.

Experimentation

Try things out and figure out what works best. We've collected some tips from successful meetup groups, but that doesn't mean they'll work for your group. Experiment and see what works best for you.

Remember to communicate about any changes and try to find some consistency. Don't experiment with six different changes in six months. When you try something, stick with it for at least three months. But when something isn't working, give up and move on.

The only way you'll find out what works best for your group is to experiment and see.

Starting a Meetup

Before diving too deep, you should look around and make sure there's not already a WordPress group meeting in your area.

- Search on Meetup.com to see what groups are in your area.

- Not every group is using Meetup.com, so you'll need to explore further. Check out Google. Search for things like "WordPress meetup," "WordPress user group," "WordPress event" along with your city or area.

- Search for other WordPress events in your area. If there's a WordCamp in your area, you can bet there's already a meetup organized.

- Ask around. Find other tech events and see if they know of a WordPress group. Ask your local WordPress friends if they've heard of a local group.

It's usually better to join forces than have two competing groups, so do your homework first and make sure you're not reinventing the wheel.

First Meeting

There are a lot of questions you need to answer when you're starting a meetup group. Where should you meet? When should you meet? What are you going to do? Will there be any costs? Who's going to do what? It's easy to get overwhelmed.

A good first step is to gather a few people interested in a meetup and start answering these questions. This can be the beginning of your organizing team. You could do this online, but it might be more engaging and, well, fun to get together in person.

There are two main ways to go about this initial meeting. Either one can work and it depends on your situation.

Small & Personal

One way to get started is to gather a few friends and talk about what you want to do. Maybe send an email to a bunch of people who use WordPress and see what happens. Maybe you already have a small group that's interested. However it works, you keep it personal and you don't make a big public splash.

The benefit here is that you can make it quick and dirty. It's a brainstorming meeting to get things started. You don't need to pick the perfect venue or worry about a logo or if you're going to use Meetup.com or what. You just gather a few friends and start talking about what this meetup will look like.

While this is a good way to get started quickly, it's not a good way to include new people—which is kind of the whole point. So while you may make some decisions and some good progress, keep an open

mind. When you have your first gathering open to the general public, be sure to get their input and incorporate it. You might find that the wider public wants something different than your little group, and that's OK. You just have to roll with it.

So with a small and personal first meeting you can get going quickly— just a couple friends at the bar can get things rolling—but you need to shift on the fly as you make the group official and open to the public.

Big & Public

The other way to go is to throw your first meeting open to the public. Invite whoever wants to come. Throw up an event on Meetup.com or EventBrite. Announce it on Twitter, Facebook your blog and spread the word far and wide.

Going big and public is good because you can bring in the community right from the start. You'll quickly see if you've got a ton of developers or a ton of newbies. You won't have to shift on the fly because you're getting everyone's input right from the start.

The downside is that it's a lot more work. By making your first meeting open to the public you have to do a lot of the groundwork yourself. Where are you going to meet? That depends on how many people show up. And when your first getting started you may have no idea. You could be a handful of people at a corner table in a coffee shop. Or you could be a dozen or more and need your own room. If you use something like Meetup.com or EventBrite, you might find yourself using technology that isn't ideal and need to switch later. And since you're inviting the public you need to be, well, inviting. You should have signs directing people and sign up sheets and all the rest. You need to do a fair amount of organizational legwork before you even get started.

Questions to Ask

However you get that first meeting started, you'll begin to answer some questions and figure out how this group will come together. Of course things will change. You'll outgrow space and need more speakers and have to figure all kinds of things out. That's part of the process. Just be flexible, be friendly and have fun.

A good early tip is to survey your group and get some answers on all these questions. You may have consensus at your first meeting, but you may not. You might see three or four good ideas rise to the top and still need to narrow things down. A post-meeting survey can be a good way to get a vote and see where things are at.

A few things you might want to ask:

- When do you want to meet? Give a few options, don't leave it wide open.
- Where should we meet? It might help to find out where people are coming from as well as where they're willing to meet. Some people might be more willing to drive than others. Get a sense for how important is it to have a centrally located venue.
- What kind of meetup are you going to have? While speakers and presentations are pretty popular, that's not the only way to do it.
- Who's willing to speak? Any time you can, ask for volunteers to present.

Getting input from the group is important, but remember that the group can't make all the decisions. Get their input and let it guide you, but ultimately you're running the show.

What to Do

One of the first things you'll need to sort out is what kind of meetup you're going to have. What do you do when you get all these WordPress fans together? This will influence everything else, from what type of venue you select to what kind of speakers you need.

There are a ton of different things you can do at a meetup. And there's no single answer. You can do different things at the same meetup or change it up every month. Mix and match and do what works best for your group.

"Everybody does them differently, sometimes they have the meetup where you meet in a bar and talk about WordPress, sometimes it's a classroom type format." says Michael Torbert, founder of the Raleigh WordPress Meetup Group. "We decided to have the best of both worlds. Once a month we have a social WordPress meetup at our office lounge, in addition to our regular meeting that's more of a classroom setting."

- Classroom Style Presentations – Many meetups offer your basic classroom style presentations where somebody stands up in the front and shares something. This educational approach is a good way to offer some serious value (assuming you can find some good speakers).

- Social/Networking – Another approach is to focus on networking or simple hanging out. This is less organized and more casual. It's up to the individual attendees to find their own value as they connect and meet people. Most meetup groups set aside some time for socializing and networking.

- Group Discussion/Forum – Another approach is to open your meetup to the group for a large discussion. You'll probably need a facilitator to keep the discussion on track, but this can be a good way to hear from a lot of people and draw on the collective wisdom of the room. You'll need to pick good topics and have some prepared questions to keep things going.

- Introductions & Personal Sharing – Since meetups are about meeting people, a good way to go is gearing your meetup as a chance to introduce people. For small groups it might work to go around the table and have everybody introduce themselves and share what they do with WordPress. It can be fascinating to hear what other people are doing. It's also a good way to encourage networking and socializing later. For large groups this is harder, but it can still be done. You could give everyone a very brief time limit to share or just ask a handful of different people to share each month.

- Hackathon/Help Desk – You can also draw on the wisdom of the group and offer to solve problems. Set up a help desk and encourage people to bring their laptops and their problems. Have some developers on hand ready to answer questions, help fix bugs, tweak CSS and more. This can work well with a social/networking component where some people can socialize while others are getting help.

- Build Something – This is really a glorified classroom style presentation, but it's so fun it's worth talking about separately. The New York City WordPress Community built their own social networking site using the BuddyPress plugin. But instead of having a couple WordPress experts do it during their spare time, they did as a group. They built it together on the big screen (and recorded it!), showing everybody how it's done and walking through every step. How cool is that? It's a chance for beginners to see a major project at work and hardcore folks to share their know-how. You

could build a site for your group or put together a site for a local charity.

- Expert Q&A/Panel – Sometimes if a formal presentation is too time intensive, you can ask an expert to do a question and answer session. You could also pull together several experts and do a panel discussion. This can be a little more informal and a good way to get input from your audience and get their questions answered.

- Themes – A good way to organize your events is to come up with themes. Each meetup can cover a different topic and this can be a helpful way to bring some cohesiveness to what you're doing. Cover plugins, themes, business, writing, design, etc. One downside is that it might be harder to appeal to a larger audience with such a specific focus.

Whatever you decide to do during your meetup, remember that value is important. If people are going to take time out of the schedules to come to your meetup (and come back!), there has to be something of value.

How to Pick a Time

Picking a time for your WordPress meetup is crucial. Here are some tips on how to choose a time:

- Pick a consistent day of the month that's easy to remember. The first Friday or third Wednesday. This makes it easy for you to plan and easy for attendees to remember.

- Plan around other meetups in your community. You don't want to be competing with other groups, so find any social, tech, blogging, etc. meetups and make sure you're not conflicting.

- Find a time that makes sense. If you're meeting downtown it might make more sense to meet earlier so people can go straight to the meetup from work. If you can't offer food, maybe start a little later so people have time to grab supper.

- Consider shaking things up every now and then and offering an event at an off time that might appeal to people who can't normally make it. If you always meet in the evenings, consider a morning meeting. If you meet on weeknights, consider a weekend event. This might work best for special events once you're more established, but it's a good way to make more people feel included.

- Find some consensus on what works, but don't sweat it. You're always going to have some people who can't make it. Don't feel like you have to change everything to meet the needs of a vocal minority. Often you'll find that the ones who complain the loudest are also the ones who won't show up when they get their way.

How to Find a Venue

Finding a place to meet is always important. You want a place that's accessible and friendly, a place that will work for the type of meetup you're doing (a coffee shop will work great for a networking session, but not so much for a presentation). You also need a place that works for your group. You don't want the fire marshal breathing down your neck, but you also don't want a cavernous hall for five people.

Since most meetup organizers aren't independently wealthy, you probably want a free venue. We'll talk about costs later, but the venue cost can be one of the big ones and will often determine whether or not you'll need to charge for the event.

Tips on spaces:

- Wi-Fi – Internet access is a must. You'll definitely need it for your presenters and it'd be nice if the entire audience can get online as well. Unfortunately, many Wi-Fi venues have a hard time keeping up with a tech-heavy crowd. Ask ahead. You might not have a choice, but it'd be a perfect tie-breaker if you're choosing between two venues.

- Power Strips – Wi-Fi is great, but it's useless if your battery is dying. Make some power strips available so nobody has to fight over outlets.

- Projectors – If you're doing classroom style meetups you'll need a projector system and screen.

- Mics – Depending on the size of your group and the location, you might need some amplification. More than likely you'll need this sooner than you think. A soft-spoken presenter and background noise is a recipe for frustration.

- Good Directions – Nobody likes to be lost. Offer maps to get there and signage once you're there. If you're at a restaurant, try to be visible from the front door and use table tents so people know where they're going.

- Legal Obligations – Be aware of any legal obligations you may have. If a floor gets scratched they may come after you as the organizer.

- What About Food? – If you're doing any kind of refreshments will they work in the space? Or are you going to get burned when pizza sauce drips on the carpet?

- Centrally Located – It's a good idea to find a place that's centrally located. This can be hard to manage since it depends on who's coming, but it's nice to try.

- Parking – Make sure there's plenty of parking or it's clear where people can park. You don't want people getting tickets thanks to your meetup. That's a downer.

- Safe – Make sure you're meeting in a neighborhood that's generally safe. Some people have different standards, so make sure everybody's going to feel safe. If it's an area that maybe gives a sketchy vibe but you know it's safe, just reassure everybody by making sure it's well lit after dark or have people head out in groups.

- Fun – A fun space can make the event. If there's a cool tech company in town with a hip office, those kinds of spaces are fun and energizing. Sure beats a drab conference room.

- Spice It Up – If you are stuck with that drab conference room, find some ways to spice it up. Full on decorating might not be worth it, but there are always some simple ways you can add something fun. Maybe you put toys on the tables to fiddle with or ditch the fluorescents for some lamps.

- Paying for Space – Be sure you're getting your money's work if you have to pay for space. Look for perks and be sure they're catering to you. You'll also want to come up with an RSVP system and maybe even charge so you have a good idea how many people are coming. You hate to pay for a big space only to have it half filled. You can try to cover these costs with sponsorship or charging an entrance fee. We'll talk more about costs later.

Finding that all-important venue is tough. But where to look? Here are some places to start your hunt:

- Connections – Work your group's connections to find a venue. It's entirely possible someone works at a school or business with a space that might work. With an employee or student involved in the group, some places might be willing to waive any fees to make it work. Ask around and see what connections your group has.

- Coworking Spaces – Shared office space in a coworking location is often a good place to meet. WordPress groups are often chockfull of freelancers, the bread and butter of any coworking space. The exposure is often worth a free conference room.

- Restaurants/Coffee Shops – For small groups simply pulling

together a couple tables at a local restaurant or coffee shop might do the trick. Of course you'll need to have an appropriate meeting style, but for low-key events this can work well. Plus, it's easy to have people pay for their own refreshments. Just remember to be courteous to the establishment and tip well. Don't take over an entire corner of the coffee shop for two hours and buy nothing but a small coffee. Also, be sure to pick a place that's not too loud so you still have effective conversation.

- Schools/Businesses - Local schools, businesses and other organizations may be willing to offer up free space for the exposure it provides. Just like coworking spaces, a local tech business may love having a swarm of WordPress fans in their space every month. A local tech school might also want the honor of hosting a local meetup and forging some connections that can help their students. It never hurts to ask.

- Community Spaces – Some local community organizations might have space that's available to the public for free. Try libraries, community centers or churches.

How to Find Speakers

Finding speakers seems to be a constant struggle for meetup organizers. Especially with smaller groups it can be hard to find new speakers. It can also get tiring to hear from the same couple folks every month.

Here are a few ways to find speakers:

- Ask Your Group – Ask for volunteers. And keep asking. There are always new people or people who are newly considering it. Keep asking. As time goes on people are learning and growing, so they're gaining the insights to give a solid presentation. So keep asking.

- Out-of-Town Guests – Watch for out-of-town guests who might make good speakers. If they're coming in to town for something else they might be able to piggyback and attend your event as well.

- Local Experts – Find local experts in your area and invite them to speak.

- Blogs – Watch the blogs and tweets of your group members for good ideas and then ask them to speak on that topic.

- Search for Ideas – Check out WordPress blogs, WordPressTV and the schedules for other WordPress Meetups or WordCamps to get ideas for engaging

presentations. Then look for someone in your community who could cover those topics.

- Off Topic – Sometimes the best presentations are only tangentially related to WordPress. Think outside the box. Sometimes a design refresher or a basics of copywriting presentation is just what people need. After all, WordPress sites need graphic design and they need copy. You don't want to stray too far from WordPress often, but occasionally it can be fruitful.

- Shake Things Up – If finding presenters is hard, go with a different format. Go with a social hour, demonstration, round table discussion, group project or something else.

Plan Ahead

"Don't wait until the week before to try to get a speaker," says Lynn Dye, co-organizer of the Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group. "Plan in advance so you're not scrambling at the last minute."

As hard as it may be to find speakers, the more you can plan in advance the better. You give your speakers more lead time to prepare their presentations, you can announce the event earlier and build community interest and it makes your organizing efforts less stressful.

Take Care of Your Speakers

It's also important when you find speakers to make sure it's worth their while. Most groups can't afford to pay presenters (though if you're charging for the event, you might be able to offer a small honorarium or gift card), but you can still do your utmost to be thankful. Make sure you communicate all the appropriate details and don't leave your guest speaker wondering. Confirm that they're coming a week before and ask if they need anything. At the event, anticipate any needs they may have. Make sure the audio-visual connections work, offer them water and let them know the schedule for the event. After the event show your appreciation by sending a thank you card.

It's hard to find speakers, so when you find them treat them well so they're eager to do it again.

It Gets Easier

"Passionate people have found ways to get involved in the group; we don't twist arms," says Toby Cryns, co-founder of the Minneapolis-St. Paul WordPress User Group. Hopefully over time you'll find the same thing: Put together a good group and the passionate speakers will come to you.

Dealing with Costs

"You don't want to charge for the meetup," says Michael Torbert, organizer of the meetup in Raleigh, N.C. "Obviously it's not about making money."

But you don't want to go broke either. You'll be putting a lot of time and sweat into a meetup, you shouldn't have to put your wallet into it as well. This is where meetups can get complicated.

There are several costs associated with meetups and just as many ways to handle them. Here are some of the potential costs:

* Venues

* Food

* Speakers

* Meetup.com

* Video

* Promotion (website hosting, flyers, table tents, signage, etc.)

Certainly you don't need all of these. Many meetups go without free refreshments. They either ask folks to bring their own or they meet at a restaurant or coffee shop where everyone can buy their own. Recording your events is also not required.

You also don't have to pay for all of these. Most speakers will volunteer for free. Promotion can often be done on the cheap. You can also find sponsors who might be willing to cover the cost of the venue or food.

WordPress has also offered to cover the nominal cost of Meetup.com ($12/month), though at the time of this writing details were still being worked out.

So you've got some expenses. How about some income? There are generally two options and you can always do both.

1. Charging for the Meetup

While you want to keep your event free, that's not always possible. WordPress strongly encourages it, but sometimes you have expenses. Sometimes you need to charge for the meetup to help cover those expenses. It's not ideal, but it's perfectly acceptable.

"I charge to ensure that the members have a quality experience," says Tony Cecala, organizer of the Dallas/Fort Worth WordPress Meetup. "There are many other haphazard, free meetups they can attend."

Charging for your event also means you can more easily raise the bar on what you're offering, as Tony says. This fits with the WordPress model: There are plenty of free themes out there, but if you want a better, solid, more trusted experience, you can also spend the money on a premium theme.

Another benefit to charging for your event is that RSVPs will become much more reliable. When an event is free it's too easy for people to RSVP if they're kind of interested but then not show up. This can be

a major problem if you have limited space. But charging a nominal fee--$5 or $10—will almost guarantee that people show up when they RSVP. They'll flake out if it doesn't cost them anything, but they're less likely to throw away good money.

That entrance fee can help cover costs and allow you to provide some refreshments, offering a little extra value to make paying a fee worthwhile. Remember that once people have to start paying for an event they're going to expect more. Be sure there's a tangible sense of value.

2. Sponsorship

Sponsors can be a great way to cover costs. That extra money gives you room to invest more in the event and make it a better experience for the community.

"If there's a major theme or plugin company in town, I think it's great if they support it," says Lynn Dye, co-organizer of the Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group.

But opening up your meetup to sponsors also means you have some added responsibilities. No one is eager to sit through a commercial, so you're going to have to balance the needs of your sponsor and the needs of your community.

It's important to make it very clear to sponsors what they're getting. Spell out the details in writing. If you're giving them a plug from the stage, give a time limit. Do they get two minutes or 20? Spelling out all the details is a good way to avoid conflicts.

You also need to make it clear to your community what the sponsor

provides. A two-minute commercial goes down easier when it's understood that it keeps the event free.

Transparency is important and will keep everybody happy.

A final tip: Make sure everyone is getting value out of sponsorship. Forking over cash for your meetup needs to be worth it to the sponsor. If you want them to come back they need to get something out of it. A good way to do that is to make sure they're offering value to your community. A meetup discount will draw attention. Attendees will be more likely to check out the sponsor and the sponsor will be more likely to score some new customers. A good sponsorship works when everybody gets value out of the relationship. If everybody wins, everybody's happy.

Philosophy

WordPress has its own philosophy that sets it apart from other content management systems. A good way to likewise make your meetup distinct is to follow the same philosophy.

- Ship early & often - Don't sit back and wait while you try to perfect everything about your event before you have it. Make it happen and then tweak as you go. Learn on the fly. Iterate.

- Free - WordPress is free, so make your meetup free, or at least as low-cost as possible. Sometimes it's just easier to have people pay for their own drinks rather than provide them.

- Non-Commercial - WordPress is a nonprofit. The platform allows for all kinds of commercial activity, but at its core, it's non-commercial. Likewise, meetups should be non-commercial. It's not all about promoting yourself or your company. Sponorships are OK, but they're only there to help cover the bills. Your event shouldn't feel like an infomercial for sponsors or speakers.

- Power to the People - WordPress is driven by users who contribute to the core code and create free themes and plugins for the community. It's a community platform, so your event should

likewise be community driven. That means lots of people should pitch in. Don't be the one poor martyr who does all the work. Empower other people to own part of the event.

- Accessible - WordPress is about making things open and accessible to people. Likewise, make your event friendly to as many people as possible. If you usually do events in the evenings, try to do something at a different time to accommodate more people. Find a central location that works for everybody. And make stuff available afterward. Post notes or video from your events so people who didn't attend can see the value themselves (and maybe they'll want to attend the next one).

Random Tips for a Better Meetup

We talked to a lot of people for this ebook and gleaned a lot of wisdom. Here are some of the random tips that can be especially helpful:

- Make Your Own Decisions - It's tempting to try to please everybody, but it never works. Worst-case scenario is the people you try to please don't stick around and you're doing things for somebody who isn't even attending. Try to get some input and figure out what works for everybody, but in the end you just need to make some decisions.

- Schedule in Advance – You should schedule your meetings several months in advance. A lot of WordPress meetups schedule one month at a time, but that's a good way to get behind and get in trouble when a speaker falls through. It shows stability and organization when you have several months planned out. Plus, it gives attendees something to look forward to. This also means you can plug the next meetup at the end of the current one.

- It's Not All You - Try not to be the featured speaker all the time. Early on that's a temptation, especially as you struggle to find speakers. We know you're cool, but people will quickly get tired of hearing you all the time.

- More Presenters - If you can, schedule multiple presenters with shorter blocks of time. This way you get multiple perspectives and more chances the audience will connect with a speaker (and less fallout if a speaker is a dud).

- Online Info - Offer a single page announcing each meetup that gives all the necessary overview info, as well as bio info and links for speakers. It's easier to send people to one place for Twitter handles, hashtags, bios and more.

- Shake it Up - The standard classroom presentation can get tired if that's all you ever do. Use different formats. Offer panel discussions, roundtables, workshops, networking sessions, etc.

- Things Change - The makeup of your meetup will change over time. The people who came initially will get busy and stop coming. New folks will start popping up. Don't take it personally if people stop showing up. Often it has little to do with your meetup and more to do with the general busyness of life.

Promotion

You need to get the word out about your WordPress meetup. This isn't a Kevin Costner movie—just because you built it doesn't mean they'll come.

There are a lot of ways to promote your event, but we'll cover a few big ideas to help you out along the way.

Keep What You Get

Make the most of your efforts by making sure that people who come to an event come back. Put on excellent events, be consistent, communicate well. Make sure people are getting value. If you're doing this right, then your event will promote itself. Any effort you put into promotion will be magnified because your event backs it up.

Make sure you connect with new people when they come for the first time. Don't overwhelm them, but do introduce yourself, explain how things work and make sure they're signed up on your email list.

Can't Someone Else Do It?

Another easy way to do promotion is to let someone else do it. Make it easy for other people to promote your event. Use a consistent hashtag for your event. Encourage people to take photos and tweet about the event. Post a good agenda of the event ahead of time so people can get excited and spread the word. After the event share some valuable content like notes or video. Give people something to talk about.

Use Your Time Wisely

Running a meetup is time intensive so you want to make sure you're getting the most promotional bang for your buck. Since you're appealing to a tech-centric audience, use tech-centric channels. Focus on Facebook, Twitter, a website. Also recognize what you are—a local social event. That means you need to find ways to reach out to local people. You also need to be aware that this is a social event and that can be intimidating for newcomers. Often a personal invite from a current attender is what will bring someone new.

Just a Start

There's always a lot more you can do to promote your meetup, but these are some big ideas. Of course an obvious promotional tactic is to create a site for your meetup. We'll talk about that in more detail next.

Create a Site for Your Meetup

You need an online presence to organize and announce your WordPress meetup. Many groups use Meetup.com and it's the official WordPress Meetup site. But that's not the only way to go. You can also create your own site. Or you can do both. But you need a vibrant, consistent online presence.

Meetup.com

The upside of using sites like Meetup.com is you're tapping into a pre-existing community of people who like to attend meetups. In the case of Meetup.com, it's likely the first place people will look for a meetup in their area because WordPress sends people there.

"Get on Meetup.com," says Lynn Dye, co-organizer of the Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group. "So many people have heard of it. Why not?" She points out that it also sends out event reminders automatically and has a built in review section.

The downside of Meetup.com—or any other event listing site—is that you're not in control. These sites can always disappear, change their policies, raise their rates or otherwise make life difficult for you.

Setting Up Your Own Site

That's the primary bonus of setting up your own site: You own it. You're in charge and you can do whatever you want. You could even use it as another revenue source by running Google ads with your content.

Plus you can build the site during a meetup. It's a great way to walk newbies through the process of installing WordPress and show off some expert tips along the way.

The downside is that it's another place to maintain. If Meetup.com is working for you, you might be needlessly doubling your efforts.

Online Presence Tips

A few tips for creating and maintaining your online presence:

- Single Event Page - Have a single page announcing each meetup that gives all the necessary overview info, as well as bio info and links for speakers. It's helpful to point to one place for Twitter handles, hashtags and bios. If you're doing both a Meetup.com site and your own site, the basics should be on both sites, but use one as the primary page and have the other link to it. You want to have everybody using the same main page.

- Build a Content Reservoir - "Our videos have benefitted the global WordPress community, and that's awesome!" says Steve Bruner, organizer of the New York City WordPress Community. Have someone take notes at every meetup and post those notes on the site. If you have the resources, record each meetup and post the videos online. You're creating a wealth of content each month and you might as well collect and share it. It gives people an example of what your meetings are like and will encourage them to attend. It also helps people who missed a meetup see what they missed. Finally, it's a wealth of content that will draw more people to your site, which can mean more attenders and maybe even some ad revenue (if it's your own site). You're not going to get rich, but a few bucks to help cover pizza is always good.

- Connection & Interaction – Be sure your site allows for connection and interaction within the community. That's the whole point of a meetup and you should be encouraging it online as well as offline. Meetup.com has a message board you can use or explore a plugin for your own WordPress site.

- Your Own URL – Even if it just points to a Meetup.com site, have your own URL. It's a lot easier to point people to wpcityname.com than meetup.com/wpcityname. It just makes things simpler.

- Keep it Current – Nothing kills your consistency and communication like an out of date site. Whatever you decide to do, keep it current. This is especially true if you're going to have a Meetup.com site and a separate site. It's easy to let one be neglected and that's a bad move. Don't build what you can't maintain.

Top Tips for Awesome Meetups

We've been talking WordPress meetups for a while now and we've collected some of the best of the best tips. Here are the top tips for creating awesome WordPress meetups:

- Pick a consistent day of the month and time to meet that's the same every month. Like the first Friday or third Wednesday. It makes it easy for everyone to remember the event and plan on it.

- If space is a concern, charge a nominal fee like $5. This will vastly increase the number of RSVP folks who actually show up.

- Share content from your meetup: "Our videos have benefitted the global WordPress community, and that's awesome!" says Steve Bruner, organizer of the New York City WordPress Community.

- Promote, promote, promote: "Turnout generally depends on how good of a job we do with promotions," says Toby Cryns, co-founder of the Minneapolis-St. Paul WordPress User Group. If you want people to show up, you need to spread the word.

- Value: "People want to know that they are joining something of substance," says Tony Cecala, organizer of the Dallas/Fort-Worth WordPress Meetup. "It almost goes without saying that the content of the meetup should be valuable. If members feel that someone is just on stage to pitch to them, the reputation of the meetup takes a hit."

- Learn from mistakes: "I've made mistakes, but I try not to ever make the same mistake twice," says Tony Cecala.

- It's OK to charge: "I charge to ensure that the members have a quality experience," says Tony Cecala. "We've evolved beyond just sharing our tweets and cute kitten photos."

Interviews

We've talked a lot about how to run a Wordpress meetup. It's fair to wonder if it's worth all the effort.

"There's a great cost to one's sanity. No! Just kidding," says Tony Cecala, organizer of the Dallas-Fort Worth WordPress Meetup. "I've met a great number of people I call close friends."

Those relationships are one of the main benefits meetup organizers talk about.

All About Relationships

"I've made tons of great friends and business relationships," says Steve Bruner, organizer of the New York City WordPress Community. "Plus, I ended up organizing the NYC WordCamp three times. I really learned how to put on an event."

"The friendships you make are good," adds Lynn Dye, co-organizer of the Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group. She also mentions meeting WordPress experts from around the country, including Lisa Sabin-Wilson, whom Lynn had the opportunity to interview.

"So you get the knowledge, you get to know people and you can help people," says Lynn. "It makes you want to learn more. I just want to go."

"I enjoy seeing what other people are doing, even when they're my competitors," says Michael Torbert, organizer of the Raleigh WordPress Meetup Group. "It's nice to see interesting projects."

More Than Money

One thing you're not going to get out of organizing a WordPress meetup is money: "If you're wanting to do it to make yourself money, that's not going to happen," says Michael. "Even if you do that's the wrong reason to do it."

WordPress meetups are really about the community. Connecting with people and forming friendships is really more valuable than any negligible profit.

"I believe strongly that digital interactions are not a good way to build lasting friendships and partnerships," says Toby Cryns, organizer of the Minneapolis-St. Paul WordPress User Group. "The most valuable part of the whole MSP WordPress operation is the 20 minutes following our gatherings, where everybody stands around and talks."

Favorite Memories

One of Tony Cecala's best memories from a WordPress meetup is when a friend took an opportune moment when Tony stepped out to wish him happy birthday: "When I returned, there's a lot of laughter and buzzing, and I see a slide with a birthday cake on it and everyone sang the song," Tony explains.

Michael remembers a Christmas social event at a funky warehouse office with pingpong. "It was fun talking with everybody instead of getting up and talking to everybody," Michael says. "Not a whole lot of talk about WordPress, but just a fun time."

NYC WordPress Meetup: Interview with Steve Bruner

With more than 2,300 members the WordPress NYC Community is one of the largest in the country. Of course having a lot of members doesn't mean they all show up. We talk with organizer Steve Bruner about getting people to show up, how the group works and more.

"About seven years ago I fell in love with WordPress and started building websites for fun," Steve says. That's the kind of enthusiasm you want to see in a meetup organizer.

"Eventually it turned into SlipFire, my WordPress development company," Steve adds. He also partnered with developer Kevin Miller to create Piklist, a WordPress rapid development framework.

What's a typical NYC meetup like?

Steve: Our meetups usually range from 80-100 or more. For some meetups we could have had 170, but we've never had a venue that held that many people.

We ask each member to pay $5 when they RSVP. During the first few years, this was more to keep them honest than to fund the group. When we didn't ask for money, 90% of the attendees never showed

up. Now 95% do. Over the last year, the fee has helped pay for some of our expenses.

I usually start the meetup with a brief intro of the group and let them know about our community site. The site is built on BuddyPress and provides support to the members. We also built it live at the meetup and recorded it. After the intro we usually have one to two mini-presentations that last about 15 minutes each. Maybe it's a new plugin developed locally or a lawyer guiding us through copyright law.

We may take a break (and have pizza if we didn't have to pay for the venue), and then the main presentation starts.

The majority of our meetups are two and a half hours (6:30-9). However, when we have a hot topic and pizza, it can easily go to 10 p.m. Sometimes it takes me 20 minutes to get everyone out—they really love networking.

How did the NYC group get started?

Steve: Back in Nov 2007 I RSVPed to attend the meetup on a Saturday afternoon at a Starbucks. I think 12 people RSVPed, but only five of us showed up… the organizer did not. I emailed the organizer to ask about the status of the meetup, and even offered to take it over. I don't believe I received a response.

Then one July morning, I woke up early, checked my inbox and saw an email from Meetup.com notifying the group that the organizer stepped down and if someone didn't take over the meetup would go away. I pressed "Keep this group going" and I've been running it ever since.

What's involved in putting on a WordPress meetup?

Steve: Speakers, speakers, speakers and venue, venue, venue. I find it hardest to find qualified speakers and a venue (hopefully free) that can hold 80-plus people (would love 100-plus).

It sounds like finding speakers is hard—what's worked best to land speakers?

Steve: A few things:

- Time: I'm able to ask past speakers to speak again.

- Meetup members: As the meetup has grown, more members are at a level to present.

- WordCamp: We had about 100 speaker applications for the last WordCamp NYC. I've spoken to all the local ones and asked them to speak at the meetup.

- Staying in touch with the community: Two examples of this:

  - Mark Jaquith tweeted about an "Epic Post" on WordPress, which lead to one of our best and unique presentations (you can watch it here).

  - WP Candy wrote that Darcy Clarke from Themify was moving to NYC. I contacted him… BAM! Meetup presentation (you can watch it here).

With all this, I still find it hard to schedule speakers sometimes, especially when one cancels at the last minute.

It sounds like finding speakers is hard—what's worked best to land speakers?

Steve: Two tips:

- Co-working spaces have been the best. Especially ones that are just starting out. They usually do it for free to try to get members.

- Companies that use WordPress. CBS Local hosted the meetup three times for free! Even bought us pizza the first time.

What are the costs involved?

Steve: Venue (sometimes), pizza (if didn't pay for venue), videographer and I usually give the speakers a little money.

What's the advantage of having video of all your presentations?

Steve: We record everything because:

1. Members who can't make a meetup, or have attended and want to review, can view the video.

2. Our videos have benefited the global WordPress community and that's awesome! We have a pretty popular Youtube channel. Our community site offers the same videos but tagged a little better than YouTube.

What have you gained from attending the NYC meetups?

Steve: I've made tons of great friends and business relationships.

What have you gained from organizing the NYC meetups?

Steve: Same as above, plus, I ended up organizing WordCamp NYC (800+ attendees) three times. I really learned how to put on an event.

What tips do you have for someone looking to start a WordPress meetup?

Steve: A few things:

- Charge a minimal amount for attendees.

- Be prepared to be the main speaker most of the time. I'm pretty sure I did most of the presentations for the first few years.

- Keep it on the same day of the month to help other tech events organize around you.

- Find a cheap (or free) venue!

Tell us about your experience with sponsors: Why did you need sponsors, how did you get sponsors, etc.?

Steve: We're starting to grow and venues are getting more expensive. To pay for a venue and pizza is getting costly. $5 a head doesn't cover it, so we need sponsors. Luckily, we don't have to go out and get sponsors since we're pretty large and well known. They've come to us.

Dallas/Fort Worth WordPress Meetup: Interview with Tony Cecala

The Dallas/Fort Worth WordPress Meetup has been meeting since 2008 and has over 1,400 members, making it one of the top five WordPress meetups. Tony Cecala currently organizes the group. In addition to being a proud WordPress user, he's got two masters degrees and a doctorate in psychology from Yale. He's currently the vice president of technology for Newsroom Ink. For the last 20 years he's published the Holistic Networker and produced the Wellness Expo in the Dallas area. He also launched the Emerging Tech Conference in Dallas in 2012. He's a busy guy.

Tell us about a typical DFW Meetup.

Tony Cecala: We usually have about a 75 to 100 people attend a meeting. About half come early for the pizza/networking/lunch and by the time I'm about to get on stage to talk there is a buzz with everyone talking and schmoozing. I thank the local sponsors, a few members who provide funds for food in return for recognition. Then I introduce the speaker, who talks for about 75 minutes. After Q&A, about a dozen will end up at a local bar for more "networking."

What does it take to put on a WordPress Meetup?

Tony: It takes a great deal of dedication to run a meetup. You have to be there for the members on a day-to-day basis. Each day there are questions and often there is some referral of business, or simply making connections between members. You really need to have the personality for it. It takes someone who loves people to run a good meetup. Think of the members as guests to your party, you really have to know how to throw a good party.

There's a great cost to one's sanity. No! Just kidding. Really, the costs are minimal if you plan correctly. There's food and venue, depending on the city these can be as simple as donated office space and some donuts, or as lavish as a hotel meeting space and catered smorgasbord. I've been lucky to find a civic center with a reasonable cost and excellent A/V.

How did the DFW Meetup get started?

Tony: I inherited the organization in 2009. Prior to that, a small group of us met in coffee shops and restaurants.

What prompted the transition from a small group meeting in coffee shops to what you are now?

Tony: We needed a venue that permitted a presentation. We did try to do A/V in restaurants, but they aren't set up for that.

WordPress has said they want meetups to be free. Why do you charge for your meetups?

Tony: I charge to ensure that the members have a quality experience. There are many other haphazard, free meetups they can attend. When they attend DFWWP they're getting a quality presentation and a quality experience. They get lunch, coffee, snacks, soda and a business-class venue. If they are a student or express that they have a financial hardship then I don't take their money. For the most part, our group consists of professionals who go home and charge their clients based on the skills they learn at the meetup.

Have you seen a difference in the events since you started charging?

Tony: Members spontaneously started making donations two years ago because they saw how much time and effort and cash I was laying out to make the event stable, consistent and professional. We then moved to a standard fee the next year to make it a simple message to tell on the meetup site. As for acceptance, our numbers are up year-to-year in attendance.

What tips do you have for someone looking to start a WordPress meetup?

Tony: If someone is looking to start a WordPress meetup I would advise them to do some soul searching first. If they are looking to support the community, and would like to meet like-minded people, then they should jump right in. They should be organized and understand: how to work with a venue, how to promote the meeting, how to handle speakers and sponsors. These things are learned, I've made mistakes, but I try not to ever make the same mistake twice.

The most important feature for a successful WordPress meetup is the sense of continuity. When someone joins a meetup they want to know it's been around for a bit, and that it will continue. There's an investment of time and energy and reputation to being part of a group. So people want to know that they are joining something of substance. Speaking of substance, it almost goes without saying that the content of the meetup should be valuable. If members feel that someone is just on stage to pitch to them, the reputation of the meetup takes a hit.

What's your best memory of a DFW Meetup?

Tony: My friend, Mark Ramsey, was presenting and I took a moment to use the men's room. When I returned, there's a lot of laughter and buzzing, and I see a slide with a birthday cake on it and everyone sang the song.

What's one thing you've gained from attending DFW Meetups?

Tony: I've met a great number of people I call close friends.

Minneapolis-St. Paul WordPress User Group: Toby Cryns Interview

The Minneapolis-St. Paul WordPress User Group first met on July 30, 2009. Founded by Toby Cryns and Gillian Reynolds, the group averages 20-40 WordPress enthusiasts each month. They're able to hold a free event with free food provided by their host and sponsor, The Nerdery, a local tech company employing more than 400 self-proclaimed nerds. After dropping by a meeting we connected with Toby to learn more about the group. Toby has been doing WordPress design and development at The Mighty Mo! Design Co. for six years. Previously he was in politics and sports writing in Chicago and also has two indie rock albums on iTunes.

How did you get involved in organizing the Twin Cities group?

Toby: Gillian and I were singing at Tech Karaoke one night a few years back, and we both had the same idea: "Let's start a local WordPress user group." We both share a passion for people as well as an interest in organizing people around common interests.

We got together for beers and black bean burgers over at Acadia Cafe not long after that to sketch out the foundations for the group. From there, we promoted the group through our respective geek networks.

What kind of turnout do you normally get?

Toby: We usually have between 20-40 enthusiasts show up to our monthly gathering. Turnout generally depends on how good of a job we do with promotions. For our initial meeting, we had around 80 people show up, but we promoted the hell out of that one.

WordPress is officially pushing Meetup.com, but you haven't started using it until just recently. What kind of organizational tools have worked best for you?

Toby: A tool is a tool. Our Google Group does a great job for us.

The Automattic folks are pushing Meetup.com but have not offered us any financial support. I filled out an application in that regard a while back but never heard back. [Editor's Note: WordPress has been slow to respond to these applications and as of this writing it appears that they're in the process of getting organized to officially support individual meetups.]

My company has sponsored our recent entry into the Meetup.com world. It is highly unlikely that we will switch to Meetup.com for our discussions, because there are some big logistical questions involved with shifting 400 or so users over to a new (and different) proprietary platform that will require a different login. Most people already have Google logins, but very few have Meetup.com logins.

Do you have any tips for finding speakers?

Toby: We try to leverage our Google Group to find session leaders and experts to share their knowledge and experiences both on the Google Group and beyond. The Google Group is a huge asset for the

local WordPress community. Passionate people have found ways to get involved in the group; we don't twist arms. From time-to-time, I will put out a personal ask if I know someone who is doing something neat.

Do you have any tips for finding speakers?

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Passionate people have found ways to get involved in the group; we don't twist arms. From time-to-time, I will put out a personal ask if I know someone who is doing something neat.

Your Google Group seems pretty valuable. Have you had any challenges to overcome with it?

Toby: We regularly have discussions on the Google Group about email list etiquette—things like posting affiliate links and job postings.

As the group's moderator, I regularly apply my best judgment to what is allowed through to the Google Group. There's a lot of gray area in managing a community.

You guys have a sweet location with The Nerdery—how did that come together?

The Nerdery was in the user group business before MSP WordPress existed. Gillian is a long-time Nerdery employee. Hosting our first gathering at The Nerdery was a no-brainer, since Gillian had the "in" there, and it has grown into a wonderful partnership. We have entertained some offers to host our gatherings at other venues, but

when it comes down to it, The Nerdery has been a great partner. So long as they continue to be a great partner, it is highly unlikely that we will migrate to a new venue.

Have you ever talked about meeting anywhere else? Either to be more centrally located or just a different space?

Toby: Yes. This comes up regularly in casual conversations, and we have had at least two discussions about it as a group (not to mention a discussion or two on the Google Group). We have some things in the works to host at least one, passion-centric WordPress group in Minneapolis.

A group of us meets every Wednesday at [the coworking space] CoCo in Minneapolis for a day of co-working. It's a lot of fun, and recently served as the ad-hoc planning committee for WordUp. This co-working opportunity is open to anyone with a CoCo membership.

What kind of challenges have you had to overcome with the group?

Toby: Allotting enough planning time for meetings is my main concern on a regular basis. Thankfully other members have stepped up to fill the void there (John Havlik being the main one).

Along those lines, MSP WordPress relies on its members for content and engagement. We are part of a larger community of local, grass-roots user groups in town. I try to facilitate ownership by our group members. For example, right now, 10 or so of our members have admin privileges on mspwordpress.com. We had around 10 people actively planning WordUp and 20 or so volunteers show up at 8 a.m. to set up.

What do you get out of organizing the group? Why do you do it?

Toby: Our goal with MSP WordPress has always been to facilitate eye-to-eye interactions in the physical world. I believe strongly that digital interactions are not a good way to build lasting friendships and partnerships. It can be part of the equation, but it isn't the core of how relationships are built. The most valuable part of the whole MSP WordPress operation is the 20 minutes following our gatherings, where everybody stands around and talks. Chatting with people eye-to-eye after our meetings creates better connections than all of the support I have given and received on the Google Group.

I am passionate about people. I like meeting new folks, and I like discussing WordPress. Also, the group has become a great way for me to build relationships with other people who are sharing similar professional rewards and struggles.

Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group: Interview with Lynn Dye

We talked with Lynn Dye, co-organizer of the Oklahoma City WordPress Users Group that meets on the last Monday of every month. Lynn is a virtual assistant and builds simple websites for small businesses with WordPress.

Technology guru David North started the OKC WordPress Users Group in April of 2009. The group now has more than 170 members on Meetup.com, but lately they average 15-20 at each event.

Lynn learned about the OKC meetups shortly after she started using WordPress. "I had just started using WordPress and I thought it would be cool," she says. Then Lynn moved from attendee to organizer, stepping up to help run the events, handling much of the preparation, including announcements, scheduling speakers and more.

Lynn shares some of her tips for putting on a WordPress meetup:

Tip 1: Use Meetup.com

Lynn recommends using Meetup.com to organize your group. "So many people have heard of it," Lynn says. "Why not?"

Meetup.com has several useful tools for organizers, including automatic reminder notices, contact tools, RSVP capabilities, reviews and more. "It generates interest," Lynn says. "It's its own social media space."

Tip 2: Get Help

Get help organizing your WordPress meetup so you don't have to do it all by yourself. While David initially founded the OKC group, Lynn came on as a co-organizer because "he's a busy guy."

"It's good to have two people in case one can't be there," Lynn says. If one can't make it the other person can pick up the slack.

Tip 3: Find a Central Location

The primary reason Lynn gives for attending her first meetup: "It was so close."

That may seem like a minor issue, but not many people want to spend their day driving across town. Find a place to meet that's centrally located. It's a simple way to lower the barrier to entry.

Tip 4: Finding a Location

When it comes to picking a location, Lynn has two suggestions: Free and Wi-Fi. Wireless Internet is a must. And a free location makes all the organizing that much easier. You don't have to charge people to attend or burn a hole in your own pocket. The OKC group is currently meeting in a local college where David teaches. They've also met at a local nonprofit that hosted tech groups. Your best bet is to explore connections within your group. You'll likely be able to find a low or no cost space that can provide Wi-Fi.

Tip 5: Signage Helps

Being easy to get to is more than just being centrally located. You also need to give clear directions and put up some signs to help point the way. You should have exterior signs pointing the way to the building

and interior signs pointing the way to the exact room.

Don't expect people to be able to ask for help along the way. Lynn's group meets on a college campus and most students have no idea there's a WordPress group meeting and would be at a loss to give directions.

"We've had people come in an hour late because they don't know where they're going," Lynn says. "If you don't know your way around, it's bad. So have good signage."

Tip 6: Mmm... Cookies

"When I started bringing homemade cookies and stuff, we started getting more people," Lynn says. Delicious snacks are an acceptable form of bribery. Lynn goes all out with homemade goods, eschewing the "yucky cookies in a box" you can pick up at any grocery store.

With a relatively small crowd that the OKC group attracts, a free gathering with free snacks works out OK. Lynn doesn't mind providing the treats and won't let her fellow WordPress fanatics chip in. With larger groups that might not work so well.

Tip 7: Consistency

Lynn recommends deciding on a consistent time and place to meet. Choosing a specific day of the month, like the second Friday or the last Monday, can make it easier.

"You don't have to worry about a date," Lynn says. "It helps people."

Consistent venues can make it easier to find as well. It doesn't mean you can't move around—the OKC group has moved around a bit—but try staying in one place for a while.

Tip 8: Speakers

Providing content for every month can be another difficult challenge. "Plan in advance so you're not scrambling at the last minute," Lynn says. She also recommends confirming speakers a few days before so you don't have any last minute surprises.

A good way to find speakers is just to ask. Lynn surveyed her group and had a number of people volunteer.

"When you get to know people it gets easier to find people to speak," Lynn says.

Tip 9: Content for Every Level

"In every group you get someone who's worked with WordPress for a week and developers, so you have the whole gamut of levels," says Lynn. "In our agenda we always plan a tutorial covering something for those beginner users."

Creating content that's accessible for everyone can be a challenge, but it's important to keep things friendly for the newbies.

Tip 10: Take a Break

It's OK to take time off. The OKC group takes the last two months of the year off. Since they meet on the last Monday of the month, in November and December those are usually holiday weeks.

"It gives us a breather," Lynn says. "It's a chance to recuperate and come back in January recharged."

Raleigh WordPress Meetup Group: Interview with Michael Torbert

In the high-tech heavy "Triangle" of North Carolina there's a large WordPress community that gathers in Raleigh, N.C. The Raleigh WordPress Meetup Group is headed up by Michael Torbert, creator of the All in One SEO plugin. He does custom WordPress development and plugins through Semper Fi Web Design.

"I knew a few people locally who were using WordPress, but not too many," Michael says. "I figured there has to be a community out here, particularly with the big tech community." Twelve people showed up for the first Raleigh meetup, mostly Michael's friends, and it's grown from there.

The group has over 500 members, though less than a hundred are regular or semi-regular attenders. They offer two meetings a month, a regular classroom format meetup and a social meetup specifically for networking. Their current location has a maximum of 40 people for the regular meetup and 20 for the social gathering. They usually max out both events.

"I enjoy seeing what other people are doing, even when they're my competitors," Michael says. "It's nice to see interesting projects."

Venues & Space

Finding an appropriate venue can be a challenge for meetups. The Raleigh group has met in restaurants, offices and co-working spaces. Smaller spaces mean setting limits on how many people can come, which has been difficult. Relying on RSVPs often means people don't show up and then not as many people can attend.

Michael's solution has been to charge a nominal fee. "For some reason you pay $5 and you're going to show up," he says. The money goes toward food and comes close to covering the cost of refreshments.

"You don't want to charge for the meetup," Michael says. "You don't want to keep people away... but it works out to make sure the people who say they'll show up actually do."

"It's hard to strike a good balance," he adds.

Speakers

Another continual challenge is finding speakers: "It used to always be me, but that gets tiring after a while," Michael says.

Finding people from local businesses has also worked. They have a number of WordPress-based businesses in the area that have shared. They also had a local engineer from Red Hat talk about security.

Most speakers are local, but they have had a few guest speakers come in from out of town, including core developer Andrew Nacin and Automattic user experience guru Jane Wells.

He's sent out emails asking for speakers and he'll get a few responses. "You start to build up a good list of regulars," Michael says. "There's usually someone always willing to talk about something."

Sometimes if you get lots of new people eager to share it's helpful to screen the talks to make sure everything is appropriate and useful. "Sometimes you'll get people who shouldn't be there," Michael says. "Someone shouldn't come in and do social media marketing or promoting themselves."

Appealing to All Levels

One of the difficult challenges of hosting a meetup is trying to offer something for people at all levels. Most meetups have a mix of beginners and hardcore developers and it's difficult to keep both groups happy.

"There's no way you can cater to everybody," Michael says. But the Raleigh group does try to make people feel included. They'll occasionally do a code workshop and Q&A where people can bring in their questions. They'll also do specific presentations for beginners.

Don't Do It For Money

Costs for organizing a WordPress meetup can vary, but for Michael and the Raleigh group there's food, Meetup.com costs and any venue costs.

"I've had a few people ask how I'm making money off this—well, I'm not," says Michael. "If you're wanting to do it to make yourself money, that's not going to happen. Even if it does, that's the wrong reason to do it."

While Michael is a big name in the WordPress world (the All in One SEO plugin has been downloaded more than 12 million times), he's careful not to take advantage of his role as an organizer.

"I try to keep my name out of it," Michael says. "I figure all the money I put into it over the years, I deserve to be a sponsor. [But] we don't get up and plug ourselves."

Instead Michael does it for the community. His favorite memory from a WordPress meetup has little to do with WordPress. He recalls a Christmas social from last year when he just got to hang out with people. "Back in those days we didn't do the monthly social, so it was fun talking with everybody instead of getting up and talking to everybody," Michael says.

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