Proposal: WordPress Hosting Directory

For some time now, different proposals have been developed suggesting that the Hosting Team offer a directory of hosting companies. This directory would be primarily based on objective criteria such as technical features or contributions, enabling WordPress users to make informed decisions suited to their hosting needs, a fundamental aspect of CMS functionality.

This initiative began a few years ago with the [WordPress.org Recommended Hosts Page Requirement Matrix Criteria](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uvb3LsOyTZ0D2mVw7yokfCxMb0lCkFWdSnXD1b-2HWU/), an initial approach to consider all potential elements that hosting companies must meet as requirements.

Following this, a formal proposal known as [Project Bedrock](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FhjFjY9I6gn6uqz4oBsHvYzxnrUg0RfAYuRhlLjdWec/) was developed. It aimed to create a directory of hosting companies that promote WordPress from a purely objective standpoint, where users can search, filter, and browse through multiple combinations.

This effort initially did not include formal participation of hosting companies in the community, which led to an additional proposal, the [Hosting Application Rubric](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dImuG_wzrimUuJ3hPGZjzxHlL0QqQCpM4Ond5CcNT0A/) focused exclusively on this aspect.

From these three projects, a roadmap is now proposed for what the project should be and how to approach it, from a slightly different perspective than the current one, with certain unresolved issues that will need to be discussed in the team's weekly meetings and the Contributor Days in the coming months.

The Directory

The project's goal is to create _//make.wordpress.org/hosting/directory/_ where filtering can be done based on various needs, displaying a list of companies and products. Filters might include the type of hosting (shared, VPS, cloud, etc.), whether WP-CLI access is available, or the type of energy the servers use. The list is quite extensive and may include over 50 variables.

The listings will feature an algorithm based on objective elements, providing a clear and common scoring of what ranks higher and lower. Factors in scoring will include ease of access to tools offered by the community (like WP-CLI),

participation in the Hosting Team's Testing Project, and the company's involvement in the Five for the Future project.

There will be two types of data: company profiles with general information, and the products offered by each company.

Data Retrieval

To keep the directory agile, creating a plugin that includes all the options might be very complex. Storing the information, however, is not. Therefore, the [use of a JSON Schema](https://github.com/javiercasares/wordpress-hosting-directory-schema/blob/main/json-schema/hosting-directory-schema.json) is being considered, which could also allow the project to evolve in the future with backward compatibility. There is also [an example of what such a file would look like](https://github.com/javiercasares/wordpress-hosting-directory-schema/blob/main/json-schema/hosting-directory-schema.example.json) that a provider would need to create.

The files would be hosted at a path such as:

`/.well-known/wordpress-hosting/wordpress-hosting.json`

First Data Review

Considering that these paths do not contain any personal information that could breach privacy legislation, the initial management would be through a GitHub Issue, indicating the provider's path (or the main URL) and the main user within WordPress.org.

A first review of the data would be conducted, and the same Issue would report potential errors or unverifiable elements. Once the first approval is done, this user would be assigned a role that would allow indicating their participation in the directory, and the URL of the JSON to be processed would be assigned.

An alternative is sending a message to _hosting (a) wordpres.org_ and following up through the ticket support platform. In any case, both approaches would be complementary.

The Plugin

The creation of a plugin that allows three main tasks is necessary.

The first is the reading of the JSON data and its storage. Once the first reading (previously reviewed) is approved, it will be published as the current content.

The second task is the review of changes. Any changes in the JSON data would be stored in a future/draft entry, pending review by the team in charge. This way, we will have several contents for the same user: past entries, the current public entry, and a future entry pending review with different data from the current one.

The third is basically the directory itself, which will display data on the frontend, both from companies and products, in addition to listings with filters, the result sorting algorithm, and a system for users (who should be logged in) to report incorrect data, thus generating an internal ticket for the review team.

Data Review Team

One of the most important aspects of this project is the review of changes and proposals from hosting providers, which community members will need to examine. Initially, a period of review and learning work will be planned, along with the creation of documentation, which will later open to more contributors. There is no rush, so the emphasis will be on taking things slow and steady rather than trying to set up the directory in a week.

Initially, four tasks are proposed:

- The main task will be to review new hosting providers, their services, and ensure the initial information is correct.
- The second task will continue the first, reviewing any changes that occur.
- The third task is to review complaints that may come from the website, indicating erroneous data.
- Finally, as a fourth point, we have the resolution of general issues, which would be managed by email, involving communication between the parties.

This does not mean that there will not be additional tasks sporadically, such as maintaining the JSON Schema with new product versions, informing providers of the JSON update, etc.

Next Steps / Roadmap

The first major milestone will be WordCamp Europe 2024, where on Contributor Day, feedback on the project can be discussed and received from hosting providers, both in terms of adding and removing elements from the JSON Schema.

Meanwhile, Issues and comments can be left on [the enabled GitHub](https://github.com/javiercasares/wordpress-hosting-directory-schema).

A second step will be the construction of the plugin and the entire review system. If anyone is interested in creating this project, please comment (you can write to @javiercasares on Slack or leave comments on the post). In any case, ideas about this potential plugin are welcome.

A subsequent milestone will be at WordCamp US 2024, also on Contributor Day, where emphasis will be placed on this project, receiving inputs from those U.S. companies not present at WordCamp Europe.

Conclusion and Call to Action

As we move forward with the WordPress Hosting Directory, we are embarking on a journey that not only enhances the WordPress community's access to reliable and transparent hosting information but also strengthens the bond between WordPress and hosting providers. This directory aims to serve as a robust resource, equipping users with the necessary tools to make informed decisions that align with their specific hosting needs.

Your involvement is crucial to the success of this project. Whether you are a hosting provider, a developer, or a community member, your feedback, ideas, and contributions are invaluable. We encourage everyone to engage with the project through the following channels:

- Feedback Submission: Provide your insights and suggestions via the [GitHub repository](https://github.com/javiercasares/wordpress-hosting-directory-schema) or direct communications to the Hosting Team.
- Participation in Upcoming Events: Join us at WordCamp Europe and WordCamp US in 2024. These events will be pivotal for discussing further developments and refining our approach based on your input.
- Volunteering: We will be searching for volunteers to join the Hosting Review Team. This team will play a critical role in ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the data within the directory.

Together, we can create a directory that not only reflects the diversity and capability of the WordPress Hosting Community but also sets new standards for transparency and user-centric information in the industry. Let's work together to build a tool that will be indispensable for every WordPress user navigating the complexities of web hosting.

Thank you for considering this proposal. We look forward to your active participation and support in shaping the future of WordPress hosting.

Props: @crixu