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Adam Zieliński - Streamline your site building workflow with WordPress Playground

Hi, my name is Adam Zielinski and I am sponsored by Automattic to work on WordPress core. I'm also the WordPress Playground architect and today I'm going to show you what is WordPress Playground and how it can help you build websites. Let's get started. Playground is WordPress in a single click. What this means is typically when you start working with WordPress, you have to pay for a hosting plan and get someone set up WordPress for you or you have to go through a bunch of complex setup steps locally on your computer.

With playground you have a third option which is to click a button and you get a WordPress site. The website you're seeing right now is running on my computer. There is no hosting company somewhere running WordPress for me. I could turn off my Internet right now and this WordPress would still work. It's privately mine, no one has access to my data and it will be gone as soon as I close my browser tab.

So let me show you. I'm going to change the site title and maybe the headline and then reload the page and we'll see that it's in fact reset to its default state. So let's just say hello page builder summit. This is a customised headline, so I'm going to save it and go to frontend and you can see it in fact says hello page builder summit. This is a customised headline.

Great, it worked. However, I'm going to refresh this page right now and once I do it the page title and the headline will be restored to their to

folder values. So I'm refreshing and I get a completely new WordPress site after this refresh. So this makes testing very easy for me as I can just go here, do a bunch of experiments and I don't I never have to maintain this site, I never have to worry what state did I leave it in? Will I have to go and delete it?

It's a single temporary site for anything I may want to experiment with. So the cool thing about playground is that because it runs in your browser, we can very easily do things that are normally hard. For example, if I want to change a PHP version, I can just click this button over here and say I want to run Php 8.2 and then I also want to run WordPress. Let's go back in time, let's run WordPress 6.3 and all I have to do now is click apply changes and playground is generating a new WordPress site for me running on my selected PHP version and my selected WordPress version and voila, we have a new site. This, as you may recognise, is the I believe 2020 theme.

So let's confirm that. Oh, we can already see it's WordPress 6.3 as requested, if we go to appearance themes, yeah, it is 2023. And if I go to PHp info PHP, we'll in fact see that it runs PHP 8.2. So I can use this WordPress to test my websites, my plugins, my themes on different PHP and WordPress versions without having any setup on my local computer. All I have to do is go to [Playground.WordPress.net](https://playground.wordpress.net) and that's it.

So let's see what's also interesting about WordPress Playground. Playground is an endless supply of ready to go WordPress sites. You never have to manage them, delete them, worry about them. You can start as many throwaway sites as you want and experiment with them. WordPress Playground is maintained by the WordPress community.

I originally created it and I'm contributing to the project right now alongside my team at Automattic. So what can WordPress Playground help you with specifically? WordPress Playground can help you get a fresh WordPress site to experiment with, but also you can use it to build a theme or build an entire site. Or create a site template to quickly spin new sites. Let's say you have a woocommerce setup and you're building ecommerce stores for your customers.

And every time you start a new ecommerce store you would like to start from the same base. Maybe you already have ten plugins you enjoy, maybe you already have a very specific theme or global styles and you would just like to click a button and turn that into a site playground makes that possible. And you can also try changing your website without affecting live visitors. Let's go through these one by one. So a fresh WordPress to experiment with.

So this website we've already seen. Well, I'm going to go to the plugins directory and let's instal a couple of plugins, shall we? I'll try the classic editor, why not? I'm going to instal it. Activate.

And as you may imagine, the blog editor is now disabled and all my posts are going to use the classic WordPress editor. So I could upload my plugin here or build an entire site. In fact, let's actually explore that and build a site. And to do that let's try recreating WordPress.org inside Playground. So I have a fresh playground in here and I went to the site editor and to save you some time, I'm not actually going to rearrange all this content.

During this presentation I prepared another playground with WordPress.org already somewhat recreated. So the once again this here is the original WordPress.org site and this here is what I recreated inside Playground. So let's actually save that work and to do that I'll go here to hamburger menu and I'll click download a zip. So right now this site was downloaded to my disc as a zip file. If we take a look, this is the unpacked zip.

So I have WP config in here, I have Wp content inside that. I have my plugins, themes and the entire database. So I can use this zip file to recreate my work inside Playground. So let's try that. I'll go back to the fresh playground instance that I created earlier.

So once again I'll go to the homepage to just to see it's blank.

Yeah, just a default WordPress setup. And I'm going to say restore from zip file and I'll put that zip I just downloaded in here, click import. Okay.

And voila. I created, I recreated WordPress.org in playground, open another playground and brought it in here.

So this already touches on an important point of playground. Even though it's ephemeral, temporary in a way you can actually preserve your work and you can use it to work over long periods of time.

Downloading zips is just one way of preserving your work. Another would be going to playground settings, clicking storage type browser. And what this will do is it will start a new playground where everything I do is actually saved in my web browser storage. So I will not lose my changes this time. And in fact let me restore playground in here so that WordPress.org clone.

So I'm grabbing the zip file, dropping it here, importing it. Okay, we have meet WordPress. Now I'm going to refresh that page and once it refreshes I'll see the WordPress.org clone again. So by default playground gives you a completely new site and it's very easy for you to create as many of these throwaway sites as you want. However, if you want to preserve your work, playground also allows you to do that.

And typically when you work on a theme or a site, it's not going to be finished in an hour, right? You may want to work on it through days, weeks, sometimes months. And there's another thing you can do with Playground which is actually collaborate on that site with your team. So playground has a feature in here. I will go to additional actions and there's a little button here that says export pull request to GitHub.

And from there I can say I want to export WP content directory and I have to paste the URL of my GitHub repository where I want to store it. I prepared a little repo to use and it's called adamjell, my first and last name slash playground sites. So I click next step, I'll describe this as a WordPress.org site clone cheque this little chequebook in here and click Create pull request. And what playground is doing right now is it connected to my GitHub account and it's creating a new pr directly from the browser. Again, I didn't have to instal anything on my computer.

I could do this entire flow from my phone. And once I once the pull request is created, it actually created a pull request on GitHub. And all the files relevant to this are here. There is the database, there are plugins. If I used any custom themes, they would also show up here.

And there's also a zip file with my entire site in it. So what's cool about that is say I was working with a teammate on this site project. They could go to my pull request and they could click this link preview preview loaded from this pr, and then what they would get is a new playground instance with that pull request loaded in it. So this is a team workflow already, right? You can build a site in playground, you can export it to GitHub, and your colleague may go here and they may preview your work.

Then they may share feedback, say it looks good, you can collaborate with them without any local setup whatsoever. But what I'm going to do right now is I'll just merge this pull request.

And as you can see in this repository, I have a few things. In fact, I have three sites in here. So one of them is the wp.org clone we just created, but there's two more. One of them is a woocommerce setup, and I can just click a link and it will start a playground with a woocommerce setup I prepared earlier. It's just a backpack store with a few products.

The other link, what could that be? That's the presentation I showed you at the beginning of this video. So that presentation is actually a WordPress site living on GitHub, originally built with Playground by Anne McCarthy. And you can preview it, you can clone it, you can customise it, you can use it as a template for creating new presentations.

So that was fresh WordPress to experiment with. We've built a site, the wp.org clone, and we've covered site templates. You can create a set of canonical sites. You have a customer and they own a Woostore. You happen to have built a Woostore in the past.

So with playground you can just click a button, spin a new one, customise it for that customer, and host it.

Playground also allows you to experiment with your WordPress site, a production one, without actually affecting it. So let's see what that looks like. I have a WordPress site in here and let's say I would like to instal a plugin this site, but I'm not that sure if it's a good idea, right? Maybe if I instal it, it will change my homepage. Maybe it will add a bunch of links.

Typically I would need a staging server or a clone of that site on my local computer to experiment with these changes. However, playground allows you to clone your site and instal woocommerce or do anything else you want in that clone. This is possible thanks to this plugin called displayground. It's a plugin like it's in the official WordPress.org plugin directory. You can just go here, download it, or instal it directly on your site.

And on this site I already installed it earlier to save us some time. So what this plugin does is I can go to appearance, I'm sorry, I can go to plugins, add a new plugin, and every plugin now has a preview now button. I could do say preview now with this classic editor. And this opens playground with a clone of my site already loaded in it. So this isn't just a blank WordPress site, it's actually my site in Playground.

And because this is playground is once again running on my computer. I'm not sending my private data to some company somewhere in the world. No, no, it's all staying on my computer, never leaves it. And with the classic editor installed, let's go to pages, shall we? Let's go to pages so I can edit my homepage.

And this in fact opens a classic editor, right? Just as expected, except now it contains some blog content which maybe is not what you want to do, but that's for the demonstration purposes. I can also go to appearance editor and see this is in fact my website in context of Playground. However, if I go back and I go to I'm back on my site, it's no longer playground. If I go to plugins.

There is no classic editor in here. So Playground also helps you spin site clones. And these are sandbox sites. You can clone your site in Playground, it works via the Playground plugin I just showed you and

you can experiment without affecting your live site. So for example, you can test plugin updates.

Think how many times updating a plugin broke your site and affected live visitors. Browsing that site with playground can make sure in a safe environment before actually applying that to your site. What else playground allows you to do? Playground has these little site setup scripts called blueprints and this is an advanced use case already. What they do is they allow you to prepare a WordPress site to the exact specification without going through UI clicking things like you just say what you want and you get it.

So a blueprint may look like this. It's a JSON file and this one is pretty short. It just says give me these two plugins, log me in as an admin and redirect me to the plugins page. So what's cool about blueprints is that I can copy this and then I can go to Playground.WordPress.net and I can put a hash at the end of my URL and paste that blueprint just as it is. I press enter.

Now playground reloads and creates a completely new site, except it will have these two plugins. I will be logged in and I will be redirected to the plugins list in WP admin when that site opens. So maybe four more seconds. And there we go. Here is a completely new WordPress site with these two plugins in it.

Why that's useful is again teamwork flows and site templates and sharing specific WordPress setups with others. Just as you will have access to this presentation, just so using a blueprint, there's a, we have a blueprints gallery. So there's this community gallery of blueprints that's in progress right now. But if I go to this page, there is a bunch of predefined WordPress setups I can start experimenting with. So maybe if I want to toy with custom post types, I can just click this preview link and I'm taken to a WordPress site where, look at that.

I have a custom post type called books. And so if I want to see how that's done, I just go to the source, right? And it's all spelled out here we login, we create some directories, we install a plugin and that plugin sets up a custom post type. This is convenient for, especially for development

teams when you want to have a set of sites like debug version of site for that particular client or a basic woocommerce setup, but not as a exported as a zip, right? With all the plugin files and theme files like a lot of noise, the very succinct JSON file that you can look at, change, propose, pull, request to, and collaborate on very easily.

So blueprints are JSON files. They allow you to create any website you need. There is the gallery link I just showed you, and there's the Blueprints 101 tutorial in case you would like to learn more. Just follow this link in the presentation later on and you'll learn all about what are blueprints, what you can do with them, how to use them, how to write them, how to work with them. And then there's also WordPress Studio.

Studio is a local development app based on WordPress Playground. Built by WordPress.com. It allows you to manage and work with a number of local sites that are running using Playground. So I have one here called a new site for the presentation and I can just click a button and voila, there's a local site and I can edit it and customise it and keep coming back to it and it will always remember my changes. It's just a local site, except it's not running any dockers, it's not running any virtual machines.

It's just WordPress playground running directly on your computer. And the cool part about Studio is I can go to the share tab and this is localised for my local language which is polished. I can go to the share tab, click this link and I get a public version of my site hosted on WordPress Cloud. So I can work locally, make changes, adjust the site in any way I want and then share it with my team, with my customer. I can share it with the world and that's work with studio.

I'm recording this video on April 18 and it's in beta version right now. It hasn't been released yet, but you can go to developer.wordpress.com/studio and maybe there will be a download button in here by the time you watch this. Or maybe if not, join the waiting list and you'll get access shortly. WordPress.com folks have been getting great feedback about studio and how much it streamlines the workflow. So go ahead and try it out.

And that was it for the presentation. We've covered a lot of ground today. We've discussed what is WordPress Playground, how you can use it to create new temporary sites, build entire new sites, save them for later work, collaborate on them with others, use GitHub to create site templates and spin new sites easily at a later time. How you can experiment with your existing production sites using playground without actually affecting those sites for live customers. And then we've also covered the new local development environment from WordPress.com called WordPress Studio.

You can review this presentation at my GitHub. It's GitHub.com/adamziel/playground.Sites and you can also review WordPress Playground in more details at wp.org/playground it's an entry point to a vast amount of resources, documentation, articles, videos. So if you want to learn more, that's the right place to start. And then you can experiment with and use Playground at Playground.WordPress.net.

You're also more than welcome to join us at the WordPress.org slack channel meta-playground. And that was it. Thank you so much for watching. My name is Adam Zielinski. I'm sponsored by Automattic to work on WordPress Core and I'm the architect of WordPress Playground.

Feel free to say hi on Twitter, ping me on wordpress.org, Slack or GitHub. I'd love to connect and help you figure out how you can use Playground for your specific use case. This is super useful for me to get the feedback to see how Playground is being used. And thank you so much for watching.