

# CAUTION: Why Wordpress May Not Be the Right Solution for Your Chapter



## Consider these 8 Risks before Using an Open Source Website Solution

Open source website solutions can be very attractive for chapters of professional and trade associations because initially it looks affordable and their design templates can be very appealing. Typically, someone knows someone who can “get this done” for the chapter, which appears to save the chapter money and time. But often times, the chapter is not prepared for what comes next. When considering an open source website solution like Wordpress , Drupal, or Joomla, we often see that the immediate needs of a chapter are either to update their current website or launch a new site altogether. In some instances they could also be considering adding functionality like: member only areas, blogs, event registration, dues or ecommerce ability, as well as email communication to the members and non-members alike.

On the surface, an open source website solution like WordPress seems to fit the bill because it’s easy to use and non-technical volunteers can set it up and maintain it long term. While for the most part this may be true, it does come with an oftentimes unforeseen cost and the following 8 risks that need to be considered:

### 1. Efficiency

If the overall solution still requires 3rd party apps or services, information will have to be updated in two or more places, which can open up the possibility for mistakes. This also creates more work to keep things updated and consistent. Potentially creating a bottleneck for updates to get accomplished.

### 2. Support & Training

There are very limited support & training options with an open source website solution. If you go the online only route it is free, but the free documentation is sporadic and still requires a technical background in most cases. If you use a 3rd party consultant or programmer it can be expensive and their skill can range plus they may not be able to address problems in a timely fashion.

### 3. Plugins and 3rd party integrations

The open source website solution you may be considering, like Wordpress, by itself is a content management system. So when adding additional functionality like membership management, email, ecommerce, event registration, surveys, etc. you have to rely on

plugins and 3rd party integrations. While there are thousands of options to choose from, picking the right ones can be challenging. Some are better than others. Some will work well by themselves, but not with other plugins. Some plugins don't work so well with the design theme currently in use for the WordPress site. Putting all this together correctly often requires the help of a professional developer which can be an expensive undertaking.

#### **4. Maintenance & Updates**

The open source website solution will require regular updates to the most current version as they are fixing bugs and putting in patches. 3rd party plugins are also doing the same thing. Letting these updates go undone can cause problems with the site working correctly. Updating them also can lead to the site breaking, if updates are not compatible with the 3rd party plugin. When things break, the help of a professional developer is often needed to fix and that can be costly and not in budget. You also have to plan for downtime during some updates and upgrades. This can be an extra inconvenience as it may be unplanned and during a critical time like a meeting/event and registration.

#### **5. Ecommerce**

To allow for payment directly on your chapter website, you'll need several things like an SSL certificate, PCI compliance scans and certificate as well as the whole shopping cart account management functionality. With an open source website solution this is not too difficult to set up with 3rd party plugins, and a little help from a professional developer. It may not look exactly like you want because you're dealing with a 3rd party plugin and paying the developer to customize it may not be worth it. This will lead to a user experience that is choppy and unprofessional. Maintenance of the PCI certificate is required for your protection as well as the yearly renewal of the SSL certificate which needs to be re-installed in many cases. This is an extra cost each year to plan for and absorb. There could also be downtime during these updates. One option to avoid some of these issues is to use Paypal or some other payment processor that handles the payment off of your website. This does solve some problems, but introduces others like, confusing users as to where they are, unfinished transactions, and a poor user experience.

#### **6. Security**

These open source website solutions are just that open source meaning that the source code is freely available to developers and a large community of users as well as hackers and people with ill intent. The frequent upgraded versions are often addressing security issues and vulnerabilities that have been exploited. Member data can be stolen and

made publicly available on the Internet. Members can be open to unwanted spam and or identity theft. Unwanted content can find its way onto your website promoting all sorts of products and services. This could ruin an organizations reputation and offend a lot of people. When gone unchecked or managed improperly the security risks are significant. To understand what is necessary to keep a WordPress site secure see [WordPress Code X](#).

## **7. Availability and Redundancy**

Open source website solutions that have been compromised, can crash or have to be pulled down. It may be the only way to deal with a compromised site rather than keep it up until it can be fixed or put back to normal. Interruptions in your sites availability can also hurt your reputation and kill your user experience and promotion of events and the association's message. Being able to call someone to take care of this may or may not be free, but can take time to accomplish. Once down, the big question is if the site can be brought back in a healthy state. Assuming there are backups, will there be a backup that is safe to restore to? Yes, a backup can just be a snap shot of an earlier state of your website that was still compromised. Is it possible to pull a clean back up? How much of the site history and data will be lost? Transactions? User passwords? Membership records? Blog posts? Photos? How long will it take to get this copy back up and live, working and tested? Finding a person to do this is not so easy among the volunteer leadership. Even a paid administrator may not have that technical skill and if you have to find a professional, it can cost a lot of money that was not budgeted for.

## **8. Reputation**

As mentioned previously, various things can cause these sites to misbehave. Not just having erroneous or malicious content on the WordPress site, but having data stolen and misused can cause serious reputation damage to your organization. Another type of reputation that is often overlooked is the reputation of your domain name. Yes, your domain name that you use for your official association email. Hackers will hijack your website and use the email functionality of your host to send out massive amounts of spam without your control or knowledge. This hurts your reputation with other email services that look to block spam for their users. So, if your site sent 1000's of spam emails to people with @gmail or @msn or @yahoo, then these services will block future emails from your domain even if they are legitimate emails about member renewals, or meeting invitations, or surveys, etc. The deliverability of your emails is affected by your reputation. One hack can ruin the sending reputation of a domain name for a long time and it can be very costly to have it rectified.

All of these issues can be addressed. Lots of companies and individuals use Wordpress every day. But, any responsible organization would understand these risks and take the necessary precautions to minimize the likelihood of a breach or maintenance issue. This can and should come at a cost. It is important that this cost is figured in when making a decision to use or keep using a WordPress site for a professional or trade association.

As stated in [Flywheel](#), hackers target WordPress because it is popular and its source or source of plugins can be hacked. The hackers' impact is greater and chances of success are greater.

### **Why StarChapter is a better solution for chapters of professional and trade associations than an open source website solution like WordPress or using a WordPress combo?**

We alleviate many and minimize these risks with the appropriate efficiency, support, functionality, maintenance and updates, security, and professionalism to guard your reputation. We do this so your chapter can focus on typical and more productive activities for your members to ensure that they receive their maximum membership value.

StarChapter is not just a website solution. It is a combination of the essential tools and functionality any chapter of a professional and trade association needs to operate on a monthly basis. In addition to that we are also a service that offers training and support with best practices in mind from other successful chapters in various industries and professions. The service also encompasses security, PCI compliance, SSL certificate, redundancy and recovery for your peace of mind.

When asked who will take care of these things, you can point to StarChapter, a company devoted to delivering a software and service designed for your chapter's needs rather than to a person or developer that may have other interests or priorities in the future.

### **Now what if you already have a WordPress site and have spent time and money to do so?**

Moving to a new solution will not be abandoning all the work that went into the existing site. We know there was a lot of time spent working on the organization,

content and structure of the WordPress site that would not go away when moving to a new StarChapter site. Quite the contrary, this content, layout structure, color scheme and thoughtful organization is brought over to the new system. All the previous work, time and effort are not lost.

We are also aware that many chapters have discussions regarding functionality during their WordPress projects. Functionality like event registration, membership management, email communications, surveys, blogging, user forums, photo albums, document storage and more. We realize that if you have accomplished a successful collection of 3rd party service integrations it is hard to think about replacing. StarChapter's goal would be to look at all of these integrations and configure your new StarChapter system to achieve a smooth transition and better use of a unified system of functionality.

**Contact your StarChapter Account Executive today to review your current options and see how StarChapter can carry your chapter forward for many years to come.**

#### About StarChapter

StarChapter is a member-friendly association software company serving local chapters of professional and trade associations in the United States and Canada. StarChapter's mission is to help local leaders grow their chapter's attendance, membership, and revenue. The software combines event registration, membership management, email communication, responsive website layouts, web services, and eCommerce tools. New and transitioning board members have access to dedicated StarChapter specialists, 24/7 online support, phone support, and ongoing board training webinars.