



Comparing Drupal and WordPress

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For organizations trying to determine which Content Management System (CMS) is best for their team, the choices can seem overwhelming. Trying to understand the difference between systems can sometimes feel like comparing apples to oranges. With Drupal and WordPress specifically, there are a number of significant differences between the platforms, which makes them each better for certain use cases.

But first, let's define the two systems. What's the difference between Drupal and WordPress?

A Quick Definition of Each



Drupal is an open-source CMS, and is free to use. It's maintained by a community of volunteers and sponsored contributors, and comes out-of-the-box with numerous modules and integrations. Drupal powers some of the world's largest and most complex websites, and is an excellent choice for organizations that want a solution that offers seamless and complex integrations.



WordPress is also open-source, offering both a large number of free plugins and themes, and some paid products in both categories. WordPress is the world's most popular CMS, largely because it's very simple to spin up a basic website or blog in no time — though building a more complex platform with WordPress comes with unique challenges.

Drupal and WordPress are both strong platforms with competing features, though they have different areas of strengths, which are compared below.



Supporting Ecosystems

Both Drupal and WordPress have massive communities of developers that support the software, as well as large and well-known organizations. Automattic and the WordPress foundation support the WordPress software, whereas Acquia and the Drupal Association are two massive champions of the Drupal community. Both the WordPress and Drupal communities are global, active, and constantly working to improve their respective softwares.

There's a big difference in the ecosystems surrounding each platform. WordPress is an open-source platform with some paid plugins and themes; Drupal software, on the other hand, comes without charges.

However, this doesn't mean that developing a Drupal site is inherently less costly than developing a WordPress site. In many cases, custom modules will need to be built for a Drupal site, where similar paid modules may already exist for WordPress sites. There's no guarantee that this will be the case, though, especially on complex platforms that require connection to a number of specific systems.

Which is Better?

It depends entirely on what your needs are, and what size platform you need. Just because one software is paid and the other is free doesn't necessarily mean that developing a site with one will be more or less expensive than working with the other. The more "niche" your needs are, the better chance that you'll be investing time in custom development. The more basic, the better chance that you'll be able to reuse the functionality that other members of these large communities have built, particularly with WordPress.



Customizations

If your site requires a large amount of customization or extensive functionality, Drupal may be a better choice: it's been used for enterprise sites for years, in part because of its ability to consume and output APIs through both custom modules and contributed modules. Drupal requires more customization out of the box, both for aesthetics (such as to improve its editing experience) and for structure. Custom fields, content types, and structures, as well as dynamic listing pages (called "Views" in this system) can be added through core without writing a line of code.

WordPress, on the other hand, is highly functional even before customization, and a wide array of themes make it easy to spin up a site without much design or front-end development. However, this also translates to a bit less flexibility. Until recently, WordPress was best known as a blogging platform, and extending it to handle more complex content was a more intensive undertaking than in Drupal. However, WordPress' community of developers has now made the software more extensible — even adding a built-in REST API as of version 4.7.0.

Which is Better?

For sites that have complex requirements, Drupal may be a better choice. If you have more straightforward needs, WordPress is an excellent option for rapid development. Both platforms can scale to support enterprise-class users.



Content Management

When it comes to content management, both Drupal and WordPress are excellent tools. The biggest difference between the two is the fact that Drupal has a high learning curve, while the back end of WordPress sites is polished and intuitive. However, even though the default Drupal administration view isn't particularly appealing, a web development agency can customize the back end for organizations that are concerned about optimizing the content editors' user experience.

There are a number of other differences between the way that the two systems allow users to manage site content (and those content types):

- **It's far simpler to customize** or change themes in WordPress than in Drupal
- **WordPress allows administrators** to upload, embed, and arrange files within their pages right out of the box. This functionality is lacking in Drupal
- **WordPress has many plugins** that are targeted toward writers, such as SEO tools, editorial calendars, and thorough workflow controls
- **Drupal's powerful Workbench module** helps organizations make fine-tuned workflows by content type
- **Drupal can easily create custom content types** and the dynamic lists that surface content across the site. This is invaluable for sites with complex data structures

Which is Better?

The intuitive interface and ease of plugging in tools and themes makes WordPress a great choice for smaller organizations interested in getting a new site running quickly. However, for organizations that have more complex content structure needs, a Drupal site may be a better choice.



Security

Because it's so easy to spin-up a blog or small-scale website, WordPress is the most widely-used CMS in the world. This means that for hackers, it's ideal for exploitation: they'll get a much higher ROI figuring out how to exploit WordPress sites. However, an increasing number of enterprise or government sites (such as Whitehouse.gov, a former Drupal customer) are using WordPress.

Both the WordPress and Drupal communities have strong teams of serious volunteers and sponsored developers who work around the clock to monitor any security vulnerabilities and, when one is found, quickly build patches to ensure that every website running on their CMS remains safe. Ultimately, the difference between the two is a question of scale: there's a far higher volume of attacks on WordPress sites simply because of the platform's popularity.

Which is Better?

For organizations that handle sensitive information on their platforms, Drupal is the better choice. It's a much smaller target than WordPress, though if you have an enterprise security team standing behind you, either platform would be a good choice.



Accessibility

Drupal and WordPress are both accessible platforms. WordPress comes with basic accessibility functions built-in, which allows content authors to offer a better reading experience to users with assistive technology. Not every starting WordPress theme is responsive, however, and for advanced accessibility functionality, sites will need to be connected to specific plugins.

Drupal has a number of accessibility features out of the box, such as default support for WAI-ARIA. Drupal 8 also has a number of accessibility tools built in, with more modules available to offer improved experiences. While some accessibility tools may be a little more difficult for non-technical users or organizations to configure, Drupal also has built-in features that make it easier to avoid user error. For example, Drupal's core mechanisms for form handling make it more likely that forms on its sites will be well-labeled and accessible, as compared with WordPress forms that come from individual plugin maintainers.



Which is Better?

Both are adequate solutions, though Drupal's wide adoption in the government community has led to an increased focus on accessibility that can benefit its users.

The bottom line

For an enterprise-scale platform, Drupal's ease of creating tailored data structures, increased security, and accessibility focus make it a great choice, unless your specific needs dovetail precisely with the functionality that WordPress provides. For something small and simple, however, WordPress is likely a far better choice than Drupal.

Regardless of which platform you choose, consider contacting FFW to help you get started. Our team brings enterprise-level thinking to every project and can help you identify which platform is best for your needs. Together, we can map out your integrations, where existing contributions can supplement your site, what you'll need to build on your own, and help you design and develop a top-notch digital strategy. FFW is here to help you figure out which system is right for you, and we have expertise in designing, developing, and configuring a system built specifically for your needs — no matter what that system may be.

CMS	Drupal 	WordPress 
Type of License	GPL (Open Source)	GPL (Open Source)
Community Support	Free modules and themes, but often require development expertise	Free plugins and themes; some robust paid products in both categories
Customizations	Highly extensible system that requires more customization to improve administrative experience	Powerful tools and administrative experience that requires more customization for complex content
Security	Excellent	Excellent
Content Management	Focus on structure; highly flexible	Focus on experience; highly intuitive
Accessibility	Greater focus on accessibility as a result of high use in the government space	Core is very accessible, though paid or community-contributed plugin products may not be

About FFW

FFW is a digital agency focused on creating digital experience platforms that ensure our clients' success, always moving forward at the speed of digital innovation.

We're an Acquia preferred partner, and have been recognized for our commitment to Acquia products, expertise, and quality of our production. We're 3-time Acquia Engage sponsors, 3-time Acquia Partner Site of the Year winners, and 3-time Acquia MVP winners, with 120 Acquia-Certified developers on staff.

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