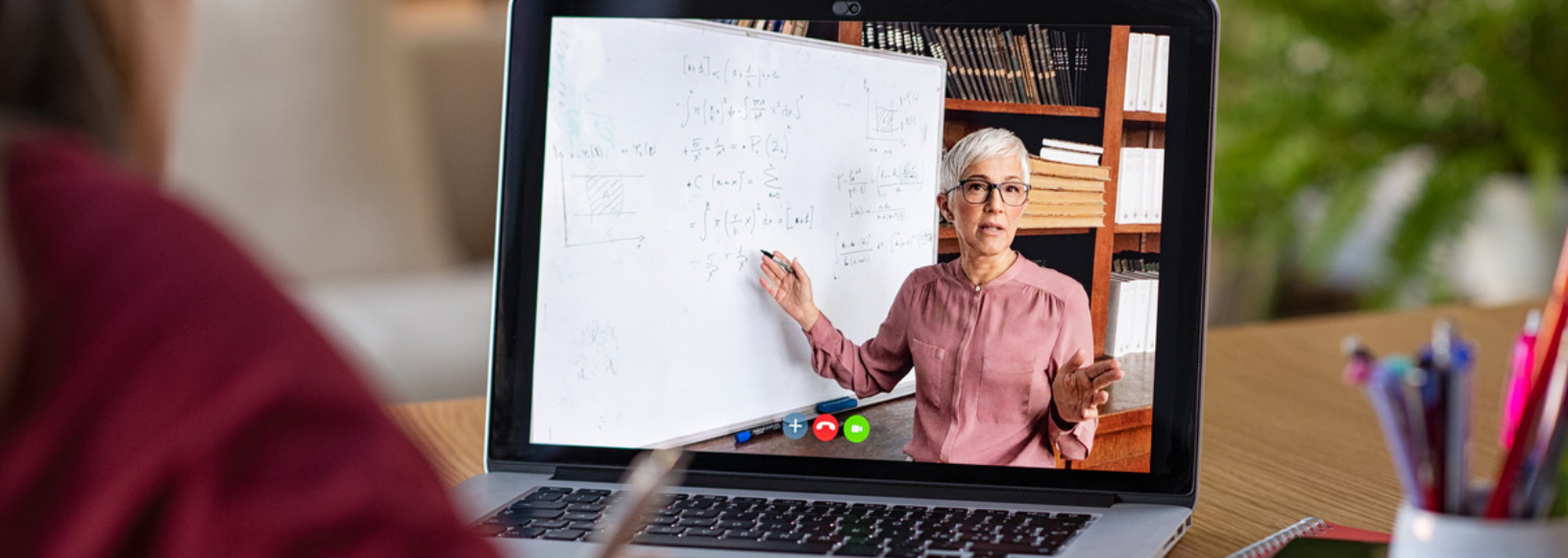


WordPress for Online Course Creators





WordPress for Online Course Creators

HOW TO BUILD PROFITABLE ONLINE COURSES AND MEMBERSHIP SITES WITH WORDPRESS

The popularity of online learning has skyrocketed in recent years, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and cemented by the widespread adoption and innovation of new technologies.

Today, online learning is used in a growing list of industries, and individual course creators have started an industry of their own. From traditional education to the most niche of how-tos, the surge in online course creation is fueling the

global eLearning market, which is [expected to surpass \\$457B](#) by 2026.

If you're interested in creating your own online courses, you may already be familiar with the long list of eLearning products and platforms that have saturated the market.

In addition to that expanding category of "all-in-one solutions" and expensive vendor-based platforms, there are also key tools and best practices you can apply with WordPress that will help you build your own online courses and membership sites and make them profitable.

In this ebook, we'll walk through some of the most common ways course creators are using [WordPress](#) to build and sell their online curriculum, from [plugins](#) and [themes](#) to the deeper technical considerations that set them up for success.

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The Rise of Online Learning

Online platforms for remote learning go back to the early days of the web, but prior to 2020, many of these online learning solutions were viewed as nice-to-haves, not necessities.

The pandemic changed all that, creating a widespread need for tools and software that could assist with different aspects of remote learning. At the same time, it also spurred on new innovation and adoption of eLearning solutions, and it's expanded well beyond the world of traditional education.

While many public schools and private universities have evolved in the ways they present online courses, so too have individual content creators, who are tapping into eLearning solutions and other technologies more than ever to reach new audiences more effectively.



eLearning and online courses have become increasingly popular for both consumers and content creators.

The rise of online learning has also been accompanied by an influx of standalone platforms for online courses—some are geared towards traditional educators while others are aimed at entrepreneurs.

Against this backdrop of mostly proprietary software, [WordPress](#) is gaining momentum as a powerful, open source content management system (CMS) that allows course creators to build an entire web experience around their online curriculum.

With widespread integrations (plugins) for [video streaming](#), [membership content](#), or a multi-functional [Learning Management System \(LMS\)](#), WordPress is an attractive, cost-effective choice for course creators who are just getting started, as well as those with a growing following they're looking to scale.

WP Engine keeps WordPress scalable, secure, and seamlessly up-to-date so you can focus on creating great courses.

[SWITCH TO WP ENGINE](#)



What is a Learning Management System?

Some of the most popular solutions for online course creation fall under the Learning Management System (LMS) category. So what is an LMS?

In technical terms, an LMS is a specific type of software application that facilitates the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, automation, and delivery of an educational or training course.

IF YOU'RE THE EXPERT ON A TOPIC AND YOU WANT TO TEACH OTHERS ABOUT IT, AN LMS ACTS AS YOUR VIRTUAL TEACHER'S ASSISTANT.

A good LMS can organize your files and video, keep track of where course participants are in a lesson and provide them with the training materials they need in real-time (even when you're occupied elsewhere). Versatility is key, and many LMSs can be customized with specific features and toolsets based on the needs of the content distributor.

At its core, an LMS consists of two parts: the admin interface and the user interface. Content creators use the admin side to upload course content, add new course participants, send notifications, and set all the basic functions necessary for the course to run as expected (including eCommerce integrations for billing and subscriptions).

The user interface is where your course will unfold for your students. It allows course participants to access lessons and other course materials and downloadables at a pace set by the admin.

When it comes to bringing LMS functionality to WordPress sites, using an LMS plugin can offer a ton of benefits and upside. Installing the right plugin will allow you to bring all the necessary LMS functionality you need into your WordPress site, often without additional coding or dev time.

WordPress for Online Course Creators

With a high upside and a low barrier to entry, WordPress is increasingly used by course creators because it lets them build a rich digital experience for their course curriculum, at their own pace.

But before we get into the details of course creation, what is WordPress?

For starters, WordPress is the most popular content management system (CMS) in the world, and for good reason. It's user-friendly for content creators and developers of all technical backgrounds, and WordPress is open source, which means there are no upfront or recurring licensing fees tied to the system itself.



WordPress is also supported by an [active community](#) of developers and other users committed to maintaining it as an open source framework for all. That means bug fixes, security patches, and other important updates are regularly made available for WordPress, for free!

For course creators specifically, the benefits of open source vs. proprietary software also play a major role given the expansive amount of content they entrust to their underlying CMS or other course management platform.

While building on WordPress gives you complete and total ownership over your content and your data should you choose to [migrate](#) to a different platform or host, those details get murky when it comes to proprietary software—who owns what, and how easily transferable is it?

Ease of use, lower cost, and content ownership are all major advantages that come with using WordPress, but perhaps the most tangible benefit for course creators is that WordPress integrates well with a wide range of features and functionality through its [massive repository of plugins](#) and themes.

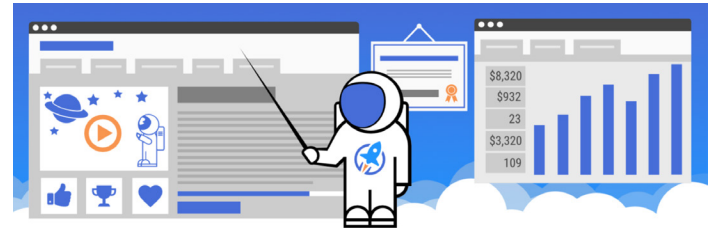
While there are plugins and themes for just about anything, including many features used by online course creators, there are also specific plugins and themes that bundle features together for LMS-specific functionality.

Take a look at the sections below for some of the top plugins and themes you can use for your LMS or membership site.

Best WordPress LMS Plugins

LMS plugins can provide course creators with a clear path for achieving their website goals. With a WordPress environment ready to be customized, you can install an LMS plugin to add a wide array of tools and features to your site that will help you with everything from course creation and management to registration and payment.

Here are ten of the top WordPress LMS plugins (including free and paid options) you can use to enhance your online courses and eLearning content and facilitate a better experience for your students.



LifterLMS

The vision of [LifterLMS](#) is “to lift up others through education,” and their plugin is one of the most popular educational tools

for WordPress. LifterLMS offers a [free version](#) as well as annual plans for single or multiple sites, and the easy-to-use drag-and-drop course builder comes with all the support and training you need to get started.



[Blog](#) [Docs](#) [Extensions](#) [Get Started](#)

Create and sell courses

Sensei is a WordPress LMS plugin by the makers of WooCommerce and Jetpack. Build engaging online courses in minutes.

[Start teaching for free](#)

[Explore our extensions](#)

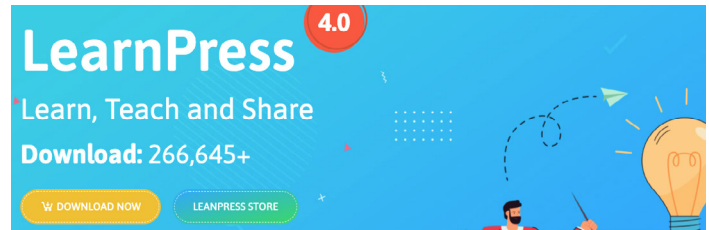
Sensei

From the creators of WooCommerce and JetPack comes [Sensei](#), the all-in-one LMS for academics, entrepreneurs, marketers, and more. Share your knowledge in an informal setting or set up a rigorous course with real certifications earned along the way. Sensei offers a free and Pro version, and because of its origins, it works seamlessly with WooCommerce when it comes time to sell your content.



Memberium

[Memberium](#) allows you to easily create powerful, automated WordPress membership sites and online courses that are deeply integrated with Infusionsoft or ActiveCampaign. Gaining this type of CRM integration can be limited with other providers, and Memberium was built to solve that issue. Today, this premium WordPress plugin is trusted by some of the world's leading marketers and organizations for creating courses, membership sites, and other digital products at scale.



LearnPress

[LearnPress](#) is a great option for those who are taking their first foray into online course creation. The free version of

the plugin allows you to create, sell, and manage your online courses while you're still workshopping your ideas, and you can always upgrade your plan when you're ready.



Features Pricing Case Studies Add-ons

NEW! Dynamic Achievements Has Arrived! - [Check It Out](#)

Your online course deserves the best!



LearnDash

[LearnDash](#) transforms your WordPress site into a powerful learning management system (LMS) in minutes, allowing you to create and sell courses, track user progress, deliver certificates, award points and badges, and more. This premium LMS plugin offers a one-time licensing fee for up to one, 10, or 25 sites, and it's a great option for entrepreneurs, educational institutions, training organizations, and beyond!



MemberPress

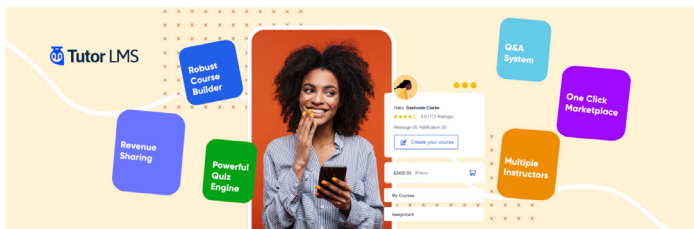
[MemberPress](#) is a powerful and easy-to-use premium WordPress plugin that gives you the ability to confidently

create, manage and track membership subscriptions and sell digital products. In addition to these powerful capabilities, MemberPress lets you grant and revoke access to posts, pages, categories, tags, feeds, communities, and digital files based on the products your users have purchased or subscribed to.



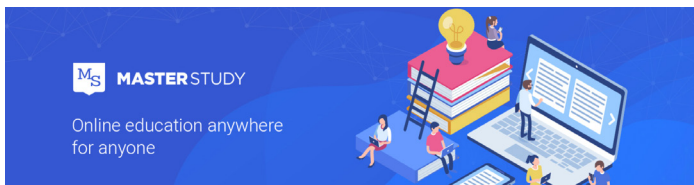
Namaste! LMS

[Namaste! LMS](#) is another great low-cost option that offers a lot of benefits for course creators. Aside from the free version, the plugin offers three packages with low one-time payments (i.e. no recurring or add-on fees). Namaste takes care of everything for your courses, from management and monetization to running reports and keeping in touch with students.



Tutor LMS

Themium, the company behind **Tutor LMS**, also created a handful of other WordPress tools, including the Quebly page builder and the WP Crowdfunding plugin. Tutor LMS is multi-instructor friendly for collaborative courses, and their easy setup allows users to get up and running in under an hour. While there is a free version available, Tutor LMS also offers additional features through its annual plans for individuals, freelancers, and agencies.



MasterStudy LMS

MasterStudy LMS has a ton of options for companies of all sizes, and the plugin's powerful software can be easily

translated into almost any language for worldwide use. You can opt for the free version of the plugin, or purchase an annual (or lifetime) plan for access to more functionality across multiple sites.




ARMember

ARMember is an easy-to-operate WordPress plugin that will help you build fully functional membership sites. The plugin, which has free and premium versions available, provides a wide range of features, including the ability to create your own course and membership plans as well as a form builder for seamless sign-ups and registration.

Best LMS Themes

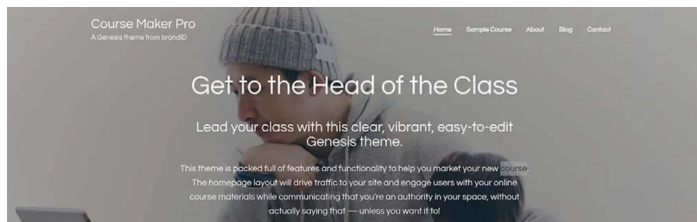
While LMS plugins offer a ton of functionality that can work with a wide array of WordPress themes, you can complement your LMS plugin or standalone plugins with a theme designed for LMS use.



When building a membership or course website, it's important to choose the right theme that matches the look and feel that you're going for, but also offers the flexibility to grow as your business expands.

- Syed Balkhi, CEO, WPBeginner


While a simple WordPress theme such as [Revolution Pro](#) or a [free theme from WordPress.org](#) can help you get your site off the ground, the following options will take your online courses to the next level. Note: all of the themes listed below are premium themes with varying costs.



Course Maker Pro

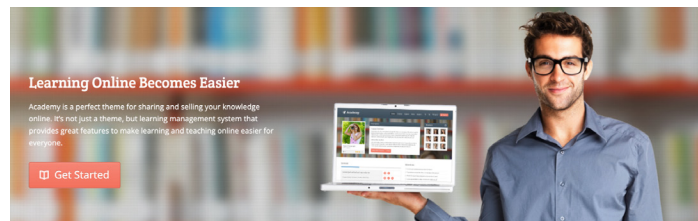
[Course Maker Pro](#) is a [Genesis](#)-built StudioPress theme that's designed to meet the style and organizational needs of your online course site. Packed with features and functionality, Course Maker Pro can be customized to reflect your style

and sensibility and all the things that make your course experience unique!



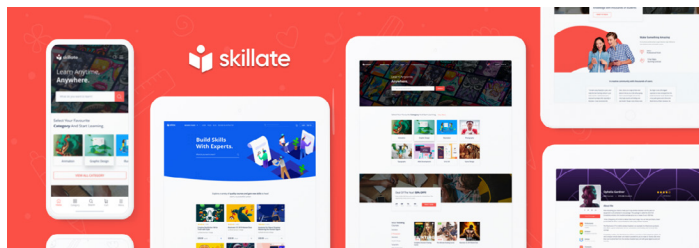
Course Maker Pro is a great option for online courses, and like other modern themes, it works well with LifterLMS. Within the next year or so you'll likely want to choose a theme for your WordPress LMS that is Full Site Editing compatible to maximize customizability and templating opportunities.

- Chris Badgett, CEO, LifterLMS



Academy

[Academy](#) is a flexible, innovative, fully responsive learning management theme that helps you share and sell your knowledge online. The theme comes with a wide variety of features that allow you to create free or paid courses, track student progress and offer learning certificates.



Skillate

Skillate is a WordPress eLearning theme based on the Gutenberg editor and designed to keep students in mind. The theme offers a best-in-class navigation system for finding courses faster and makes the learning process easy. Skillate integrates well with the **Tutor LMS plugin** and includes dedicated design for mobile.

Authority Pro Theme

Authority Pro perfectly highlights your knowledge, years of experience, and acquired wisdom. Even if it's early in your journey toward building expertise and trust, this carefully-constructed design will accelerate how quickly your audience grows.

Included with Genesis Pro

Get this theme & more with Genesis Pro

Get this theme for FREE



Authority Pro

Authority Pro is another Genesis-built StudioPress theme that's excellent for online courses. Pre-styled for the **LifterLMS** plugin, this theme helps to highlight your knowledge, years

of experience, and acquired wisdom. Even if it's early in your online course journey, **Authority Pro's** carefully-constructed design will accelerate your audience growth. The theme is highly responsive which means your LMS sites will look great on mobile, and the one-click theme setup makes it easy to load content, plugins, and Gutenberg blocks.

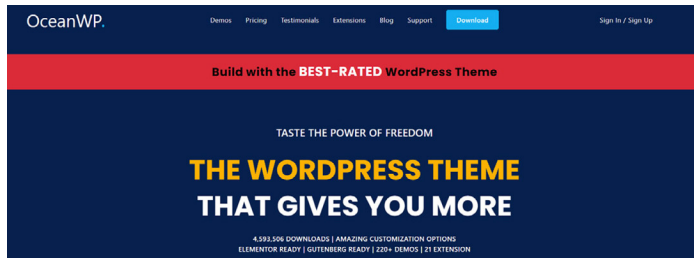
Authority Pro and more than 30 additional StudioPress themes come standard with every WP Engine plan.



Buntington

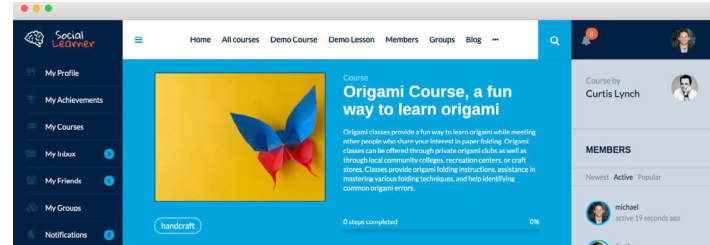
Buntington is a lightweight, user-friendly WordPress education theme that can be a great option for schools, an education or non-profit organization, and course creators

that don't have a lot of WordPress experience. Built with the Bootstrap and Vafpress frameworks, Buntington provides events and course management and comes with a visual homepage builder, a slider builder, and gallery support.



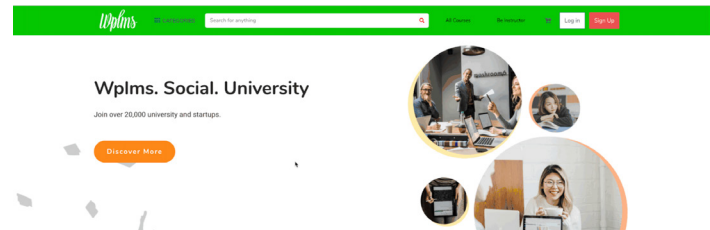
OceanWP

While not specifically tailored to LMS sites, [OceanWP](#) offers wide customization options that have made it a popular theme for many types of websites, online course sites included. The theme comes an assortment of customizable header layouts, top bars and mobile menu styles, in addition to different extensions including Footer Callout, Woo Popup, Side Panel, and more.



Social Learner

[Social Learner](#) is a great LMS theme that integrates with the [LearnDash](#) and [BuddyBoss](#) LMS plugins. The theme helps you engage learners with a gamified experience. In addition to helping you deliver your courses, Social Learner can drive engagement thanks to its powerful social features and integrated gamification.



WPLMS

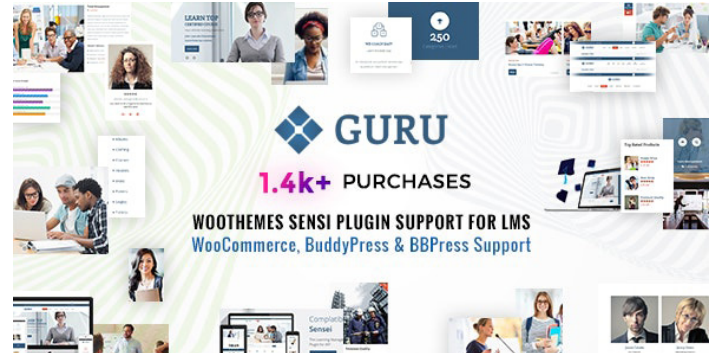
[WPLMS](#) is an advanced, feature-rich social WordPress LMS for web and mobile. The theme helps you easily start your online education community using web and app simultaneously. With WPLMS, you can easily create and sell courses online,

and know that your course participants are getting a great experience on both desktop and mobile.



Eduma

[Eduma](#) is a popular WordPress education themes that integrates with the LearnPress plugin. The theme offers numerous features, including pre-built demos, events booking and management, Mega Menu support WooCommerce integrations, and more, and it's built for high performance and optimized for SEO.



Guru

[Guru](#) is a powerful WordPress LMS theme that's ideal for creating and managing online courses, lesson management, quiz systems, practice tests, learning modules, WooCommerce integration, and more. The theme comes with a ton of pre-built features including options for course assessments, Instructor profiles, candidate profiles, course details, related courses, and course news and events, among many others.



Top LMS Use Cases

There is a wide range of LMS use cases, spanning everything from public education to private training. Here's a look at a few of the most prevalent implementations of LMS software.



Academics

Academics is a common use case for LMS software (in addition to other eLearning solutions), as traditional educators—from elementary schools to private universities—have adapted to remote learning. That said, the benefits of an LMS go far beyond location, and have been credited with

[higher engagement and performance](#) among K-12 students as well as increased connectivity and efficiency for [large colleges](#).

For example, in 2019, Northwestern University and the University of Oklahoma integrated chatbots into their LMSs, which receive a high volume of queries from students and faculty members, and serve as a student recruitment tool. Developed by the universities themselves, these custom LMS platforms tap into massive knowledge bases and school libraries to quickly provide answers.

One emerging academic LMS use case is a “public-private hybrid” in which public schools or universities work with private course creators to provide students with a “boot camp” or other type of immersive online program that takes place within a semester.



Competency-Based Courses

Similarly, but not always tied to academics, are competency-based courses, certifications, and how-to or instructional courses, which make up another large segment of LMS use cases.

From nursing to real estate to fitness and personal development, the topics covered by online courses today are truly limitless. While many courses are simply educational in nature, others offer officially recognized certifications and competencies across a growing number of fields.

The Washington State Department of Health, for example, offers certified [online training](#) for public health professionals, and [HubSpot](#), as another example, offers a wide range of marketing courses that culminate in certifications. The list of certification-based online courses is growing by the day and it could be a needed element for your own online course catalog.



Employee Training

Internally, LMS software has also enjoyed widespread use as a tool for [employee training](#), although in the past this was often limited to larger businesses with the budget for custom web development.

WordPress and its growing list of powerful LMS plugins are changing that, however, and providing businesses of all sizes with a straightforward, cost-effective method for building

successful employee training that's easy for end-users to navigate.



Courses for Everything Else

As alluded to in the competencies section above, the list of topics covered by online course creators today runs the gamut from traditional education to, well, just about everything else.

One of the great things about the recent explosion in course creation and LMS functionality is that it's democratized education on a macro scale. While you may not receive an official certificate of completion, today you can become more knowledgeable about topics spanning [mushroom farming](#) to [historical martial arts](#), and everything in between. In short, you can create courses about anything.

The challenges course creators often find, however, are generally rooted in two major areas: ensuring they have enough information or expertise to provide thorough course materials, and identifying the tech stack they'll use to bring it all to life. The following sections will provide some help with both.

How to Build (and Sell) an Online Course

Successfully building and selling online courses is far from easy, but with a few actionable tips and areas of focus, you'll be well on your way.

As noted, using WordPress as the foundation for the tips below is our recommendation, and although many of the following suggestions are focused on WordPress, you can apply others to general LMS software and course creation.

Before you begin building, it's important to map out key elements of your course strategy, starting with the **creative** and **technical** components of online course creation, outlined below.

Creative Components

Choose a Niche!

This is perhaps the most important element of your overall course creation strategy—what are you going to teach people about and who are you going to teach? If you're reading this ebook, you likely already have an idea of the

type of course content you want to create, but there are a few ways you can refine that idea and drill down on a more effective area of focus:

Ask yourself these questions:

- What do I have to add to the already existing conversation on this topic?
- How does my expertise put me in a position to share knowledge about each aspect of this topic? (i.e. a product's history vs. its current use)
- How can I share this information in a way that's highly engaging to a specific audience, whether they're beginners or more advanced learners?

Once you have a solid framework for the courses you're going to create, you should account for a few additional creative elements that will set you up for success. If you need help with the ins and outs of course design and production, check out [this helpful article](#).

Once you've nailed down your content, it's time to figure out how you'll distribute it to your course participants. Will your content be text-based? Will you include video elements? While it's not a must for online courses, the majority of today's LMS software is built to accommodate video content. Assuming your courses will include video, here are a few additional elements to keep in mind:



Brass Tacks: Camera and Recording Equipment

Making sure your videos are crisp and clear will be your audience's first indication of the quality of your course. The second will be the quality of your sound.

That said, most smartphones now have the capability to shoot and even edit high-quality videos. For your first foray into course creation, your [phone on a tripod](#) may be your best tool. This will simply help you stabilize the camera to avoid a shaky finish. You could also look into some [webcam options](#) that you can place atop your monitor or on another solid surface.

Additionally, there are plenty of options for [low-cost](#) and even [free video editing software](#) to help you splice your clips

into consumable sections for your audience or cut out any unnecessary moments.

Engaging Add-Ons: Voiceovers, Sound Effects, and Music

If you've got more room in your budget, there are additional ways you can add to and improve your courses. Investing in editing software that allows you to easily add professional voiceover (VO), sound effects, or even intro and outro music can help add a professional edge to your content.

There are numerous resources online that provide [royalty-free music and sound clips](#), and you can hire a VO artist through sites like [Fiverr](#). Improving your editing software can help you combine these elements seamlessly across all of your course content.

You might also consider adding professional lighting and backdrops so your "set" looks the same no matter when you're shooting the content. If you're speaking to the camera for a majority of your course, this may help enhance your message.

You can print a custom backdrop, or use large paper backdrops for an easy low-cost investment. When they get overworn from use you can simply roll them out and rip off the excess.

Going Further: Bringing in Professional Expertise

If you've got access to all the budget you need for the above and then some, don't be afraid to take the leap and hire outside help to make your courses as creative and interactive as possible.

From improving your camera, light, and sound equipment to investing in custom animations and effects, a large budget can go a long way. And because your site is built on WordPress, the cost savings you'll find in comparison to vendor-specific all-in-one platforms may indeed be enough to reinvest in an agency or freelancer who can take your course content to the next level.

If your budget allows, consult or collaborate with other professionals like videographers, animators, or agencies with a background in creating online courses for additional help and suggestions. Assembling a small team of experts will allow you to focus on explaining your content while delegating other technical aspects you may be less familiar with.



Other Elements to Consider

As you're creating your course content, it's a good idea to put together a script—or at least an outline of a script—to guide you through your topic. As the expert, it's possible you know too much, so it's easy to go off on a tangent before your students understand the basics. Your newbie audience members will be grateful for a course with a sense of structure.

Take time to create written materials and downloadables (including checklists, templates, and ebooks) for your students as well. Giving your users a well-branded and informative digital takeaway can help them better remember and implement your teachings. They'll also be more likely to remember you when they need advice, products, or services down the line.

While the above is not meant to serve as a comprehensive walkthrough for creating your specific course, it will hopefully provide you with ideas and inspiration for how to get started, as well as key areas to focus on first.

As you get a sense of what your course will look like, you'll also want to begin envisioning the tech stack that will power your courses and the website they live on, which is covered in the sections below.

Building Online Courses: Technical Components

Understanding the technical components of course creation is equally important to the creative aspects outlined above. Put simply, you can build the best courses in the world, but if the website they're housed on suffers from poor performance, the quality of the content will quickly be overshadowed.

Creating or Migrating a Website

While plugins can help you take care of some of the important technical pieces of online course creation, they can't do everything. Before you even get to plugins, some of the first

technical questions you'll need to answer will be tied to the scope of your overall project. Specifically:

- Are you creating a brand new website to host your course content?
- Are you refreshing or migrating an existing website to add courses or other membership content?
- If you're working with an existing site, does it already have course content and/or LMS functionality?

The answers to the questions above will inform your next move. If you're creating a brand new site, you'll want to follow [this guide](#) for the basics of WordPress site creation, while keeping in mind capacity and high availability requirements for your LMS or membership site (more on this below).

Add site

Get started

- This site is mine; it will count towards my site allowance. You have 24 of 25 sites available.
- This site is transferable; it will be moved to someone else's account. You'll be transferring the site to a client or collaborator.

Start with a blank site Add an empty WordPress site pre-installed with the (removable) Genesis Pro theme	Start with a guided experience Get up and running faster with site building tools and sample content	Migrate a site
Copy an existing environment to a new site	Move an existing environment to a new site	

WP Engine makes it easy to create a new WordPress site or migrate an existing one with just a few clicks.

If you're migrating an existing site, you'll need to follow specific instructions from your chosen hosting provider for a seamless transition. For WP Engine customers, our Automated Migration plugin makes the entire migration process quick and painless. You can migrate multiple sites of varying complexities to our platform with ease, and if you need any assistance, our award-winning support team is available 24/7 to help.

Migrate your website to WP Engine today!

MIGRATE NOW!

Every site migration is unique and depends on numerous factors, including the platform you're migrating from (whether built with WordPress or another CMS) as well as how much data and custom functionality need to be migrated over.

Some migrations are easier than others and depending on the scope of your project, you'll need to decide if a migration or simply a rebuilt (net new) website is the best option for you.

Server Resources

In tandem with the above decisions around your site and domain, you'll also need to make a decision regarding the

server infrastructure you select for your new or migrated site.

As noted above, one of the key benefits of creating a course or membership site with WordPress is that you can build it as you grow. Adding new functionality and courses to your WordPress site can occur on your timeline, and because you're not paying monthly or annual fees to use WordPress itself, you can take your time.

That said, course and membership sites are often dynamic in nature—they are usually media-heavy, they can experience rushes of traffic for discounts or flash sales, and they often have specific requirements for user permissions and content access.



Many of those elements can take a toll on compute power and server resources, and making sure you have enough of both to provide your users with an optimal learning experience is critical for the success of your online courses.

Slow courses that take forever to load or videos that buffer too often can quickly turn off an otherwise eager course participant. Not only does this create an increased risk for customer churn, but it can also lead to poor reviews for your courses, a decrease in engagement, and lower conversions.

WP Engine offers [plans built to scale](#) with your site growth and accommodate your anticipated server needs as well as [free premium themes](#) for LMS sites, [advanced security solutions](#), and [highly scalable infrastructure](#). Plus, if you outgrow the plan you select, you can easily change plans to ensure continued uptime for all of your course participants.

WP Engine's [eCommerce plans](#) offer fast, secure WooCommerce hosting that can benefit any eCommerce site, and LMS sites in particular. By offloading search requests to reduce server load, our eCommerce plans are well-suited for handling the dynamic requests that are common to course or membership sites, and they use WP Engine's compute-optimized infrastructure to dramatically speed up high-traffic sites. Plans also come with automated plugin updates, available added security, and [Instant Store Search](#), which provides instant search results that showcase the most valuable and relevant courses and other information to your site users.

While WP Engine's plans include both shared and dedicated server space, our dedicated plans provide the best way for

course and membership sites to maintain high availability and serve the many dynamic requests that are common to these types of sites.

You can view all of WP Engine's plans [here](#), with detailed information about the number of sites included in each, as well as visits per month, local storage, bandwidth, and more.

With your site and domain ready to go, you'll want to address additional technical elements as they relate to site maintenance and security, as well as the additional capabilities and features your online courses will offer.

Website Maintenance

With your site up and running or recently-migrated, you've got a great canvas for building or refreshing your online course site. However, there are a number of moving parts operating in the background that require regular, sometimes critical, updates.

For example, your version of WordPress will need to be updated from time to time to ensure you're benefiting from the latest features, upgrades, and security fixes. In a similar vein, the code WordPress uses, like PHP, will also need to be updated, although not on a regular basis.



Plugins, however, and to a lesser extent themes, will require regular updates to benefit from new features and bug fixes and address potential security vulnerabilities. Plugins and themes are arguably some of the best parts of WordPress, but failure to keep them maintained can come at a steep price.

More than half (52%) of all WordPress security vulnerabilities come from plugins—usually outdated plugins—while another 11% come from themes. While plugin and theme updates can mitigate these issues, staying on top of all your required updates can also be a lot to keep up with.

WP Engine takes the hassle out of plugin and theme maintenance with tools like [Smart Plugin Manager](#), which ensures plugins and themes are always up-to-date, without the risk of breaking your site thanks to simple and safe visual regression testing.

Get back to business. Delegate plugin and theme maintenance to WP Engine.

SWITCH TO WP ENGINE

Keeping your plugins and themes not only neutralizes the vast majority of WordPress security vulnerabilities, it also helps with overall site performance, not to mention the specific functions a plugin or theme might serve.

That said, site security encompasses additional factors beyond plugin or theme vulnerabilities, and LMS sites have unique security needs that should also be addressed.

Site Security

Even a relatively small online course site can be a gold mine for hackers. If you've collected course participant information, including payment information, your site could be teeming with sensitive data. And if your site is in regular use, you might fall prey to a DDoS or ransomware attack that puts your entire operation on the line.

To mitigate these security risks, the above section on website maintenance is crucial, but in addition to keeping your website up-to-date, you might consider taking additional precautions given the sensitivity of your site and the data it holds.

[Global Edge Security](#) is a great example of what those additional precautions might entail and brings enterprise-grade security from WP Engine and Cloudflare to your online course or LMS site.

With DDoS protection and a Web Application Firewall (WAF), Global Edge Security extends the [security benefits](#) already realized by WP Engine's platform, which meets the SOC 2 standards for Security and Availability [Trust Services categories](#), and combines them with protection against top OWASP security vulnerabilities while delivering a faster experience for your course participants.

For even faster delivery of your course content, the addition of Argo Smart Routing detects real-time congestion and routes web traffic across the fastest and most reliable network paths to increase performance, with some customer web assets performing up to 30% faster.

There are additional security solutions available for WordPress, including the [WordFence plugin](#), which provides an endpoint firewall and malware scanner that were built from the ground up to protect WordPress. What's most important is that you're taking the necessary steps to secure your site and your course users.



Adding LMS Functionality

While you can add LMS functionality to your WordPress site using a wide array of plugins, it's important to become familiar with some of the key features course creators rely on as you add functionality to your site.

While many LMS plugins will include the bulk of these elements, you can identify those that are most important to you and then align them with an LMS solution that fits your needs (and budget):

- **Certifications:** As noted above, certifications are a growing demand among online course participants. Depending on the topic, online certificates should adapt to state, federal, and regional requirements. Even if your course isn't part of a formal certification training, it's recommended that any certificates you provide include a course number, account number, or accreditation number for added verification.

- **Course Lock:** A course lock feature is a must-have for many courses and membership websites. In general, a course lock will limit access to specific content if a participant is inactive or stops engaging with the learning material.
- **Course Timer:** A course timer is a valuable tool that can provide a line of sight into the average time individual participants spend on a course. It will also provide details around how long participants study material and track their progress within a specific topic.
- **eCommerce Integration:** One of the first steps to monetizing your online courses is making sure participants have easy-to-use options for registration and payment. An eCommerce integration will help and can support paid and free courses, coupon-redeemable courses, courses that require payment via credit card or other payment gateways, and more.
- **Identity Check:** While tech innovation has powered its share of advances in LMS functionality, it's also given rise to unsavory practices—bots, spam accounts, and other bad actors target websites of all types. LMS and membership sites are not immune. To help keep your sites secure, an Identity Check tool will initiate random checks while your participants take a course to help you verify that users are actual people taking the course.
- **Intrinsic UX:** Even if students know what your course

is about, their level of experience with LMS software is going to vary. To ensure your courses cater to a vast student base, your site UX must be user-friendly and intuitive, with functionality and support for everyone.

- **Media Storage:** Is your content going to be stored on-site or through a third-party platform? Self-storage requires more bandwidth for your site, while platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, and Wistia allow you to compress large files for faster, clearer playback.
- **Subscriber Permissions:** Choosing the level of content that's provided to different membership tiers is vital to your monetization process. Free content can help entice people at an observer level to pay for more advanced, gated content.
- **Video Integration:** Video is the nearest experience that someone can have to a traditional classroom. Make sure your WordPress LMS site hosts videos efficiently.
- **Integration with Emerging Technologies:** As new products like artificial intelligence and virtual reality continue to improve, integrating them thoughtfully into your course structure is a great way to increase user engagement and comprehension.
- **Reviews!** The world of online courses is fueled by today's digital word-of-mouth: user reviews. Make sure your course participants can leave valuable, star-based reviews

that help potential participants quickly gauge their responses and make an informed decision about your course.



Best Practices: How to Get Started

While the other sections of this guide expand on the various elements needed for creating courses and membership sites with WordPress, here are a few key takeaways to keep in mind as you begin building a new LMS site or refreshing an existing one.

Choose your topics wisely

Before you begin to map out the tech specs of your course or membership website, make sure you have a content plan in place. What will your courses focus on? Who is your addressable market? What types of unique specifications will your courses require?

Don't build it all in a day

Like Rome, your LMS website doesn't have to be built in a day. While WP Engine offers excellent solutions for fast site migrations, we also provide numerous ways for you to build or refresh your course or membership site as your business grows, at your own pace.

Select plugins and themes carefully

While plugins and themes can be the secret to your LMS success with WordPress, it's important that you choose quality plugins and themes, built by active developer teams. Look for plugins and themes with a high number of active installations, positive reviews, and recent updates. While the plugins and themes listed in this ebook are a great starting point, they are by no means the only quality options for building a powerful LMS site with WordPress.

Find a hosting provider that fits your needs

Ultimately, the success of your course or membership site will depend on its performance. If students or course participants can't easily access your content, or if it's slow to load or renders poorly, they will find another course.

While there are numerous things you can do on your own to optimize your site for performance, working with a trusted hosting provider is the best way to ensure that critical elements such as server resources, site security, and easily-accessible support are all taken care of.

WP Engine offers plans that can scale with your LMS site as it grows, and with tools like Smart Plugin Manager and Global Edge Security, you can focus on course creation while we focus on site security and maintenance.

Start Building Your Best Online Course Today!

WP Engine empowers course creators to share their expertise. Educators, instructors, and individual creators are already monetizing their knowledge and hosting their online courses on WP Engine's industry-leading WordPress platform. With high availability infrastructure and 24/7 support, WP Engine takes care of WordPress so you can focus on building your best online courses yet.

[MIGRATE NOW!](#)



About WP Engine

[WP Engine](#), the WordPress technology company, provides the most relied upon and trusted brands and developer-centric WordPress products for companies and agencies of all sizes, including [managed WordPress hosting](#), [enterprise WordPress](#), [headless WordPress](#), [Flywheel](#), [Local](#) and [Genesis](#). WP Engine's tech innovation and award-winning WordPress experts help to power more than 1.5 million sites across 150 countries.