041 - Wordpress Page Builders - with Justin Meadows

Justin Meadows 0:00
The user interface of the backend of your website, does that really make a difference to your business? You know, if you're starting out and you're going to be building the website yourself, then sure that'll make a difference. But really, if you're paying someone else to build a website for you, it doesn't really matter. And either way you go, the only thing you're going to be logging in to do is to like, add blog posts and make small changes, which any one of these options gives you that ability to do fairly easily. So I think that as a business decision, it's better to go with whatever is going to give you the best performance output and be a better website for you in the long run to get you better SEO results, and convert more customers.

SEO Leverage Podcast Intro Music 0:43
Welcome to the SEO Leverage Podcast, where we talk about search, marketing, and conversion.

Gert Mellak 0:53
Hello and welcome. My name is Gert Mellak from SeoLeverage.com. This is Episode 41. And I'm pleased to have our most common expert guest on the show here, Justin Meadows, thank you so much for coming, Justin.

Justin Meadows 1:07
No worries, Gert. It's always a pleasure to come and have a chat with you.

Gert Mellak 1:11
Awesome, awesome, I definitely enjoy this chats, I'll learn a lot and develop myself by trade or by passion, at least it was like this years ago, but I'm really happy I can now refer our clients, to your service at Tunedwp.com. You've taken care very nicely quite a few of them by now. And we just noted whatever we need for the technical side is going to be taken care of. So really appreciate this. We met in Sydney in person just before the COVID madness hit, we had you on episodes 22 and 27 her. 22 talking about the technical foundation, which I think people just completely underestimate how important it is the tech stuff just works. And then on the episode 27, you kindly explained a little bit more about how to prepare a website for mobiles. So if anybody's listening to this and interested in more technical things about their WordPress site, definitely go back to those episodes. And today, we have invited you because you told me about an interesting test you did with page builders, we're going to talk a little bit about what a page builder is, what page builders are there, what a possible difference is, etc. Before we actually reveal your your final verdict and your final test, test result there. I just want to to ask you, in

case someone hasn't listened to the first episodes, could you give me a very quick overview about what you're doing? What is tuned WP who you're helping.

Justin Meadows 2:34
Yeah, so our main services around helping improve people's websites. So a lot of we work with a lot of business owners that have grown and you know, the business is going really well. And they've got to a stage where they're, they're marketing a lot, they've really, things are going well, but their website is starting to hold them back. Because they're spending a lot of money on marketing to send people to their website and, you know, might not be converting and might be slow and might have a bad experience on the site. And so we we help work with people to improve their websites, and then support and ongoing, make make sure that there's ongoing changes and growth to the website alongside the growth of the business.

Gert Mellak 3:14
Awesome. Thank you so much. Many of us only know the WordPress side of things from actually logging into WordPress, creating a new page, creating new posts, etc. And we know there are different options. One of those, one of these options is to use a so called page builder. Can you quickly explain what this is? Because I can imagine people might be using it. But maybe if the page builder not really know what it is?

Justin Meadows 3:36
Yeah, sure. So page field is sort of came about because WordPress, as has been a very popular website building platform. But initially, it was made for blogging and wasn't really made in a way that was very user friendly to make it easy to edit, and make the page look really nice. You could if you knew some coding, you could mess around in the HTML editor. Or you could use the visual editor, which was very basic in the way that it worked. And it was kind of like using a Word document. And sometimes you move the image a little bit, then all gets messed up, you know, that sort of thing. Exactly. So so. So page builders came along to just make it easier with that sort of drag and drop interface to move things around and layout the page in a really nice way. And that there's been some around for a very long time. But there's been a lot of newer page builders that have come along that make that easier, apart from a page builder is using the theme itself. So themes are often built with set layouts and things like that. But nowadays a lot of themes themselves that you might get from theme marketplaces or actually have a page builder built into them for that that drag and drop, you know, visual functionality. Yeah.

Gert Mellak 4:52
So when people create a new page, add blogs, move around images, etc chances are they using the page builder already. What could Some popular page builders that might be out there, but people might recognize their names. And there's a I think I've got this one.

Justin Meadows 5:06
Yeah, so the most sort of popular ones out there are Divi, Elementor, Beaver, and WP Bakery which used to be called Visual Composer. So those those tend to be the top four big page

builders. There is a lot of other ones. There's Thrive Themes and Origin. There's a host of other smaller page builders out there. But yeah, those those four are the big ones

Gert Mellak 5:32
referred to we definitely have been working I think with all of them, including Thrive Themes where I think we didn't have the pleasure for WP Bakery just yet. But definitely, I think right now we're using Divi and searching for a faster alternative. Really, Beaver definitely looks great as well, I'm testing this on a new website right now. Page builders per se, so essentially, we have WordPress being built for blogs, we have page builders, enabling WordPress to really create an entire website layout easier than then with what WordPress would be coming out of the box with. But very often page builders are also in on the internet and forums, Facebook groups, etc. and reports studies, audits, like the culprit of of bad performance, so to speak. So very often, we're in SEO very relevant, we're prone to kind of blame it on the page below that things are not working out. And and sometimes this might be correct, sometimes it might not. What are the possible problems when someone is using a page builder they could encounter?

Justin Meadows 6:30
Yeah, sure. So the biggest one is the slowing down of performance from adding a lot of extra code, CSS and some scripts and that sort of thing onto the page. And this, this also happens with with some of the themes out there. And that the trap that is the cause of this, in most cases is making it so that the page builder is able to do whatever you want it to do. So having it fully, you know, all these different options are possible. There's so many different things that you can do. But having the ability to have all those options on there means that you need to have the code in place the structure there for those things to be possible. Whereas if you have a situation where you only put on there, what you need, then obviously it's lighter, it's cleaner, and it's going to load faster. And so a lot of and this is probably also where page builders came into a bit of popularity was that the the themes that are built to do all the you know, if you build out a theme with all these possible options, then you need to have so much junk in there and it doesn't do what you want it to do, you have to dig into the themes code and change things in there. Whereas on a on a page builder, they're built to be a lot more flexible. But yeah, the other the other issue that you can encounter with a couple of them Divi and WP bakery in particular is that they put shortcodes into the content. So in order to change the layout of the content on the page, it puts in some code into that text. And that's not a big deal until you try and change to a different theme or a different page builder. And then all of your blog posts will have these shortcodes in there, and it just looks like garbage code, instead of a nicely written article. And so you need to find a way to extract those codes from all the blog posts and pages of your site.

Gert Mellak 8:17
So now you're finding , finding it hard to recreate?

Justin Meadows 8:20
Yeah, exactly. It's a bit of a nightmare.

Gert Mellak 8:23

Right, right, I remember the shortcodes were really good, cool alternative when they started out because it's okay, once you especially with a technical background, it was easy to just copy and paste these in. But definitely, obviously if even someone is running on a on a page builder, and they know it's a page builder, they've heard from their SEO from their tech person, true the page builder, slowing things down. It's understand it's not an easy task to transition from one page builder to the other one is not like installing a plug in and now I've got everything on the new page builders are deciding on which page builder to use probably deserves some conscious decisions. It's a strategic decision probably that should remain this way for a few years, maybe or until you redesign the site or renounced the site.

Justin Meadows 9:07
Unfortunately, most most business owners don't even make that conscious decision. They they're not even aware that they're being given a page builder that they're now stuck with for the next few years or that it's going to be a really hard task to make that change. If the developers working on it has just decided to start building it with a page builder. And that discussion wasn't really hard, then. Yeah, some some people, we've had to have that hard discussion with some of our clients that have come to us with websites that are not performing well. And it's like, Well, unfortunately, the way it's been built is just that that's your problem. Yeah, the other thing in particular is sometimes the page builders can be okay, if you use them just as they are out of the box. But quite often, there's add on packs that you can get for page builders, and every add on pack adds on a whole bunch of more CSS and code, that's there to make all these other new possibilities, you know of what you can do with your layouts on the pages. And so although it makes it easier to create those fancy layouts, it adds a lot of job to the page.

Gert Mellak 10:10
I think it's fascinating. And when I was I was doing web programming for more than 15 years, before, we then really focused only on SEO, and was also fascinating to me that I was just making so many decisions, right. And I know business owners, like you say, they don't know how much how many strategic business decisions their developers are making. And these might not even be full time or continuous developers, this might be someone you hire on Upwork for a task, they might be making a decision that's going to impact your business over months and years. So I was I remember, I was really blown away, I was always trying to beat him as random as paranoid as possible and say, Look, you asked me to do this task. This is what these are the options, this is what I think is good, this is what I can back up is good a good decision. But I always try and reduce still the same thing with SEO, we always try to involve the client in our Erika Consulting and just walk them through the steps so that they understand the why they don't understand need to understand the how, but they should understand the why they chose a certain platform. Why but phrases is the way to go for them. Why a page builder, why not a page builder, etc. But it was always mind blowing, how many decisions are essentially relying on IT or the on the developer, and how many businesses we have been working with over the years where it was clearly the developer holding them back, or their IT person holding them back because they didn't want to engage in a huge project of redoing something that was done 10 years before, things like those, it was always mind blowing for me.

Justin Meadows 11:40
You touched on something as well, you know, if you're getting that person from Upwork, to make some changes, you know, that wasn't the original developer of your website, we've, we've encountered this before, where websites have been passed from developer to developer before they've sort of come to us. And sometimes there's the different developers have actually installed another page builder. And so there's not just one page builder, adding extra code onto the page, there's actually like, two, I've even seen three different page builders on a website before and it just that blows my mind, because that's definitely adding way too much unnecessary code to the site. And most of that code gets added site wide to all of the pages, you know, even if that page builders only being active on a couple of the pages. So yeah,

Gert Mellak 12:26
I think Upwork, Upwork is going to be a topic of one of the future episodes because I think there is a lot of awareness to be raised about how to get someone broken something it's not like you just have one task, you get one person, give them all permissions. So they can do this and then move away and don't leave anything or don't leave the back door open. There's a lot of things we might be discussing at another stage. Tell me about your test. So you test the different page builders, I know you have been testing different page builders, you have been working with all of them on different projects. What were the favorites you had in your head on your mind to really test before you

Justin Meadows 13:02
Yeah

Gert Mellak 13:02
tell us who would have been else?

Justin Meadows 13:03
For sure. So pagebuilder we've been going with for many years now is beaver and Beaver Builder, we prefer mainly because it is one of the better performing page builders, it has the cleanest code output the smallest files, usually. And it generally gets us the fastest pages. So that's why we've stuck with that. But also it had a lot of advantages over many of the other page builders, especially a few years ago, I think some of them have sort of caught up. But it allowed you to save sections of that you've created to reuse on other pages. So if you have a few, some sections that you're going to use on different sales pages or one on your homepage, one on your services page, you can just reuse it instead of having to rebuild it again. So something that was really good about that. What's happened recently is that WordPress have changed the way that their editor works to introduce these Gutenberg blocks. And that gives the ability to make these kind of layouts in a way that doesn't add so much extra code to the pages. So it is lighter and faster. However, they're not as user friendly. And there's a bit of a learning curve to them. And a number of people just hate using that editor, especially for it's not so bad for just making layouts on the content of your blog post, for example. But to actually design a landing page or or you know, the layout of your services page, your home page is not not so easy to use. So, so what's coming we've started testing recently was Oxygen Builder. And oxygen builder is a

builder that uses the Gutenberg blocks but in a way that's a bit more of a user friendly drag and drop builder. There is a bit of a learning curve to it. It is it does work a bit differently to the other page builders it doesn't rely on the theme files. So normally these the theme which provides the framework and then you're adding these page builders to give you the layouts on the page. Oxygen just takes over the whole situation. So you don't need to use the theme at all, you just use the default WordPress theme. You don't need to pick a theme for it. And it would require probably a developer to set that up for you. I wouldn't advise you just go set up Oxygen yourself and start playing around if you're not a developer. But then also, you probably shouldn't be doing that anyway, if you're not a developer with anything. So yeah, anyway, the tests we did side by side, like we created identical copies of a long landing page, and oxygen came out on top, we actually tested it without a header at the top, so just a plain sales page without any navigation at the top of it. And on that Beaver still performed really well and actually got a higher desktop score. But when when we've introduced the header, so that requires a bit of extra code at the top of your page. And especially with the testing we were doing, we're using Google's PageSpeed Insights test, which mainly looks at the top of the page, and how that loads, Oxygen definitely went a lot better on on desktop. And then also on mobile, we've got a difference of scores 48 to 84, Oxygen really got a much higher score. And that's with a caching plugin in place, but no CDN or anything like that. So you'd imagine that you could optimize that further and get higher scores.

Gert Mellak 16:24
That's really really impressive. So let me let me recap so we have the, the main favorites you were considering was Beaver Builder, I can hear from your conversation, you have good experiences with beaver builders, so someone using beaver already might not be immediately needing to look somewhere else. We personally are using Divi. I know Divi Elementor users very often are looking for a little bit of a faster alternative. And an alternative that does not produce so much extra code I'm hearing that we have on WordPress, we have these Gutenberg blocks, just a different way of handling the editing of a website. And then you have this Oxygen page builder that essentially builds on top of those Gutenberg blocks. So it's essentially detached from WordPress using what WordPress already comes out of the box with, which is why there's no extra code, no extra overlay overhead involved. And Oxygen essentially makes it easier to work with what WordPress brings us out of the box with this be right.

Justin Meadows 17:19
Yeah, exactly. Because yeah, WordPress is out of the box is very lean and fast. And it's it's adding the theme files in the page builders, that often adds a lot of that code. So Oxygen gets around that. And the code output from Oxygen is just very simple, very clean, there's a lot less unnecessary lines of code in there, like the actual, if many users wouldn't do this very often. But you can right click and go view the source code of a page and you can scroll down through how many lines of code is on that page. And the the output from Oxygen for an identical page is about 1/3 of the length. You know

Gert Mellak 17:54

It's really, really impressive, we do these changes. It's not not necessary, not in a ranking criteria. But there are tools out there that give you a ratio between content and code. Just to give you an idea how much content, how much code is really on a page in order to produce a certain amount of content. And sometimes it really blows me away how much how much code is necessary to give this freedom to use, as you mentioned initially, that they can do whatever they want on their website. I never thought it was a good thing. I was not using not using WordPress when I had my digital marketing agency where we do we're doing websites and programming etc. We use completely different content management systems because it was always really afraid of of users being able to do whatever they want on a website we designed and programmed and made responsive, etc. But yeah, I totally, totally get that. Yeah,

Justin Meadows 18:40
Yeah, I think it is a case by case basis as well like Elementor and Divi I will say are definitely much nicer to use. They're they're much more intuitive. The user interface is a lot easier to work with. And so if you're not a developer or you're not comfortable with with code, and that sort of thing it is lacking you want to build the website itself. Definitely those are better options for you. Oxygen and Beaver, Beaver is not about actually beaver is pretty good. It's not as user friendly is Elementor and Divi but it's still pretty good. And Oxygen requires a little bit more of a learning curve to it. But ultimately, as a business owner, does that matter to you know, should you be, you know, should the user interface of the back end of your website? Does that really make a difference to your business? You know, if you're starting out and you're going to be building the website yourself, then sure that'll make a difference. But really, if you're paying someone else to build a website for you, it doesn't really matter. And either way you go, the only thing you're going to be logging in to do is to like, add blog posts and make small changes, which any one of these options gives you that ability to do fairly easily. So I think that as a business decision, it's better to go with whatever is going to give you the best performance output and be a better website for you in the long run to get you better SEO results. and convert more customers.

Gert Mellak 20:03
Absolutely, I think this is a this is a huge topic around sunk costs here, right. So either you invest a little bit more upfront, get a page builder that creates solid code, it's not going to run you down the road into performance issues. If I, if I imagined how often my clients said this entity is probably fed up with our suggestions of making the site faster, and directing them to your team to help them out. Imagine all those resources for making the site faster and faster all the time wouldn't be necessary. Because right off the bed, you invested a little bit more upfront, because you're training for your system to be able to, to use like a faster page builder faster theme, you wouldn't bother with this at all, you would focus on creating content, creating this content ranked with SEO, you would focus on on your business rather than being essentially having the brakes on on your on your website, and then on your site performance. So I'm very big on on upfront effort in order to not have to worry about something afterwards. And be this copywriting, videos design, which is getting now a new design from Studio One design here as well. Because we have designers on our team are they really want to have someone who has been who is doing nothing else, but design. And they just live and breathe design like you guys live in with the tech side of WordPress, it's really important for us to make sure that we have experts in the different

stages. Because ultimately, as you said, it could be a developer making a bad decision that's holding back your company over two years or three years or more. Or producing major issues. When we figure to finally figure out the developer we had from Upwork last year made a decision that's now holding us back. And we don't even talk to this person anymore. And now we have to start this from scratch. So there's a lot of things to gain from an informed conversation with someone like you who can assess things. And just really, I really want to wrap this up and make this really concise episode. If I'm having a site, and I'm using a page builder might not even know which one but I feel my website is a little bit slow. Maybe this is an issue related to the page below I'm using what should be my next steps? Or can I assess these? Do I need someone like you to take a look and and give me the information? What could I do?

Justin Meadows 22:15
Yeah, so one thing you can do yourself is go to PageSpeed Insights and have a look at the speed and quite often the recommendations they might have. If you do you have a poor performing theme or page builder there is there'll be a lot of unused or unnecessary CSS will be in the recommendations for PageSpeed Insights. So that's a key giveaway. But yeah, certainly you can head over to our website and get a performance review at Tunedwp dot com. We can take a more detailed look at your site, but yeah, just, just be aware that as we mentioned earlier, changing page builders does require, you know, a fair amount of work because a lot of the pages will need to be laid out again, even if it's going to be the same content and roughly the same design, you'd need to rebuild all the different sections of the page. So there is a fair bit of work involved in in making that transition. But yeah, certainly it would be I would strongly recommend if you are in a position where getting a website rebuild is a smart decision for you and getting that performance really working well, going with Oxygen builder and getting it done right. And that will set you up well for years to come.

Gert Mellak 23:22
Sounds good. Sounds really, really good. So I think we've learned a lot we have learned page builders make our lives easier. When we create a website we have learned to make sure we make the right technical decisions when might be relying on very impactful decisions on a single person that might not even be around all the time, making decisions that can hold us back. We've learned about different page builders you mentioned essentially the the favorites really in terms of speed seem to be Beaver and Oxygen, then the body building Gutenberg blocks and WordPress, unnecessary files page builders creating a lot of code we don't need. All this code needs to be processed by the browser's by Chrome when rendering the page and need to be downloaded. There's a lot of performance gains, because your results pretty much 2x in the performance with oxygen on the PageSpeed side, which is absolutely impressive. As a developer I know how hard it is to get these videos up. So it's really a strategic decision that can give you twice the speed it's definitely something worth considering because down the road, it's going to either make you more conversions get you better SEO or at least preventing any any potential technical conflict. I want to thank you very much for your time. Thank you so much for for coming in. We definitely need to have you back on more taking advice. If someone wants to reach out to you get in touch where can they go?

Justin Meadows 24:42
At support at Tuneswp is the best way to get a hold of me or the rest of the team. shoot us an email and we'll get back to you pretty quickly and we can have a chat about what you need. Yeah, but thank you very much for having me on. It's always a pleasure to have a chat. Cheers.

Gert Mellak 24:57
Thank you so much.