WordPress in the Newsroom

This report was researched and written by Amanda Krauss, PhD. It was commissioned by the News Revenue Hub as part of the Newspack for WordPress project, which is supported by Google News Initiative, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, ConsenSys, Civil Media, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and others.
# Table of Contents

**WordPress in the Newsroom**

**Table of Contents**

**Executive Summary**

**Research Methods and Goals**

- Interviews and Contextual Inquiry
- Survey Design
- Respondent Geographic and Role Distribution
- Newsroom Size and Type
- Sources of Revenue

**Research Findings**

- The Newsroom Ecosystem: Different Tools for Different Stages
- The Four Stages of a Newsroom Workflow
- Working on Mobile Devices
- Overall WordPress Usage
- Tasks Performed in WordPress
- WordPress Usability
  - Visual Arrangement
  - Modals and CTAs
  - Copying and Pasting Content
  - Distribution and Evaluation
  - “It’s Always Live!”: The Role of Technical Confidence When Using WordPress
- WordPress Sites as Sources of Revenue and Engagement

**Conclusions**
WordPress is a ubiquitous platform in newsrooms, and one that is used by 72% of Local Independent Online News (LION) member sites and 68% of Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) member sites. The dedicated editorial plugin EditFlow has over 10,000 installations, and INN already maintains a news-oriented WordPress theme called Largo. All of these facts speak to the importance of WordPress in publishing online news.

Despite this, there has been no dedicated research on how WordPress is used in newsrooms, and in particular, what the product experience is like for newsroom users. These are the topics our three-month study aimed to address.

The goals were: to map out the typical newsroom workflow of WordPress and the tools with which it interacts; to describe the user journey of both editorial and business roles who use WordPress; and to identify pain points specific to newsroom usage.

Through this research, we found several areas of opportunity:

- **Newsroom users generally find WordPress easy to use**, especially for its core intended function of putting content online. Its ability to address other facets of publication, such as visual appearance, content distribution, and metrics evaluation are less reliably serving user needs.

- **Visually arranging content on the site was a commonly felt pain point**, as was not having adequate control over promotional content (such as pop-ups and other CTAs) that appears on the site.

- **Business-side users do not necessarily see the WordPress system itself as a means to generate revenue.** Because managing the revenue funnel requires many third-party tools (email software, CRM, donation management software, and payment systems), the site itself can often seem like a mere container for these tools, rather than a system that addresses business needs from within the platform.

---

1 Source: whatcms.org analysis.
Technical confidence (that is, the ability to confidently use WordPress for a variety of functions) can be a very large pain point. Even if there is a contract developer available for assistance—which is not a given—users may fear making “technical” decisions or changes that might affect the functionality of the live site. Furthermore, even those who feel confident in their ability to solve technical problems may not want to spend their limited time doing so. This is especially true for users who have many roles, and must work with multiple areas of the system.

Because this is a general study, and an initial foray into a large user base, we encourage those developing WordPress news tools to dig more deeply into the needs of their intended customers. Factors like newsroom size, technical confidence, and target user role(s) will all affect the types of features most likely to be useful.
In order to describe the user journey of newsroom WordPress users, we followed a two-step method. In the initial discovery phase, one-on-one interviews allowed us to sketch out initial workflows and find indications of potential pain points, as well as to gather in-depth information about the motivations, goals, and emotions of users. We then followed up with a larger-scale survey to determine how prevalent these pain points were, and to gather further data about newsrooms using WordPress.

**Interviews and Contextual Inquiry**

The initial interviews focused on 8 newsrooms with staff sizes ranging from 3-23 full-time employees. To ensure that both editorial and business-side users were represented, we selected two participants from each newsroom, one in an editorial role and one in a business role. 7 of the 8 participating outlets were nonprofits.

During the interviews, we asked participants to describe their roles and daily activities, then conducted a contextual inquiry allowing participants to demonstrate the tasks they had described. All interviews were remote, and all participants were guaranteed anonymity to ensure they felt comfortable giving honest feedback.

**Survey Design**

By having users demonstrate their day-to-day activities in WordPress, we gained an initial sense of what was working well, what could be improved, and how WordPress fits into the ecosystem of newsroom tools. The next step was to expand our area of inquiry. We designed the survey to find out how prevalent the pain points reported in the interviews were, as well as to gain a better understanding of what types of newsrooms were (or were not) using Wordpress.

We distributed the survey link to approximately 1,000 people using news listservs and social media, and received 279 responses. Respondents were invited to share identifying information if they wished, but could also take the survey anonymously if they preferred.
Respondent Geographic and Role Distribution

According to an IP address analysis, checked against those participants who provided names and outlet information, 70% of respondents were from the U.S. and 30% were from other countries.

The largest proportion (49%) of respondents identified as being in editorial roles.

Business roles were also represented, as were a small portion of technical roles. In the “Other” category, several respondents noted that they weren’t satisfied with having to choose between roles. For example, one participant noted:

“Your survey should allow for more than one answer for those of us who wear multiple hats. This doesn’t really capture all I do.”

Similarly, participants in interviews described how digital roles were increasingly covering both editorial and business tasks.
Newsroom Size and Type

The majority of respondents (59%) worked in small newsrooms, with 0-5 full time employees.

The overall mean for number of full-time employees was 26, a figure pulled upwards by one 1,100 person outlet and several outlets with over 100 employees. The median number of full-time employees was 4. This median/mean divide is similar to the one found in the 2018 INN Index Survey Report, which reported an average of 16 and a median of 8.3. The median in our study is brought down by a number of respondents (15 total) reporting that they had zero full-time staff, as well as by the large number (42) of respondents reporting that they were the sole operators of their outlet.

---

2 According to the report, page 14: “the average staff size is the equivalent of 16 full-timers, but that can be a misleading number as staff sizes range wildly, from zero at startups run by volunteers, up to news organizations with more than 50 employees. Half of nonprofit newsrooms have fewer than eight employees; half have more. Independent contractors make up 30 percent of the labor force.”
Local news outlets made up nearly half of respondents (47%), and topical news made up slightly more than a quarter (26%).

Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate which types of content their outlet produced, checking all that applied.
Sources of Revenue

The majority of survey respondents reported using ads on their site; just over half also reported taking donations. Notably, many “Other” responses also indicated that membership programs were in effect, presumably driven by donations as well.
Research Findings
Modern newsrooms rely on multiple products beyond the content management system (CMS) for their publication needs. In the survey, newsroom respondents reported using an average of 7 tools (representing both the mean and median, and not including WordPress). The four most commonly used tools were Facebook (82%), Google Analytics (81%), Twitter (80%), and Google Docs (75%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Tools Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 75%</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Google Analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>Google Docs, Mailchimp, Word, Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-50%</td>
<td>Slack, Stripe, Google for Ads, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25%</td>
<td>Eventbrite, Salesforce, Broadstreet, Parse.ly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews and in “Other” responses, participants also mentioned:

- Alternative email software such as Constant Contact or Campaign Monitor.
- Project management tools such as Asana or Trello.
- Design tools such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, or Canva (an Adobe alternative).
- Various third-party social media and promotional content tools such as Hootsuite, Tweetdeck, Sumo.Me, and EchoBox.

In addition to these software products, interview participants noted that SMS/text and face-to-face communication were critical tools for communication when collaborating on a story.

---

3 A May 2019 tool mapping workshop by The Public Media Stack revealed 134 software products used by public newsrooms. This figure is recorded in their post-conference newsletter, and the official report is forthcoming.
The Four Stages of A Newsroom Workflow

**CREATION**
- Creating and refining content (text, media, data, ads)
- Planning photos, videos, and social media components
- Creating data visualizations
- Planning event logistics

**PUBLICATION**
- Copying-pasting or uploading content into WordPress
- Adding tags and categories
- Arranging and refining visual presentation
- Deploying 3rd party modals and CTAs

**EVALUATION**
- Monitoring performance metrics
- Gathering metrics from different sources to create reports
- Sharing impact metrics with funders

**DISTRIBUTION**
- Sharing story links on social media
- Creating newsletters to share stories
- Making public appearances to support stories
- Republication or syndication by other publishers

⚠ Indicates a painpoint
In the initial interviews, we found that participants’ mental model encompassed a four-stage publication process: creation, publication, distribution, and evaluation. Each of these stages, in turn, has a given set of tools.

**Creation** is comprised of planning, drafting, and composing stories or pages. For stories, it includes writing and editing content, selecting headlines or page titles, and choosing accompanying images. **Most editorial interviewees reported that they preferred to create content in Word or Google Docs, rather than in WordPress.** Media roles may use Adobe products to edit photographs or graphics, while data-based roles put together visualizations, spreadsheets, or tables using code or third-party software. Finally, business roles may create ads, CTAs, or other sponsor-related content on third-party sites.

**Publication** consists of making the material live on the site itself, and is the place where WordPress (or the equivalent CMS) is indispensable. Participants reported copy-pasting the drafted content into WordPress, uploading photos or other media, choosing visual arrangements both for the story and for the site, and attending to taxonomy features such as tags and categories. Users may also use plugins such as Yoast SEO to create social media previews and SEO-friendly headlines at this stage. To make promotional content live on the site, users may activate it with a plugin, or use other means to add the third-party Javascript to the site.

**Distribution** happens after content is live on the site. In most cases, the URL for a given article or page is shared via social media and newsletters. Depending on the workflow, the newsletter may be built, and even sent, from within WordPress or another CMS. It may also be composed directly in email software such as MailChimp, or sent using a hybrid method where content is posted to an RSS feed that is picked up by the email provider. Similarly, **most social media is controlled outside the CMS**, using tools such as Hootsuite. In some cases, reporters, editors, and business roles may make public
appearances to support the story or project. Finally, reader engagement is also an important element of distribution, whether it happens in comments or on social media.

**Evaluation is the assessment of metrics associated with content performance:** site visits, page views for a given story, newsletter opens and click-through rates, ad impressions, and social media engagement numbers. The process often includes Google Analytics and Google for Ads, in addition to the metrics provided by email and social media software. Participants also may check analytics within WordPress, either by using a Google Analytics plugin, or JetPack, the native WordPress analytics plugin.
“If I notice typos, wherever I am, I try to get in on my phone. It’s not the easiest way to edit, obviously.”

Users often access their work from multiple devices, adding more tools to the ecosystem. 

In the survey, 79% of all respondents reported that they had at some point performed a site administration task on a mobile device. This accords with the initial research, which indicated that participants frequently used mobile devices, sometimes unwillingly, for a limited number of tasks. Note that in the survey we did not ask respondents which task they performed, or about ease of use on a mobile device.

“Only in emergencies...I have a pretty big phone and I just feel like I could easily click the wrong thing or it’s hard to highlight.”

In the interviews, participants generally reported using mobile devices for small, urgent corrections like typos, and even then, only when they were away from their main computer. Two participants used mobile for single-click, repetitive tasks, such as approving comments or contributor content—in the words of one participant, “something you can do with one finger.”

One participant used their mobile device to start a story draft, adding a headline, if they got an idea while away from their computer (but emphasized that they would never write a story on a mobile device).
Interview participants universally did not want to perform any sort of extensive text composition on a small screen, and other specific concerns included:

- The right-side WordPress admin sidebar being pushed down on mobile, therefore making categorization tasks difficult to access.
- Being used to working with two screens and not being able to see what they were doing on a small screen.
- Not being able to focus on extensive composition when using a mobile device.
- Not being able to use keyboard shortcuts like CTRL-C and CTRL-V.
- Feeling that they were more prone to make errors on mobile devices.
84% of survey respondents used Wordpress in their newsrooms. All 16 interviewees worked in newsrooms using WordPress, though 2 of the business-side roles did not use WordPress in their day-to-day work.

**Commonly Reported WordPress Tasks**

Tasks reported as being performed daily by 50% or more of survey respondents who were WordPress users.
Tasks Performed in WordPress

In the survey, the most commonly performed tasks were editorial: over 75% of survey respondents reported writing, editing, and publishing articles. The next most common group of tasks is also broadly editorial, and includes arranging content on pages and adding categories, tags, or SEO information. These numbers may reflect the large proportion of survey respondents who identified as working in editorial roles.

55% of survey respondents said that they checked analytics using WordPress, which is lower than the 83% of respondents who reported using Google Analytics; this suggests a sizeable number are using Google Analytics directly rather than accessing it from within WordPress.

Finally, it is worth noting that slightly more respondents (54%) reported updating plugins than reported moderating comments (50%). This may reflect the small median size of the newsrooms, or the “multi-hatted” roles that users reported, in which they alone were responsible for technical updates. Furthermore, the initial interviews revealed that, while editors did moderate site comments, social media took up a great deal of bandwidth, and as such, it was becoming the primary medium for reader engagement:

“The vast majority of our comments are on Facebook, and our social media editor engages with them.”

The proportion of overall survey respondents who engaged with promotional content was in the low 30 percent range, and the percentage placing promotional content in newsletters was even lower (24%). This, too, reflects the overall proportion of respondents who identified as business-side as opposed to editorial.

Among survey respondents who identified as being in business roles, the proportion who chose “generate revenue” as part of their daily work was slightly higher (56%) than it was for all respondents, as was the percentage who placed promotional content (51%) or ran it (46%).

OVERALL WORDPRESS USAGE
This is in line with the pattern we saw in the initial interviews, in which business-side roles were more likely than editorial roles to use WordPress for calls to action, pop-ups, or other promotional and sponsor content.

**Other Tasks Performed in WordPress**

Tasks reported as being performed daily by survey respondents who were WordPress users.

- Generate revenue
- Create social media previews
- Run promotional content on site
- Place promotional content into articles
- Edit newsletters
- Send newsletters
- Write/edit promotional content
- Write newsletters
- Update donor/sponsor pages
- Place promo content into newsletters
- Other
In both the interview and the survey, the general sentiment was that WordPress was easy to use and understand, particularly for its core functionality of publishing.

“I find it generally easy to use...It's a WYSIWYG and a headline and you write a headline and you put your text in, and you push the publish button.”

Perceived Ease of WordPress Tasks

% of survey respondents who felt that the given task was...

- Easy or Very Easy
- Difficult or Very Difficult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Easy or Very Easy</th>
<th>Difficult or Very Difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrange content visually</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control modals/CTAs</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place ads/promos</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update modals/CTAs</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute WP content</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather analytics</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compose newsletters</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update SEO</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move content into WP</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send newsletters</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: neutral responses not shown.
That said, interview participants had trouble with some tasks; from our initial discovery research, we made a list of common pain points, and in the survey we asked respondents to rate each of these tasks according to a five-point scale. As the mirror chart above shows, the overall responses indicate a generally favorable perception of system usability, echoing the initial research. Nevertheless, some tasks are classified as difficult by a larger proportion of users than others.

**Visual Arrangement**

“What’s missing is a way to present stories in a way that’s different.”

Visual arrangement was a pain point mentioned frequently in the interviews, and the survey confirmed that many users are frustrated with their ability to create the stories that they envision. Complaints ranged from being constrained to a very limited set of layout options, to not being able to make very small adjustments (such as changing font) without assistance.

While interview participants understood that the Gutenberg text editor was meant to address these issues, and some had begun to experiment with it, many expressed confusion and consternation about how to use it, particularly when dealing with embedded data visualizations and other complex layout issues.

Additionally, interview participants showed us their methods for trying to create visually compelling content in an experimental space:

- One editor had a never-to-be-published story draft expressly for the purpose of trying out new visual ideas.
- Two newsrooms had staging sites they used for experimentation, which all four users mentioned as a benefit.
- One editor was trying to set up a staging site for experimentation purposes, but was frustrated with the amount of time it was taking.
WORDPRESS USABILITY

Modals and CTAs

25% of survey respondents reported that controlling the behavior of modals and CTAs on the site was a pain point, and this, too, echoes the comments of interview participants. For business-side users, control is key: they want to be able to adjust triggers, timing, and frequency of promotional content such as popups on the site, and quickly address any factors that might annoy readers. If users cannot have this control within WordPress, they will continue to use third-party options.

As the next two items in the mirror chart show, while control is the largest pain point, placing and updating promotional materials also cause difficulties. Participants reported that they would prefer to make copy and behavior updates within WordPress, but had not yet found an effective plugin to do so.

Copying and Pasting Content

In both the survey and interviews, copying and pasting materials into WordPress was not widely felt as pain point. In interviews, participants emphasized that the process of creating a story was very collaborative, and as such, they valued the commenting and editing tools provided in Word or Google Docs. They also had file naming conventions for reflecting revisions, and did not find that WordPress's version tracking was adequate, even when using a plugin like EditFlow.

Distribution and Evaluation

“For business-side users, control is key: they want to be able to adjust triggers, timing, and frequency of promotional content such as popups on the site.”

“In terms of publishing, WordPress is pretty robust. It meets all of our needs in terms of publishing and making it look a certain way. But there's no connection to distribution.”
There were some areas where the survey and initial research differed, and majority of these points fall along the evaluation and distribution stages.

In the initial interviews, newsletter distribution, SEO, and analytics came up as major pain points shared by many participants. This sentiment was less marked in the survey, where respondents reported that checking analytics, in particular, was much easier than the initial research had indicated. This may be a result of smaller newsrooms, which are less likely to have dedicated analyst roles, representing the majority of survey respondents.

Newsletter distribution, too, was another area in which the survey and interviews had different results; the interviews revealed many points of friction between curating, creating, and sending the newsletters.

“For what I do, a lot of times you have to jerry-rig solutions, for example in the newsletter setup there are frustrating things that make you have to go back and forth between Mailchimp and WordPress.”

In the interviews, we saw several different methods for integrating newsletters with WordPress. Only one interviewed outlet had the capacity to create, test, and send a newsletter from within WordPress, using a tool their contract developer had built. Of the remaining seven newsrooms:

- One had a system for generating the complete HTML code of a newsletter, which they would copy and paste into Mailchimp.
- One used a category checkbox to indicate that the story should be included in the newsletter, which Mailchimp would pick up automatically via RSS.
- Five composed newsletters directly into their newsletter tool, copying and pasting article text and links.
While an RSS-driven newsletter process reduces friction, it is not a totally satisfactory solution; as one editor noted, checking the Newsletter category box was no guarantee that the newsletter had been sent, and they often received texts or emails from colleagues if there was a problem with Mailchimp sending the newsletter out.

“Email integration would be a whole new thing in terms of publishing to distribution...It would be crazy efficient if the distribution options were in here and they actually worked. It would smooth the flow from publication to distribution.”

Finally, lack of SEO understanding was frequently reported in interviews; while all respondents used the Yoast SEO plugin, and were able to easily understand its social preview features, many participants reported that they simply didn’t know if their SEO optimization attempts were working.

“I do the best I can. We have SEO Yoast on the site but I don’t know if I’m wasting my time when I put in a keyword or metadata or whatever. It’s just kind of a black hole. I don’t know if I get better results from it, I just know it’s something that I’m supposed to do.”

This sentiment persisted even though one newsroom had a dedicated SEO consultant, and two newsrooms had received an SEO training session within the last year. Other interviewees reported that they struggled to balance the importance of SEO in search engines with the knowledge that much of their sites’ traffic came directly through the homepage or social media, and not through search engines.

The following chart shows the full ranges of task rating responses, and indicates those who chose “N/A” because a task was not part of their daily workflow.
Ease of Use Ratings by Task - All Survey Responses

% of respondents rating the tasks at each level of difficulty. Note that respondents were asked to choose ‘N/A’ if they did not perform the task as part of their role.
“It’s Always Live”: The Role of Technical Confidence When Using WordPress

“For me, I’m always nervous to push a button...I have very specific things I know how to go in and do and I’m always nervous to go outside of that purview because I’m scared that I’m gonna mess something up on the site—it’s always live.”

In the survey, respondents reported feeling generally confident about working with WordPress: 80% of respondents felt confident that they understood how WordPress worked. Furthermore, 76% felt confident they could achieve tasks without technical assistance.

In the initial interviews, however, lack of technical confidence emerged as a major pain point. Concerns included:

- Worrying about adding plugins or updating WordPress because this could crash the live site.
- Finding visual errors caused by tagging, categorizing, or the comment system, and not knowing how to fix them.
- Worrying that taking an action in an unfamiliar area of WordPress (e.g. a feature that they did not normally use) would destroy the appearance of the site.

How do we explain the two different interpretations suggested by these sources? One thing to keep in mind is social desirability bias in surveys; when asked directly to self-report, survey respondents are likely to report in a way that reflects what they believe to be the favorable social norm. Particularly given that this survey was not blind, and was associated with an influential news organization, it is possible that the survey responses skew positive.
In contextual inquiry, on the other hand, participants are not asked to rate themselves on tasks, but rather respond naturally to the task at hand. Based on the comments and concerns voiced in the contextual inquiry, we still recommend considering how best to serve users that do not have a high level of technical confidence, and making sure to follow best design practices such as clearly labeling UI functions to communicate the effect of an action.

Additionally, most (82%) survey respondents interacted with developers or tech support on a regular basis. Of these, 60% reported that they used an outside vendor for technical support, and 36% reported that they had an in-house staff member.

For the majority of participants, the level of support needed—whether for tech support or for site enhancement—was 5 hours or less. That said, a substantial proportion of user groups (between 15-20%) reported needing 6-10 hours, or more than 10 hours.

A final consideration from both the survey and the interviews is that, while users may be able to figure things out on their own, this takes time, and many participants expressed frustration at having to spend their limited time on fixing or understanding technical issues if they did not have adequate support. One example is an editor who knew they should upgrade to Gutenberg, but was concerned about the effect it would have on the site:

“\textit{I upgraded, and then I immediately hit change to classic, because I don’t have the time—no one has the time, at the moment—to go in and figure out how we’re supposed to do this, how Gutenberg works. We’re all just scared to try it out on real stories. I sent in a request to}"

\textbf{Many participants expressed frustration at having to spend their limited time on fixing or understanding technical issues if they did not have adequate support.}
someone at WP Engine to see if I could duplicate my site just so I could test out Gutenberg before we go live with it.”

Similarly, a survey respondent put it succinctly:

“Too many plugins that don't work well together, site load times...I just want to write my damn stories and not have to worry about whether my site is operating correctly.”
In the survey, **33% of open comments mentioned bringing in revenue as a challenge**, describing the difficulties in finding sustainable business models and fundraising. Revenue was also top of mind for business-side interviewees: although they were overall confident in their abilities and strategy, they emphasized that it was a constant effort to bring in funding.

Similarly, when respondents were asked about their site’s effectiveness at tasks related to the revenue and engagement funnel, **gathering ad or sponsorship leads was the biggest pain point, with 38% of respondents finding their site less than effective.**

This may be because, as interview participants told us, lead generation was something that required a lot of personal contact: participants mentioned in-person meetings, phone calls to follow up on sponsor opportunities with a local businesses, wishing a happy birthday to a major donor, or attending events to engage current and future donors.

### Perceived Effectiveness of Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Effective or Very Effective</th>
<th>Ineffective or Very Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collect ad/sponsorship leads</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect donations/contributions</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect newsletter subscribers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: neutral responses not shown*
Additionally, many business-side interviewees thought of donation- or engagement-related website pages as a container for third-party software. Users often did not have direct control over (e.g.) the donation system itself, nor did they necessarily have day-to-day interactions with developers or tech support who controlled the UI of the page.

On the other hand, business-side participants more directly oversaw dedicated sponsor/donor recognition pages. For this reason, they felt more ownership, and expressed the same concerns as editors about being able to control visual appearance.

“I want it to be intuitive and have a better UX and be mobile-friendly. To be able to do things so that we’re fulfilling the benefits that we owe our business and individual members.”

Finally both the survey and interviews showed that users were, in general, happy with their newsletter CTAs, and described placing them in articles, on the site, and in other newsletters. They saw the email signup as a crucial part of user engagement, and the place where they first got readers into the revenue funnel.

The chart on the following page shows the full range of site effectiveness ratings.
Site Effectiveness Ratings - All Survey Responses

% of respondents rating their site’s effectiveness at the given functions. Note that respondents were asked to choose ‘N/A’ if the function was not part of their role.

- Very effective
- Effective
- Neutral
- Ineffective
- Very ineffective
- N/A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Very ineffective</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collecting newsletter subscribers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting donations/contributions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting ad/sponsorship leads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions
WordPress is already an established part of many newsrooms, and its role as a publication tool is well understood and appreciated. Going forward, WordPress also has opportunities to move from putting content online to becoming a full-scale content distribution platform.

Rather than relying on simple, default layouts, modern editors want a variety of options, including ways to present video, audio, and data visualizations. Users crave the ability to make small changes, such as font tweaks, without having to consult a developer. They are interested in trying experimental approaches, but eternally concerned with making sure that the content they’re experimenting with does not degrade the overall experience of the live site.

Modals, calls to action, and other promotional content are another area of opportunity where users want more control over their WordPress system. While users can implement third-party tools with JavaScript or plugins, this requires moving between platforms every time they want to make updates or add new content. In order to address this pain point, WordPress needs to give users the strict control over their site that they desire; otherwise, users rightfully fear annoying their readers by overwhelming or interrupting them with pop-ups they cannot control.

Distribution is an area where WordPress is, by default, dependent on integrations with other products: email platforms, social media software, and SEO plugins are just a few examples. In these cases, the
quality of the user’s interaction greatly depends on how well the integration is managed. Some outlets have the technical resources to create their own custom setup to (for example) send newsletters entirely from within WordPress; others may remain reliant on plugins that are not as fully integrated, and therefore not as frictionless.

Finally, this study is an initial foray into a large user base; we hope that this report has provided some insights into the current state of WordPress in the newsroom, and advise that when others think about building news tools, they should examine the needs of their individual customers.

Newsroom size, for example, is a crucial factor: a one-person outlet means that a single user is responsible for all stages of the workflow, and may prefer to remain within WordPress as much as possible. A larger newsroom is more likely to have dedicated roles for each publication stage, and this, in turn, means that a given user might spend more of their time in a specific tool that is not WordPress.

User role also determines which features are most beneficial, as does access to technical help and overall confidence. If these factors are taken into account, we believe that the overall value of the product will improve, and WordPress can grow into an even larger part of the tools ecosystem than it currently occupies.