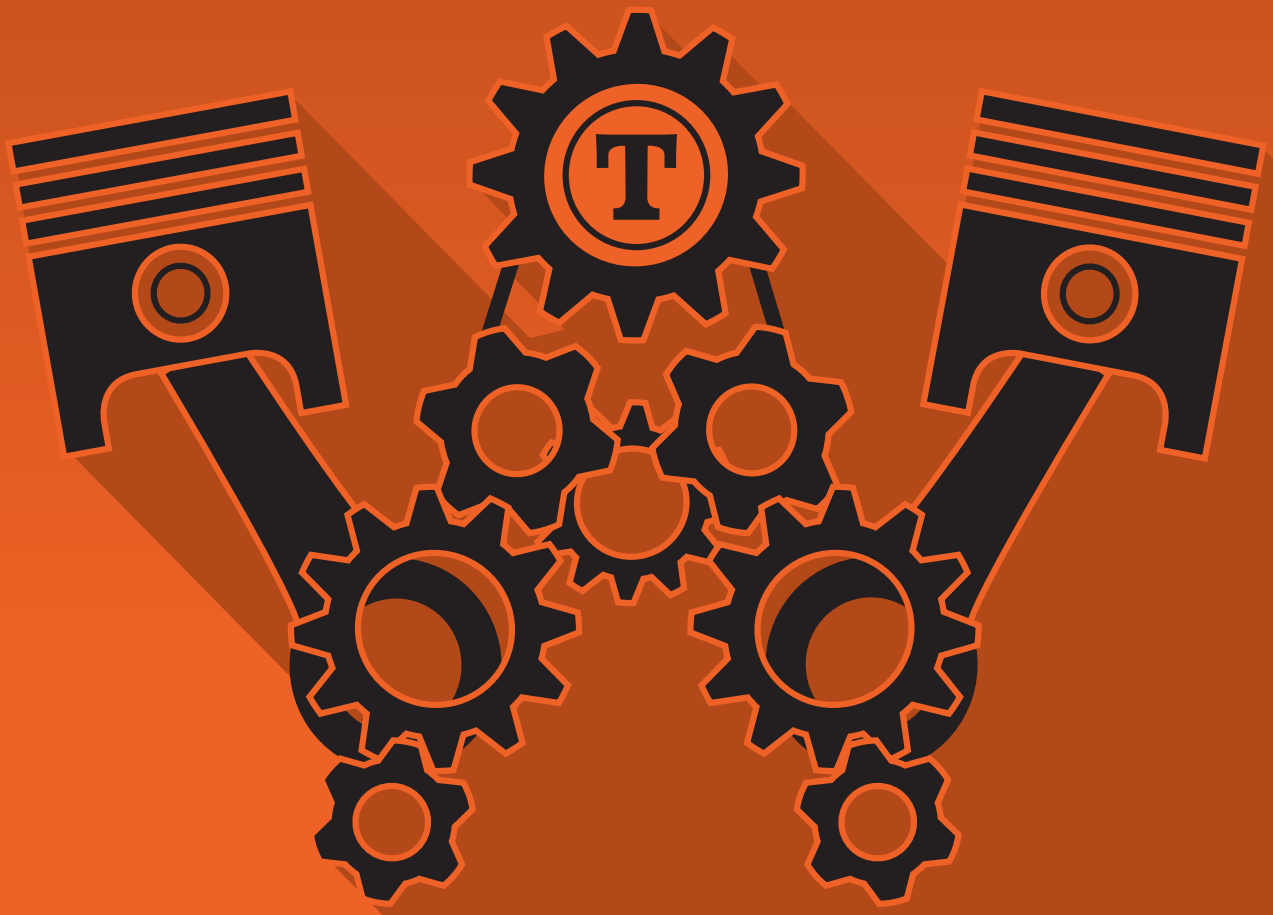
Building Exceptional Sites with WordPress & Thesis

by Peter MacIntyre



a php[architect] guide

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Chapter 5

The Best Plugins–Part 2 Advanced Tasks

This chapter focuses on some of the best plugins existing for more complex tasks. The plugins for short simple tasks are covered in the previous chapter. Here we will talk about large scale plugins like ecommerce, search engine optimization (SEO), site protection, memberships, and Google Analytics just to name a few.

You have to consider whether these plugins should be installed on your site as they take a lot of space in most cases and they take a long time to set up and to fine tune. We won't be going into every detail for each plugin here, so if you do decide to use one or more of these "larger" plugins try to install them on a testing site so you will have a playpen area as you learn. It's best not to experiment on a live environment.

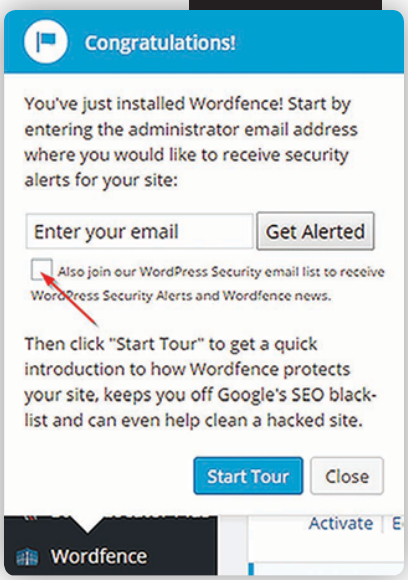
Wordfence Security

The short description of *Wordfence Security*[1] from its creators is as follows:

"The Wordfence WordPress security plugin provides free enterprise-class WordPress security, protecting your website from hacks and malware."

This is a good plugin to have regardless of the subject matter of your site. Look for this plugin by the full name *Wordfence Security* and install it. Once you activate it you will be offered a tour and will be requested to provide an email address to the plugin itself so it can send you notifications from your own site on any issues it may discover. Take the tour if you like, but be sure to provide your email address as it will be used to send notices and warnings as Wordfence does its thing. Enter your email address and click **get started**, you may want to turn off the security email newsletter option beforehand, then click close if you are not taking the product tour. See Figure 5.1 for what this dialog looks like.

FIGURE 5.1



Next, comes the complex array of options. Select **Wordfence > Options** to open this page. The top of this page is shown in Figure 5.2. Let's highlight the key features of this powerful plugin.

Note: Once you have this plugin set up the way you want, be sure to use the export/import feature at the bottom of the options page to easily set up this plugin on other WordPress sites. You'll find this to be a big time saver.

Note: On most of the options here you will see a small information icon linking to further descriptions and help about what the specific item is meant to accomplish. If you are not sure what a feature does, simply click this icon and you will be taken to the Wordfence documentation site for more detail on the topic in question.

Under *Basic options* be sure you turn on the first two options namely *enable firewall* and *login security*. *Enable firewall* performs the following protections:

- Country Blocking (premium customers only) tries to block traffic from specific countries.
- Throttling limits how often some visitors can access features of your site
- IP blocking will block traffic from specific IP addresses
- Brute force attack protection

[1] *Wordfence Security:* https://wordpress.org/plugins/wordfence/

- Two-factor authentication (cellphone sign-in–premium customers only) will have users confirm a short code or number typically sent via text before they can log in.
- All other firewall rules, including the rules under advanced blocking where ranges of IPs are blocked and user-agent patterns are blocked

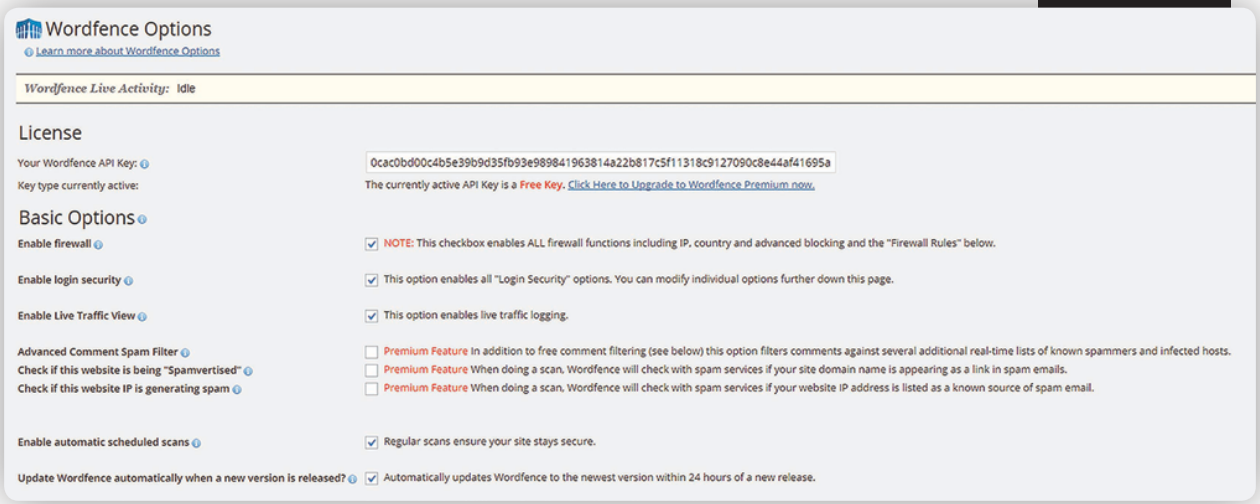
The second one, *login security*, performs the following protections:

- Enforcement of strong passwords
- Locking users out after a defined number of login failures
- Locking out users after a number of forgotten password retrieval attempts
- Locking out invalid usernames
- Preventing WordPress from revealing valid usernames in login errors
- Preventing username discovery through author scans
- Immediate blocking of IPs who try to sign in as a defined list of usernames

You should seriously consider turning on *enable automatic schedule scans* and *update Wordfence automatically*. The first option scans your site once every 24 hours (you get to choose the time of day if you are a premium customer), and the second one simply updates the Wordfence plugin with updates as they are released–always a good idea to protect against newer vulnerabilities. Do your own research on the other basic options and "season to taste".

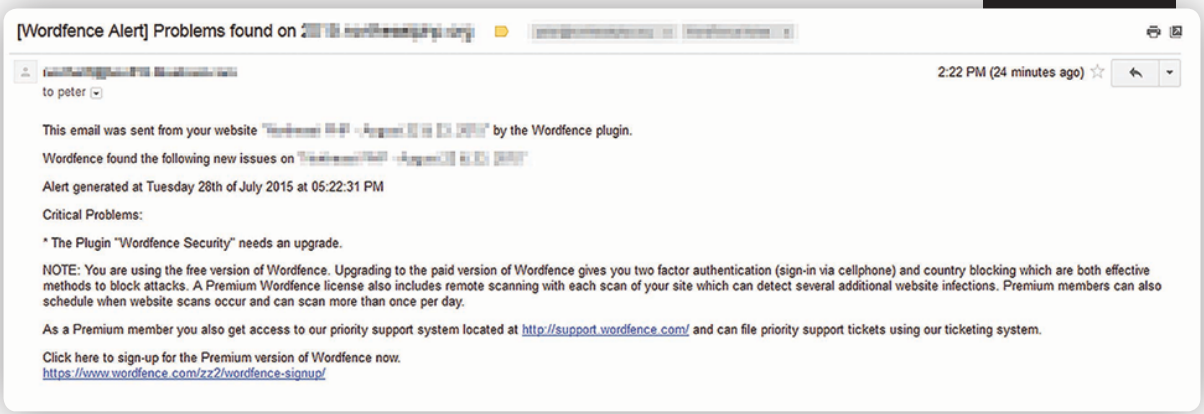
Under the alert section I typically turn on options 2 to 5 as these options are only triggered when there is a perceived issue with the site.

FIGURE 5.2



The following image shows a typical email Wordfence generates. Here it is calling for its own update. Depending on your notification settings, you could get a lot of email, so either set up a filter on your email system to automatically deal with email coming from Wordfence or create a new email address specifically for this purpose.

FIGURE 5.3



Google Analytics Dashboard for WP

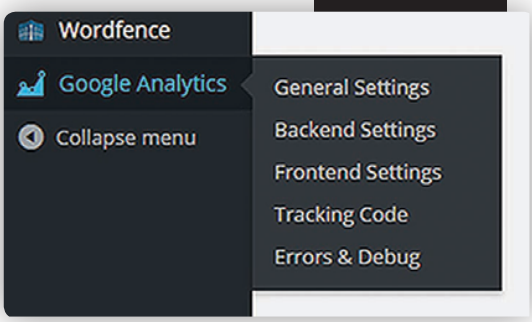
Google does a superb job of collecting site statistical information. The only drawback to their analytic data collection is you have to go to their site to see the collected information. The next plugin we are looking at is called *Google Analytics Dashboard for WP*[2]. This plugin makes a connection to your Google account, draws in most of the analytical data, and presents it to you within the Administration area of your WordPress site.

> *You may also be interested in a similar plugin called Google Analytics by Yoast as it does much the same tasks as the one in focus here. Google Analytics Dashboard for WP in our opinion has a better user interface and presents more meaningful data.*

If you do indeed use the *Google Analytics Dashboard for WP* plugin, then there is no real need for adding the Google Analytics information into Thesis. On the Thesis top menu go to **Site > Google Analytics** and remove any codes that are here and then save your changes.

After you install and activate this plugin you will see *Google Analytics* added to the admin menu close to the bottom of the list. Figure 5.4 shows you this with its expanded sub-menu.

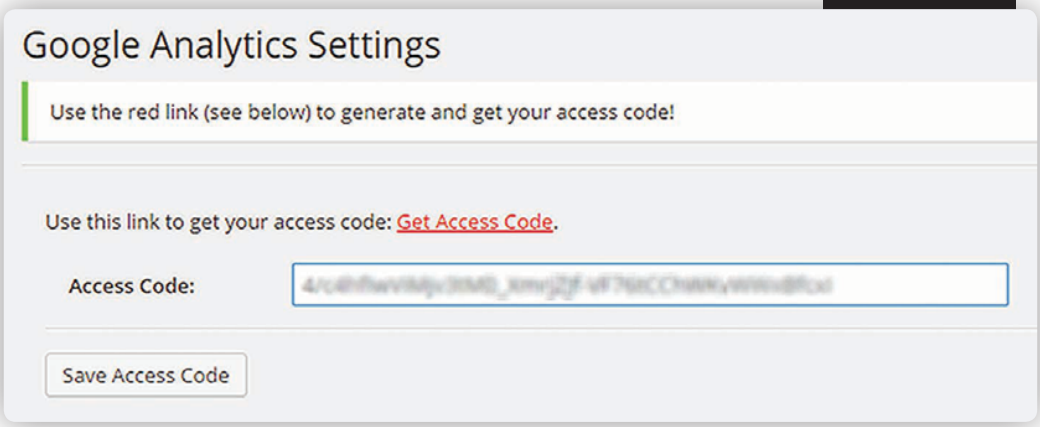
FIGURE 5.4



[2] *Google Analytics Dashboard for WP*: https://wordpress.org/plugins/google-analytics-dashboard-for-wp/

The first thing you have to is to make the connection between this plugin and your Google Analytics account. So all you have to do is to go to the General Settings menu and click on the **Authorize Plugin** button. A new screen will appear showing you a link to get your access code. Click on the link and you will be asked to login to your Google account and then you'll be presented with a code about 45 characters long. Figure 5.5 shows this process. Once you have your code saved the screen will refresh and you will see your website name being tracked and your Tracking ID, as well as some other identifying information which helps to prove you are tracking the right website.

FIGURE 5.5



Check the Backend and Frontend settings pages to ensure you have those set to what you want. You can limit some of the tracking properties and who you allow to see the statistics.

The next area you want to look at is the dashboard area itself. This is where this plugin really shows its value. Click on the Dashboard menu at the top of the admin interface to reveal the admin dashboard.

Figures 5.6 and 5.7 show the different combinations of Analytics data which can be displayed.

FIGURE 5.6

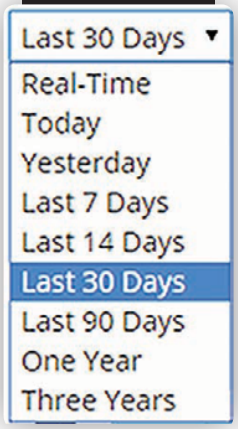


FIGURE 5.7

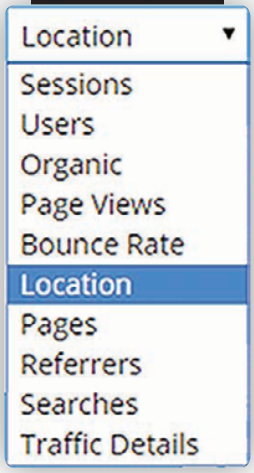
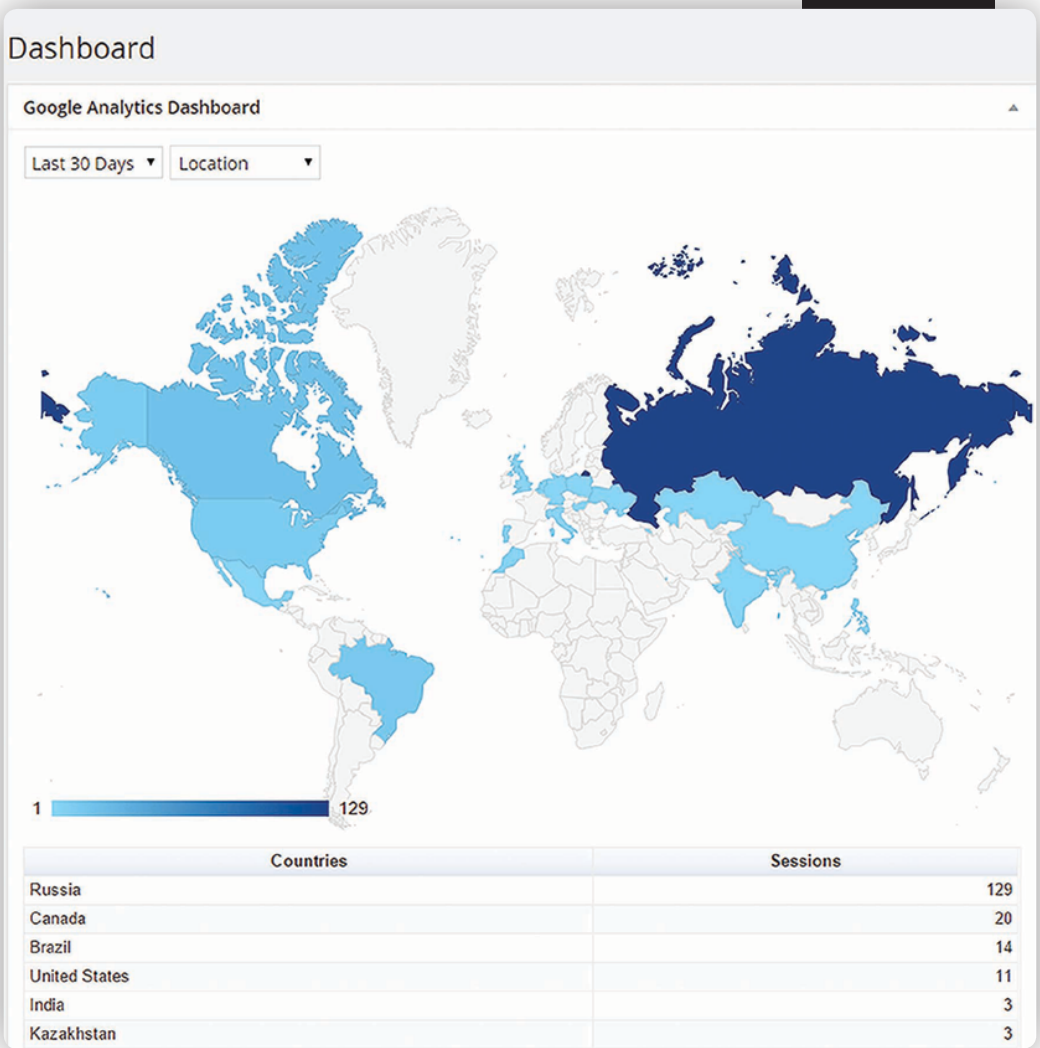


Figure 5.8 shows the display for the last 30 days by location on a world map with the numbers of visitors by named country showing below the map.

FIGURE 5.8



Countries	Sessions
Russia	129
Canada	20
Brazil	14
United States	11
India	3
Kazakhstan	3

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Peter has over 25 years of experience in IT, primarily in PHP. Author of *PHP: The Good Parts* (O'Reilly); co-author: *Programming PHP-3rd Ed* (O'Reilly), *Pro PHP Programming*, and others. Peter has spoken at Northeast PHP (Boston), CA-World (New Orleans); CA-TechniCon (Köln); and CA-Expo (Australia). Peter is currently the co-chair, co-founder and board member for the Northeast PHP Developer's Conference held in Boston, MA for the last four years (northeastphp.org). Peter is PHP certified in both 5.3 and 4.0. You can find him via paladin-bs.com and @pbmacintyre.

Need to build customized, secure, search-engine-friendly sites with advanced features quickly and easily? Learn how with this guide to WordPress and the Thesis theme.

WordPress is more than a blogging platform—it powers one-fifth of the Web. Since its release, enthusiastic contributors have pushed the envelope in using WordPress as a platform to build social networks, e-commerce storefronts, and more. However, the ecosystem of plugins and themes is vast and can be overwhelming to sift through, especially if you're new to it.

Building Exceptional Sites with WordPress & Thesis is a practical guide to using WordPress with the Thesis theme to provide an flexible and customizable foundation for building a wide variety of websites without requiring much—or any—programming. This book explains how to customize pages using Thesis and provides a survey of must-have plugins to help your website track and understand your website traffic analytics, harden your site's security and defenses against hackers, improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO), stay in communication with your users via email, handle e-commerce, offer tiered access to your site, and more.

Written by PHP professional Peter MacIntyre, this book distills his experience building online solutions for other WordPress site builders, developers, and designers to leverage.

a php[architect] guide
www.phparch.com