WP Engine brings analytics to WordPress site content performance

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The managed WordPress hosting firm extends its platform feature set to include new editorial and content management features designed to drive engagement and ROI.

451 Research®

Founded in 2010, Austin, Texas-based WP Engine is one of the originators of the managed WordPress hosting platform model. Since we last wrote about the company, it has expanded its business, now managing over 500,000 sites in 130 countries, growing from 45,000 customers to over 65,000 customers – including hitting the 10,000-customer mark in EMEA – and has about 450 employees globally. In Europe, it has added an office in Limerick, Ireland, and has opened a number of new datacenters this year, including (AWS) Sydney, Frankfurt, UK and Canada (GCP) Sydney, UK, Taiwan and Japan.

Being early to market appears to have worked in WP Engine's favor. The company says that it has '5% of the web,' meaning that 5% of all humans online will visit a WP Engine-hosted site every day. While that percentage is impressive concerning WP Engine's reach into website management, it also reflects the continuing popularity of WordPress as a platform and its credentials as a contender in the lucrative web content management space.

THE 451 TAKE

Content is king, but curated content – based on accurate analytics of site visitors' data – ultimately rules. By adding measurement tools at a page and author level, WP Engine is enhancing its WordPress site management tools, providing creators with data about not just the mechanics of site visits and experience, but also what content is driving engagement. Although designed for marketers and content creators, Content Performance provides integration with Page Performance and other tools, forming part of a performance intelligence 'suite.' WP Engine appears intent on providing further layers of value – something that will appeal to new enterprise buyers as well as its core audience.

CONTEXT

WP Engine's mantra reflects its core proposition, 'creating Amazing Digital Experiences on WordPress.' It's a focused strategy, albeit one that is inspirational in nature – as arguably befits the firm's genesis on an open-source, content management platform. And while there are many platforms out there offering a 'freemium' model, such products are often quickly outgrown by the user looking for something more distinctive, or that has more analytics capabilities, applications and tools, and more advanced optimization.

It's probably why then, that over the last 12 months or so, WP Engine says it has been asked to do more by its customers. While its marketing sector clientele have seen the scope of their requirements increase – typically from mobile apps to omni-channel experiences – WP Engine says that many other clients are asking about further content performance and management features. The company sees itself transforming from a managed website provider to a content management provider, and perhaps this is a natural evolution for WP Engine. Its move to target larger businesses means that today, 50% of WP Engine's revenue comes from enterprise customers. WP Engine says that, at the high end, the company is often an 'and' consideration, meaning that while it does necessarily expect to compete with the largest, most complex site management requirements, it is still winning some specific contracts for other tasks at the enterprise level.

Part of WP Engine's success arguably comes down to the way that its platform has evolved. Rather than just adding features horizontally, it has developed core functionality via layers, first via developer tools and by adding a more flexible environment, then via performance and security offerings for the enterprise, then site speed and content performance analytics – integrating as it develops its platform. The company believes that this is a compelling alternative to using (potentially multiple) additional third-party tools.

CONTENT PERFORMANCE

WP Engine's Page Performance tool, released in May 2016, enabled WordPress users to run tests of their sites, and deliver recommendations on changes they can make to improve performance – such as resizing images, using different fonts or placing JavaScript correctly. This year, the company has added new features, including front-end recommendations to optimize site speed on mobile devices, as well as a partner referral feature within its portal – for customers that cannot implement recommendations in-house and require assistance from a service provider.

This month, WP Engine announced its new Content Performance features, designed to complement its Page Performance tools and give the ability to understand how content topics and authors perform by various traffic sources. Site owners see simplified Google Analytics data that syncs to the taxonomy of the WordPress sites, as well as getting insights into which categories and authors get the most page views for all, or new, site visitors. WP Engine says that this allows the measurement of the best- and worst-performing posts, and decisions to be made about optimizing content impact. For publishers without site analytics of this kind, such features can significantly improve the ability to curate editorially without resorting to manual, time-consuming processes. They also help to maintain content production workflow by keeping data in sync with the site structure and access reports directly through the WordPress dashboard. WP Engine believes that this will ultimately help site owners drive audience engagement and ROI, giving the ability to improve page views and impressions across categories with more accurate data.

COMPETITION

WP Engine's direct competitors are other managed WordPress specialists – such as Pantheon, Pagely, Automattic (with WordPress.com VIP), Kinsta, Synthesis and Flywheel – as well as managed WordPress offerings from a range of more traditional hosting providers with strong WordPress offerings such as DreamHost, Media Temple, SiteGround, Rackspace and BlueHost. At the same time, there are many other firms offering non-WordPress site management and hosting, including Wix, SquareSpace, Drupal and Joomla. WP Engine cites its scale, coverage and platform as a differentiator against its closest competitors, while pointing out the size and strength of the WordPress ecosystem vs. alternative platforms.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS
WP Engine is a global leader in WordPress site management with deep operational expertise platform performance, its reputation in the WordPress community, and the increasing credibility of its services in the enterprise segment.

WEAKNESSES
While the company has been adding new performance management tools and winning some smaller enterprise deals, its services could be viewed as being limited in breadth relative to those of some infrastructure competitors that might offer private cloud, network services and other connected resources.

OPPORTUNITIES
WP Engine is in a good position to build on its success in the enterprise market for WordPress sites, particularly in the UK and EMEA, where its client base has increased significantly.

THREATS
As WP Engine and others demonstrate the value of a focused managed WordPress platform, a growing number of managed hosting providers are targeting that sector with new offerings, creating new competition for incumbents like WP Engine.