A Client Case Study

RESIGNATION MEDIA

XWP

SUMMARY

Resignation Media teamed up with XWP to gain a strong development partner to help them optimize their high traffic sites for performance and security and to support their continued growth.

SERVICE PROVIDED

- Strategy & Discovery
- Development
- Code Audits
- Ongoing Support

KEY METRICS

- 25 million monthly unique visitors
- 160 million monthly pageviews
- 60% improved site performance
- 5 dedicated XWP engineers
- 2 years working together and counting

HIGH TRAFFIC SITES & THE NEED FOR SPEED

When our relationship with Resignation Media began, they had already moved their popular web property theCHIVE.com to WordPress.com VIP. Both the backend and frontend, however, presented a number of opportunities for improvement. For a photo-centric website drawing over 25 million unique visitors a month, site performance was a top priority. In 2014, we stepped in and assembled a team to help them solve their biggest web publishing challenges.

SITE PERFORMANCE STRUGGLES

As site traffic steadily grew for theCHIVE.com, the need for a front end tune-up became increasingly more apparent. The pages and images were taking longer and longer to load, reducing the user experience for the reader. Additionally, the site's infinite scroll functionality that delivers an endless page view to the reader was getting bogged down and not performing as intended. Resignation Media identified these key areas for improvement and began working with XWP to implement improvements to help scale theCHIVE.com and their other web properties.

SHORT TERM SUCCESS FOR LONG TERM SCALABILITY

One initiative we took on in the first year of our engagement with Resignation Media was to improve site performance. Not only would refactoring the frontend architecture deliver short term gains, but it would lay the foundation for future scalability. Additionally, increased performance allowed Resignation Media to increase their monetization of the site through additional ad units. From initial code audits and solution strategy, to code development, developer training, and ongoing support, here are some examples of how we worked closely with Resignation Media and their team of engineers every step of the way.

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More With Modules - Over the course of several months, we refactored and organized all of the JavaScript on the frontend into separate modules for more efficient loading. They now load only when required and as late in the page load sequence as possible.

JavaScript That Jives - We made sure that wherever possible, JavaScript would be loaded asynchronously. This not only helps with loading times, but also allows the page to continue rendering while the JavaScript is being fetched.

Refactoring & Rendering - We refactored how we load external third-party assets and synchronous scripts were replaced with similar asynchronous code wherever possible so that page rendering wouldn't be blocked by any third-party resources.

Advertising Optimization - We optimized how ads were handled across the site for better performance. Resignation Media had a custom JavaScript-based ad management tool which handled setup and rendering of ads. Among other things, we implemented SRA (single request architecture), which allows the ad server to return all ads in one request instead of individually.

RESULTS FOCUSED & DEADLINE DRIVEN

Delivering on Resignation Media's goals of creating a site with best-in-class performance within a quick timeframe required flexibility from both parties. By leveraging the expertise of both teams, adapting, and moving forward with a shared goal, we achieved big results. Resignation Media's approach of investing in a strong architectural foundation with WordPress.com VIP, optimising the frontend, and tackling incremental improvements to move them forward made all the difference. These improvements will continue to pay off exponentially as demand on the site increases. Our collaboration has been a true testament to the power of teamwork and the importance of staying laser-focused on meeting our clients' needs.

TECHNICAL TAKEAWAYS FOR HIGH TRAFFIC SITES

For sites with millions of visitors a month, performance should always be a priority. Fortunately, small improvements often yield big results quickly. Resignation Media is a great example of how high volume sites built on WordPress can optimize and scale. Here are a few tips for high traffic sites based on the Resignation Media project best practices and lessons learned:

- Trust the experts! Providers like WordPress.com VIP, Pantheon, and WP Engine know their stuff and ensure that WordPress itself is running fast

- Use Xdebug profiler to analyze the PHP function calls made when rendering page and identify areas for improvement

- Improve site efficiency by having as much of your JavaScript load asynchronously as possible

- Reduce the number of HTTP requests by leveraging JavaScript and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) concatenation

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- Reduce the size of JavaScript and CSS assets through minification and gzip compression

- Properly leverage full page caching, object caching, query caching, and AJAX request caching

- Offload complicated queries and search to external search indexes such as Elasticsearch

STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

As a result of successful performance improvements with theCHIVE.com project, we went on to collaborate with Resignation Media on four of their other high traffic web properties. Armed with improved site performance, efficiencies in workflow, and high quality code, Resignation Media's sites are built to scale.

REFERENCES

- Eric Spielman, Head of Product - eric.spielman@resignation.com

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