

CUNY Academic Commons - Feature #7828

Theme Assessment 2017

2017-03-24 10:03 AM - Margaret Galvan

Status:	Assigned	Start date:	2017-03-24
Priority name:	Normal	Due date:	
Assignee:	Margaret Galvan	% Done:	0%
Category name:		Estimated time:	0.00 hour
Target version:	Not tracked		

Description

I am performing an assessment of the network enabled themes on the Commons, building off previous work by Laura Kane--who started a spreadsheet on this topic in 2014--and Kelly Josephs--who made edits/additions to this spreadsheet last year, which resulted in this thread and the acquisition of some new themes: <https://redmine.gc.cuny.edu/issues/5838>

In looking at the themes on the Commons, I am comparing them against network enabled theme lists for OpenLab, Blogs@Baruch, Macaulay ePortfolio, OpenCUNY, and NYU WP (<https://wp.nyu.edu/>). I asked for and received a list of themes active on OpenLab and Blogs@Baruch in late January, and I gathered the remaining information for the other three installations myself since I am an active participant on these systems. Later in the process, I'll be looking to the themes lists from these platforms for suggestions for new themes, but here's a quick bit of information right now. Macaulay ePortfolio has 211 network enabled themes (includes some child themes), Blogs@Baruch has 99, the Commons has 85, OpenCUNY has 59, NYU WP has 47, and OpenLab has 14.

In assessing our themes, I'm going to be paying close attention to when the themes were last updated on WP.org because out-of-date themes can stop working well and won't be taking into account recent trends in theme development towards responsiveness, multiple platforms, and accessibility. As I do this, I'll also be paying attention to accessibility and making sure we have or consider acquiring a healthy set of accessible themes. I will be digging into information and contacts that Luke provided when I near this step. At the end, I'm hoping to produce a white paper with suggestions that will be useful to the Commons, but which I hope to share with the other platforms as a way of saying thanks for sharing their information.

I will also be making documentation on the Help site for new users about how to choose a theme, likely once the theme assessment is farther along. I am considering drafting from this post that I wrote for OpenCUNY: <http://opencuny.info/2015/08/27/how-to-choose-a-theme-5-tips/> I welcome comments and suggestions about how to adapt this information for the Commons, in addition to changing the names of the theme suggestions once the assessment nears completion.

At this stage, I am performing a sweep through our theme list. 60 of the 85 are not actively searchable through the WordPress.org theme interface <https://wordpress.org/themes/>. That means that either they were acquired outside of this repository or that they haven't been updated in 2 years and have been removed from being searchable. I'm working right now on determining what the situation is for each of these unsearchable themes, working in part from the spreadsheet mentioned at the beginning of this post alongside resources like this list of themes retired on WordPress.com (note sometimes these themes continue to be developed on WordPress.org, but often not): <https://theme.wordpress.com/all-retired/>

Some questions at this juncture:

1. What is the process for updating themes acquired outside of the WordPress.org framework? I'm thinking here of themes from places like Elegant Themes and Woo Themes.
2. Would there be a way to get dates for when these themes were last updated on our system? To my knowledge, this information doesn't exist within the WordPress interface--even at the network admin level--but it would be easy to acquire by, for example, looking at the dates that the folders of the theme files were last updated through an FTP interface.

History

#1 - 2017-03-24 10:16 AM - Matt Gold

- Status changed from New to Assigned

I'm really excited about this work, Maggie!

#2 - 2017-03-24 04:06 PM - Margaret Galvan

I'm adding some notes to this thread based on the conversation about the theme assessment in the CUNY Academic Commons Subcommittee meeting today.

I also want to note that the above questions are likely directed at Boone.

Some takeaways:

- There is no one process for requesting or adding themes and plugins. Some requests come through Zendesk and get passed along to Redmine through there, but there are other ad hoc methods by which they're added to the system. I'll be looking through documentation of requests that I can locate on Redmine as well as looking through Boone's development blog, which Scott reminded me of: <https://dev.commonscs.cuny.edu>
- We discussed question #1 above a bit, and it sounds like there may be renewal licenses with information on updates floating out there for some of our premium theme acquisitions, and if this is the case, I would love to see them to supplement my understanding of our themes as a whole.
- Lisa talked about how this process will encourage us to think about what systems we might develop going forward for theme assessment, but that we should also ensure that this system is sustainable, which I fully agree with.

Note: My theme assessment is still very much in process in a Google Sheet, but if this might help anyone to see the spreadsheet, let me know, and I can add you to it.

If there are any other resources on the Commons or elsewhere that you think would add to this process, feel free to share.

#3 - 2017-03-27 11:06 AM - Boone Gorges

Thanks for working on this, Maggie.

1. What is the process for updating themes acquired outside of the WordPress.org framework? I'm thinking here of themes from places like Elegant Themes and Woo Themes.

These checks are manual, and depend on the place where the theme was acquired.

- On the 5th of each month, when I'm prepping the "major plugin/theme update" notification post, I manually log into our woocommerce.com account to check for themes that we run on the Commons, which have been updated since the 5th of the previous month. (Note: In the last month, Woo has transitioned so that you have to log in using a wordpress.com account, so I no longer have proper access. I'll open a separate ticket to track this issue.)

- On the 5th of each month, for each of our themes that we got from wordpress.com, I manually check <https://wpcom-themes.svn.automattic.com/> to see whether they've been updated since the 5th of the previous month. I determine this by looking at the "Version" header in style.css of the given theme (or by checking svn log at the command line). The themes checked this way are: imbalance2, manifest

- On the 5th of each month, I log into <https://themetrust.com/> and download the Reveal theme to see whether the theme has been updated.

- For themes purchased on ThemeForest, Matt gets email notifications of theme updates. When he does, he downloads the zip, creates a Private ticket here on Redmine, and attaches the zip. These updates go into the next maintenance release (1st, 11th, 21st of each month).

The fact that these themes are so difficult to manage is a strong consideration in favor of **not** granting requests for themes that live outside of wordpress.org. That is: while we can and should grant occasional exceptions, we should generally have a strong bias toward themes found on wordpress.org. (A side note that commercial theme vendors are increasingly setting up their own "auto-update" tools that use WordPress's native update tools to interface with their own distribution server, so that the update experience is identical to themes hosted on wordpress.org. When this is the case, I'm more willing to grant an exception - though there are some other reasons for preferring themes that adhere to wordpress.org's rules for distribution.)

Would there be a way to get dates for when these themes were last updated on our system? To my knowledge, this information doesn't exist within the WordPress interface--even at the network admin level--but it would be easy to acquire by, for example, looking at the dates that the folders of the theme files were last updated through an FTP interface.

You can determine this using Git. I think you have access to our GitHub repo, so you should be able to see this page:

<https://github.com/cuny-academic-commons/cac/tree/1.10.x/wp-content/themes>. There's a "last updated" column for each. Note that we occasionally modify themes outside of the standard update process (such as when I have to fix a critical bug myself) so this raw info might not be an accurate indication of when a theme was last "updated" in the typical sense of that word. You can look at the full revision log for a theme within the GitHub interface by clicking through to a theme folder and clicking the "History" tab. See eg <https://github.com/cuny-academic-commons/cac/commits/1.10.x/wp-content/themes/AskIt>. You can also use the `git log` CLI tool.

60 of the 85 are not actively searchable through the WordPress.org theme interface <https://wordpress.org/themes/>. That means that either they were acquired outside of this repository or that they haven't been updated in 2 years and have been removed from being searchable. I'm working right now on determining what the situation is for each of these unsearchable themes, working in part from the spreadsheet mentioned at the beginning of this post alongside resources like this list of themes retired on WordPress.com (note sometimes these themes continue to be developed on WordPress.org, but often not): <https://theme.wordpress.com/all-retired/>

You can glean some additional info about the history of a theme in the wordpress.org repo by visiting URLs like

<https://themes.trac.wordpress.org/browser/brunelleschi> (replacing the last bit with the slug of theme), and then clicking through to the Revision Log at the upper-right.

#4 - 2017-03-30 03:55 PM - Boone Gorges

- Target version set to Not tracked

#5 - 2017-04-11 12:43 PM - Boone Gorges

Maggie - As mentioned during today's call, we're no longer offering Woo themes to users. See [#7948](#) for a list of themes.

#6 - 2017-05-02 12:14 PM - Margaret Galvan

Okay, so I have some updates here.

I've gone ahead and removed the Woo themes from my spreadsheet and doublechecked the list of network activated themes, which currently numbers just over 70.

I then compared our network activated themes with the information on GitHub about when these themes were last activated on our install. I will do a break-down of what themes are old and we should look more into, but a few notes before that.

We have CommentPress activated as a theme, but it hasn't been updated in six years since it no longer activates as a theme. Rather, you activate the CommentPress Core plugin and that changes your theme. We should network deactivate CommentPress. Also, we have two other CommentPress plugins (Commentpress Ajaxified, CommentPress) other than the current one (CommentPress Core) that may be associated with older versions that we may consider network deactivating, as well. Lastly, it looks like we could stand to update CommentPress Core, since they're at version 3.4 now. We are at 3.9.3: <http://futureofthebook.org/commentpress/download/> Boone, let me know if I should copy this request into another thread.

According to the GitHub list, we have TwentyFifteen and TwentySixteen on the Commons, but neither are network activated. I would advocate for us network activating them, as well as installing and network activating Twenty Seventeen: <https://wordpress.org/themes/twentyseventeen/>

Okay, onto more general notes. We have 42 themes--over half--that have not been updated in the last three years or more. I would advocate for network deactivating them if there are no updates to be had. We could also discuss removing them from the system entirely if they are not being actively used, but that's something that would require more discussion. Note that one of these themes is CommentPress, which was discussed above. Here's the list, sorted by when last updated.

Last update 3 years ago

Spun

Last update 4 years ago

13floor

ArtSee

AskIt

Bluemist

Cion

DailyNotes

eNews

Expositio Theme

Infinity

Lucid

Luna

Minimatica

Shuttershot

Thematic

Wallbase

WhenIWasBad

WP-Creativix

WPFolio

Last update 5 years ago

Clean

Cleanr

Manifest

Modularity Lite

PressWork

Recovery

Shaken Grid (Premium)

simpleX

The Erudite

Last update 6 years ago

Aqualine

Arras Theme

Commentpress

Shaken Grid Free

Last update 7 years ago

Almost Spring

Arthemias

Blue Zinfandel Enhanced

Journalist

Oulipo

PrimePress

Rubric

Simpla

TumbleJack

Typograph

#7 - 2017-05-02 12:18 PM - Matt Gold

great work, Maggie! Thank you

#8 - 2017-05-02 12:48 PM - Margaret Galvan

Okay, following up here on what was discussed during the Tuesday dev team phone call.

I am going to make separate Redmine tickets for the two specific theme queries above.

In discussion, Boone and I decided that themes older than 5 years should be deactivated and that I will look more closely at those that haven't been updated in the past 3-4 years. Boone will generate a list of theme usage, as well, which I will compare with this list of old themes as we decide whether to remove some themes from the Commons entirely rather than just network deactivating them. That decision will be made based upon whether they're in use at all and also whether the places where they're in use are actual and not just test/dummy/empty sites.

#9 - 2017-05-02 03:53 PM - Boone Gorges

Thanks, Maggie!

I've attached a CSV reflecting the theme used on each non-deleted site on the Commons. From this, you should be able to sort and use Excel queries to get most useful pieces of info. If it'd be helpful for your cross-referencing for me to add a column or two to the spreadsheet, let me know.

I'll go through and deactivate the suggested themes within the next few days.

#10 - 2017-05-02 03:54 PM - Boone Gorges

- *File theme-stats.csv added*

(forgot that csv)

#11 - 2017-05-02 10:41 PM - Boone Gorges

It dawned on me that the technique I used to generate the CSV above would not catch themes that were in use by no sites at all. So I wrote another tool that looks for those, and I found a handful:

```
[Shuttershot] => 1
[Wallbase] => 1
[antisocial] => 1
[canvas-3.0.6] => 1
[carrington-mobile-1.0.2] => 1
[classipress] => 1
[digg-3-col] => 1
[digitalgrants] => 1
[founder] => 1
[fusion] => 1
[genesis] => 1
[gothamnews] => 1
[hoffman] => 1
[home] => 1
[imbalance2-room4108] => 1
[jitp] => 1
[k2] => 1
[letterhead] => 1
[light-10] => 1
[metric] => 1
[planer] => 1
[revolution_magazine-30] => 1
[scope] => 1
[sensitive] => 1
[sight] => 1
[twentyfifteen] => 1
[twentsixteen] => 1
```

Special cases among these:

- twentyfifteen and twentsixteen were not previously network-enabled. See [#8076](#)
- jitp is an older custom theme, and we should seek the permission of the JITP team before removing it
- digitalgrants is another custom theme no longer in use. I can't find reference to a ticket number describing what this theme was for (the commit message doesn't say)
- genesis is a parent theme for jitp and metric, neither of which are currently in use
- founder and hoffman were added as part of [#8053](#)

I think we can safely remove the themes from my list that are not mentioned in my special cases (and probably the special cases as well, though they could use some confirmation from others).

Files

theme-stats.csv

238 KB

2017-05-02

Boone Gorges