

WordPress and Gutenberg:

**A fast, flexible, contextually
enriched publishing experience**

The world's most popular CMS is preparing
for the future – are you?



"Gutenberg is the first attempt at really challenging the writing paradigm in a more generalised context. I suspect that once Gutenberg goes mainstream and is fully experienced by a large portion of the general market, it will create a new baseline for user expectations in editing."

Anna Harrison,
Director of UX at Ephox (creators of TinyMCE)

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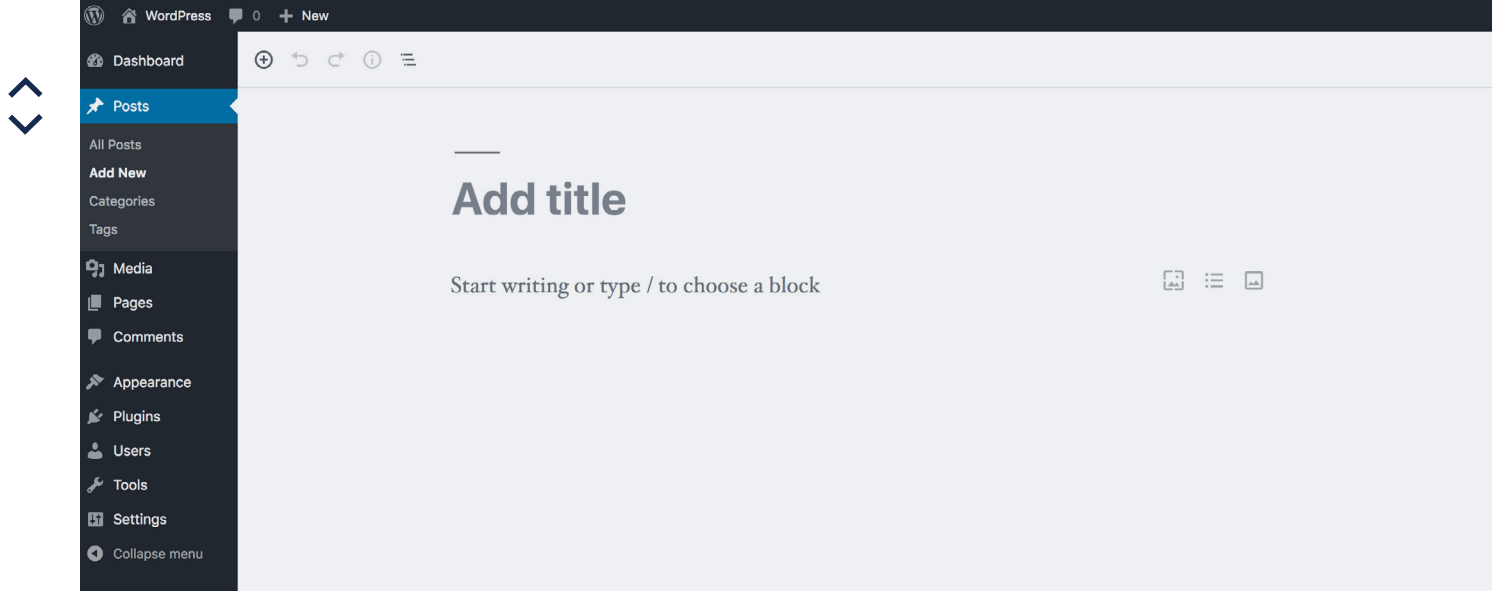
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Authors: Ana Silva

Editors: Ana Silva, Caspar Hübinger

Contributors: Ant Miller, Noel Tock, K. Adam White, Matthew Haines-Young, Nathaniel Taintor

Design: Barbara Marcantonio



Introducing Gutenberg

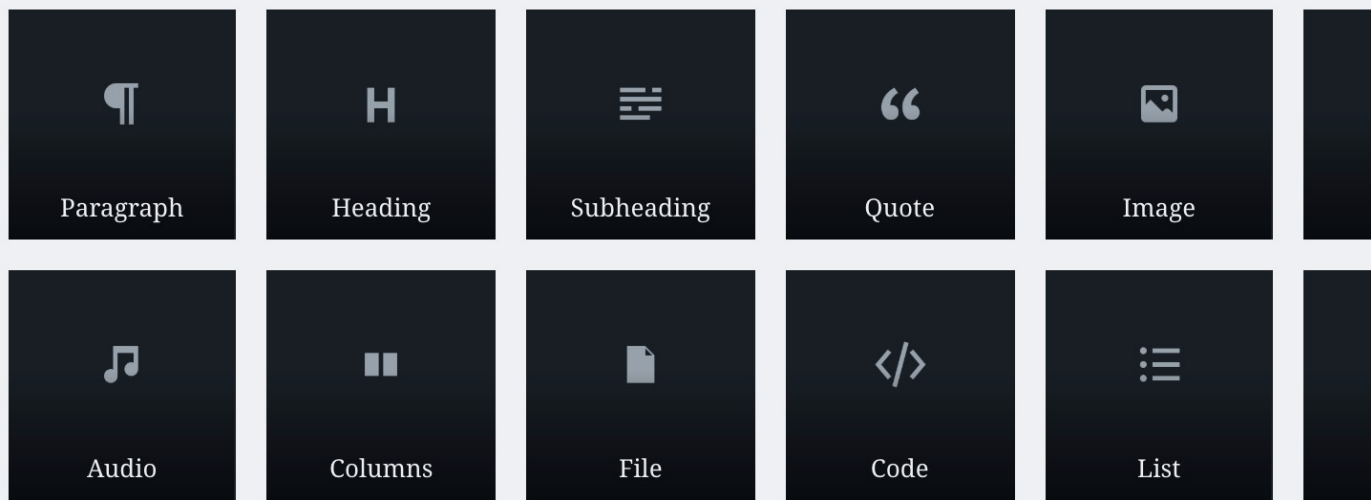
Powering 360° digital experiences with a modular approach to content

A dramatic change has come to WordPress. The world's most popular Content Management System (CMS) has been equipped with a new editing framework that completely refreshes the user experience with a block-based approach to content generation, optimised to create rich media posts with elegantly organised and displayed layouts.

The codename of this new model for editing and managing content has been Gutenberg, after Johannes Gutenberg who invented the printing press with movable type in the 15th century and revolutionised the way people consumed and shared knowledge and information. Over 500 years later, WordPress' Gutenberg project is set to equally revolutionise the way we build, edit, and publish online.

Gutenberg, the 'block editor', is the biggest change to WordPress in several years. This document explores what that change means for you as an agency, developer, or enterprise user of WordPress.

*Above:
Gutenberg's
clean interface.*



A fast, intuitive editor experience

Composing content in a consistent, contextually enriched interface

Gutenberg gives everyone, from editors to developers, a unified user interface for adding and editing complex content and layouts, making it much easier to manipulate content. Most importantly, the block-based approach replaces ambiguity with implicit structure.

Looking at the big picture, it's clear a lot of work has gone into defining precisely how to facilitate all the different roles involved with web publishing. The editor experience is just the tip of the iceberg for the future of Gutenberg, and already it is able to change the user experience for those building and publishing web pages in a variety of ways.

- **Editors and content creators** can easily work on mobile, and not have to deal with shortcodes and HTML (unless they want to). Formatting has also become much easier between text editors, such as Google Docs and Word. Content can be copied from one of these editors

*Above:
The variety of
blocks available
in Gutenberg.
Screenshot
from [https://
wordpress.org/
gutenberg/](https://wordpress.org/gutenberg/)*

into Gutenberg; the web application the text is copied from is auto-detected and content automatically converted into blocks. Embedding external content has also been made easier with options for YouTube, Reddit, Twitter, and Spotify links already integrated.

- **Marketers** are able to create and publish rich and dynamic landing pages landing pages and other online touchpoints to drive traffic, engagement, and conversions. They can also become more efficient with experiments and iterations, and react faster and with more independence.
- **Core developers** are able to use a common set of code and concepts to simplify how menus, widgets, and the editor work.
- **Plugin developers** can integrate into WordPress without having to build on top of TinyMCE, and plugins also have an improved UI.
- **Theme developers** don't need to support different plugins or create their own page builders. A standard portable way has been introduced to create rich layouts, seamlessly and intuitively.
- **Agency and Enterprise developers** have a vast new range of options for building out custom applications and workflows for their clients. These options have consistent controls and interfaces and can be used to build highly usable and accessible new features fast.

Building with blocks

Gutenberg treats blocks as individual entities of content; a variety of different content ‘types’ can be identified, including paragraphs, headings, images, galleries, lists, buttons, embeds, pull-quotes, tables, and even widgets to pull in content from elsewhere on the site, such as a list of posts. These types are the smaller units that make up the content of pages.

The block editor defines all these different elements in consistent ways, and how you interact with them is designed to be intuitive and elegant. Blocks can be moved, manipulated, combined, and saved as ‘reusable’ blocks. They are universal content components, more flexible, and more usable than ever before.

Every block has its own unique semantic value and all blocks have the flexibility to be moved around relative to each other. Blocks can be arranged in any number and type on a page, each with its own distinct behaviour and function, but this is not where opportunities end:

- **Custom blocks** can be built to aggregate and display content from third-party APIs, applying local CMS logic to remote data sets and pushing WordPress up the stack of Everything-as-a-service.
- **Block templates** allow pre-defining of a set of blocks for a specific purpose, for example as a landing page template where editors only need to fill in the default content structure and move blocks around as needed.
- **Parent and Child blocks** reflect the concept of relationships between blocks; multiple ‘Child’ blocks can be assigned to

a 'Parent' block. This group of nested blocks lives within the 'Parent' category within the block menu and only appears when the original 'Parent' block is selected. This creates an environment where Parent blocks have

a more standardised UI, and prevents an overload of blocks from appearing in the inserter at any one time – all of which contributes towards one of the project's main goals: to unify how content is added to posts.



"For a lot of common use cases, building a Gutenberg block takes a lot less work than trying to develop a comparable UI with meta boxes or shortcodes."

Nathaniel Taintor,
WordPress Engineer at Human Made

`Everything is a block'¹

The Gutenberg approach reimagines a web page, blog post, or any type of content as independent blocks that can be pulled together, reorganised, and experimented with. This is a big change for WordPress and one that accompanies a dramatic shift in a trend toward a web environment that embraces richer, more consumable, and better-tailored 360° digital experiences.

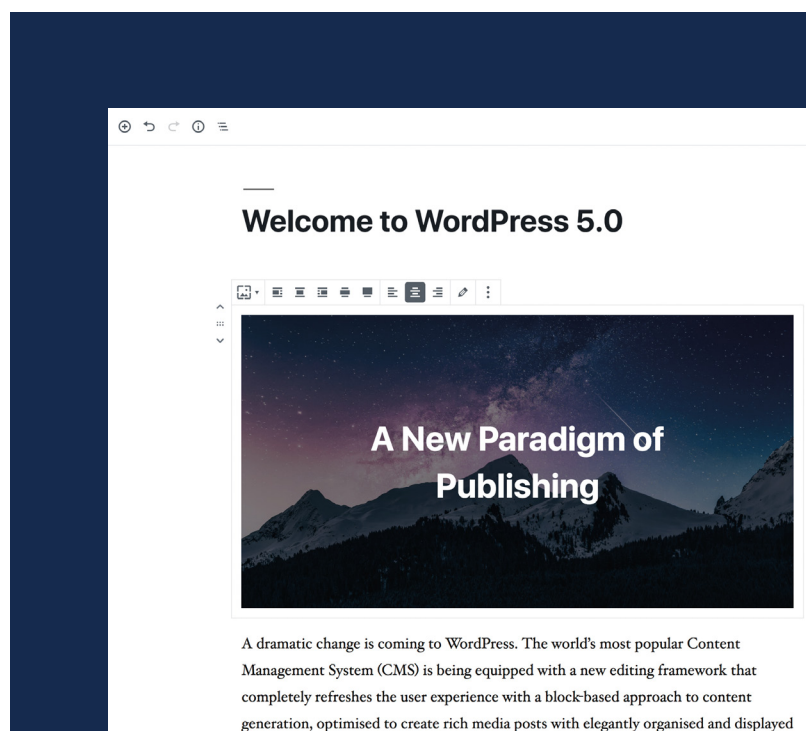
WordPress' new block model:

- Modernises the way content creation happens on WordPress, introducing a distraction-free editorial workspace and a new user experience and interface
- Creates elegant and consistent post layouts defined by pre-, auto-, or manually filled blocks
- Enables developers, designers, and content creators to use better tools to do their jobs more effectively

- Provides a faster, frictionless editing experience to make content manipulation more efficient
- Enables you to work intuitively to create content on pages with drag and drop boxes, and newly exposed support for embeds
- Opens a brand new avenue for the creation of custom features as plugins, custom code within themes, or as blocks to share and build upon

¹ <https://wordpress.org/gutenberg/handbook/reference/design-principles/>

Below:
The Gutenberg editor (cover block photo by Benjamin Voros on Unsplash).



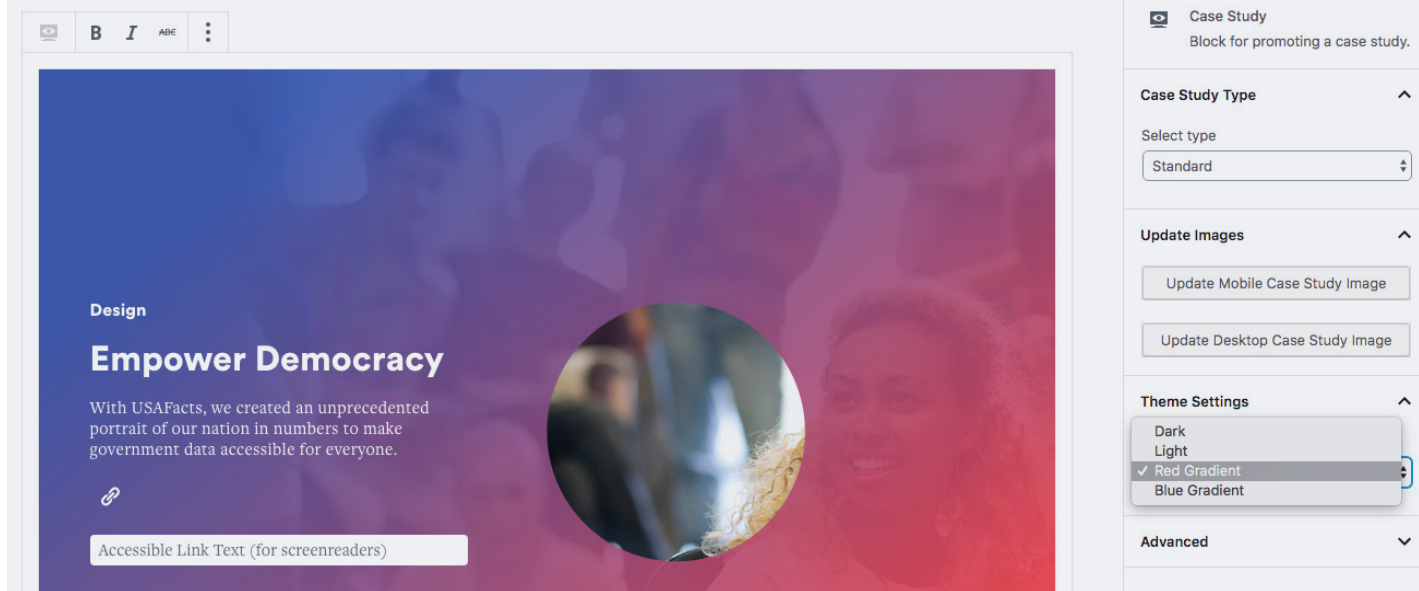
‘The smart CMS’ inside the Digital Experience Platform

Today in enterprise organisations, the ‘digital experience platform’ (DXP) is being presented as the new hub of business innovation and as an evolutionary next step from the CMS, promising to deliver ‘AI-powered personalised experiences at scale’. And while the CMS remains a huge part of DXP, it’s not necessarily the main driver.

The underlying motivation driving DXP is to provide smart solutions capable of offering interoperability with other technologies and services, and help drive engagement, conversion, and business value.

As demand for more specialised tools grows, WordPress can differentiate itself by focusing on its own specialism: creating, ingesting, distributing, editing, analysing, and manipulating content – through a flexible, reusable Gutenberg block model, and a powerful REST API.

Combined with a range of microservices and tools embedded inside WordPress, it can deliver the ‘smart CMS’ solution with all the benefits of open source software.



Artefact and the block editor

Delivering a unified publishing experience for a world-class design agency

Artefact is an award-winning design agency headquartered in Seattle, Washington.

Founded by Rob Girling and Gavin Kelly in 2006, Artefact has grown into one of the leading independent design

firms globally, serving clients such as Microsoft, Magic Leap, Hyundai, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Seattle Children's Hospital.

Artefact specialises in purpose-driven work in the space of ethical, inclusive and responsible product, service, and systems design. This includes user experience design, VR-powered healthcare innovation, and wearable technology. The company has been named one of [Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies of 2018](#) and [Seattle Business Magazine's Best Place to Work](#) twice in three years.

*Above:
Gutenberg in
action on the
Artefact website.*

Breaking free from inherited technical dept

At the time they reached out to us, Artefact had hit a systemic barrier with content creation on their website.

Their previous website had already benefited from WordPress' innate flexibility as a CMS, yet their editorial experience lacked the functionality and flexibility required to create the visually compelling pages Artefact needed.

They experienced a lot of friction and inefficiencies in their content creation and publishing workflows, and were still required to paste HTML into a classic WordPress editor: defying the general purpose of a usable CMS, which is to separate content from code in the first place.

Artefact's frontend team was ready to implement a captivating redesign on their website; all that was missing was an adequate toolset on the editorial end.

An editorial experience to drive engaging pages and power exceptional visuals

Human Made augmented Artefact's engineering team for a time-sensitive relaunch of their company website, and introduced WordPress' new block editor as the foundation for a fresh publishing paradigm: enabling Artefact to build complex designs on a flexible codebase.

The block architecture model and the custom blocks Human Made built to reflect Artefact's engaging and innovative page designs provided modern publishing tools and more efficient and streamlined workflows for everyone, from marketers to designers.

This empowered Artefact's team to iterate on their redesign with increased speed, and publish engaging content to delight their visitors with confidence. Our team augmentation over

the course of the project enabled Artefact's developers to take over after we had left, implement changes on existing custom blocks, and create new ones from scratch when needed.



"Human Made was a dedicated and trustworthy partner that understood Artefact's unique website goals and was with us every step of the way in realizing our vision. From their helpful recommendations to their flexible and responsive adaptability to our priorities, Human Made helped make the website reinvention process as productive and positive as possible. We are hugely grateful to all of the Human Made developers who joined forces with Artefact to make our new website a reality."

Hannah Staton,
Director of Marketing and Communications at Artefact





Changes and challenges

Gutenberg is here to stay – are you ready for it?

WordPress' evolution from an original blogging platform to a fully featured, flexible multimedia CMS, and latterly into a powerful application development framework, has confounded critics. As a publishing tool, WordPress has dominated in the sheer volume of its user base and is the most widely used CMS, and most popular publishing platform in the world. In many

ways, WordPress' familiar editing interface is the very definition of a user-friendly CMS.

As much as the block model is set to accelerate that development, it's clear that major changes in a well-established ecosystem can raise challenges for many users. The engagement of the wider WordPress community with the Gutenberg project has illuminated many of these challenges; well-articulated concerns have been clearly voiced and many of these concerns have since been addressed.

*Above:
Joe Hoyle, CTO
and Partner at
Human Made,
on stage at
WordCamp
Europe 2016.*

Backwards compatibility

Backwards compatibility describes software or hardware that is built to work with previous versions and continues to support features and functionality native to that of its predecessors. Backwards compatibility is a key WordPress feature and has been a huge focus, as well as a powerful differentiator, between WordPress and other competing CMSs.

Gutenberg has been developed alongside WordPress core and was merged into WordPress 5.0 by the end of 2018. At this point Gutenberg is fully compatible with all your existing WordPress content. However, some plugins and themes need to be updated to ensure they work smoothly with the new editor. For this reason, it's advised that you check the functionality and compatibility of all your plugins with Gutenberg if you haven't done so yet. For sites relying on incompatible third-party components, the 'Classic Editor' plugin [will be officially supported until the end of 2021.](#)

Transitioning legacy code

For enterprises who have built a substantial amount of custom work into their WordPress editor, some of the bespoke functionality may no longer be necessary; or additional work will be required to ensure a seamless integration with Gutenberg. For those teams the solution is to start looking deeply into how the functionality they've built into their systems will be impacted by Gutenberg.

On the other hand, enterprises migrating their networks over to WordPress from a different CMS will find a huge selection of additional features now provided by Gutenberg straight out of the box, many of which used to require a lot of custom work.

At Human Made, we've been working with blocks since 2017, and we've already seen huge acceleration in the development of simple ideas. Because there is a consistent set of interaction patterns across blocks, we've experienced easier, better, and faster UX optimisation.



Blocks of opportunity: What's next?

A unified design language empowering content creators, editorial staff, and developers alike

Gutenberg has started out as an editing tool, but it is rapidly becoming the foundation for customising and building websites across the whole WordPress platform. Since the project started, the block editor has been presented as

a bold and ambitious plan to modernise WordPress' editorial experience and revolutionise the way we create and publish content on the web.

Before WordPress 5.0, there have been almost as many models for interacting with page elements (widgets, menus, images, etc.) as there are elements. Creating an interaction with a single consistent model will naturally improve usability. However, it's the architectural and technical improvements that will be the most profound change for enterprise users.

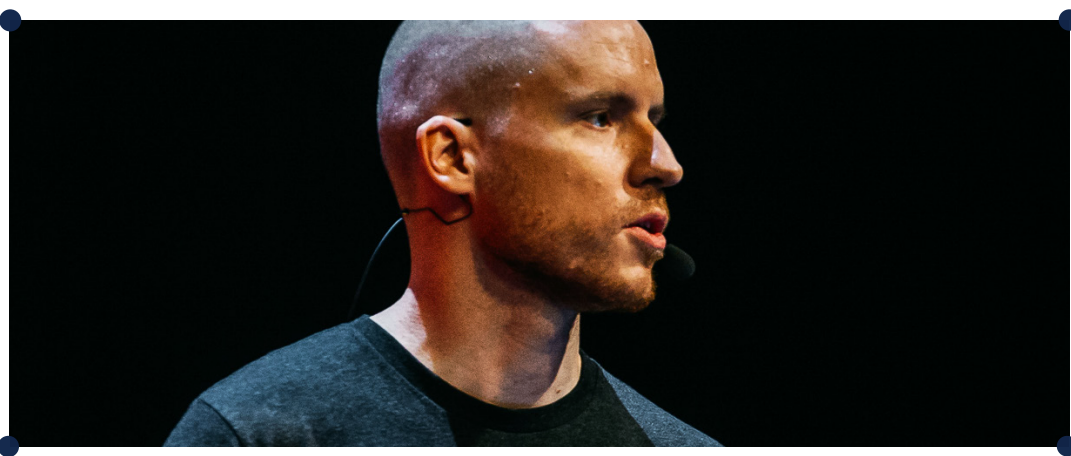
Block templates, defined in plugins and themes, have the capacity to be created with a rigid and pre-set structure

*Above:
Noel Tock, CGO
and Partner
at Human
Made, works
on his keynote
presentation,
'The Future of
WordPress'
for WordCamp
Tokyo 2018.*

or built flexibly from a variety of block options. Being the first project in WordPress' core using the REST API, Gutenberg can change the way we interact with websites as a whole; it offers an explosion of possibilities to propel WordPress

forward, and it is changing the way developers build digital experiences on WordPress.

The block editor was a key element of the major core WordPress release 5.0. That release has delivered a



"If there's a specialised tool for every need inside a tech stack then WordPress' specialisation is content: ingesting, creating, editing, analysing, manipulating, enhancing, and distributing content."

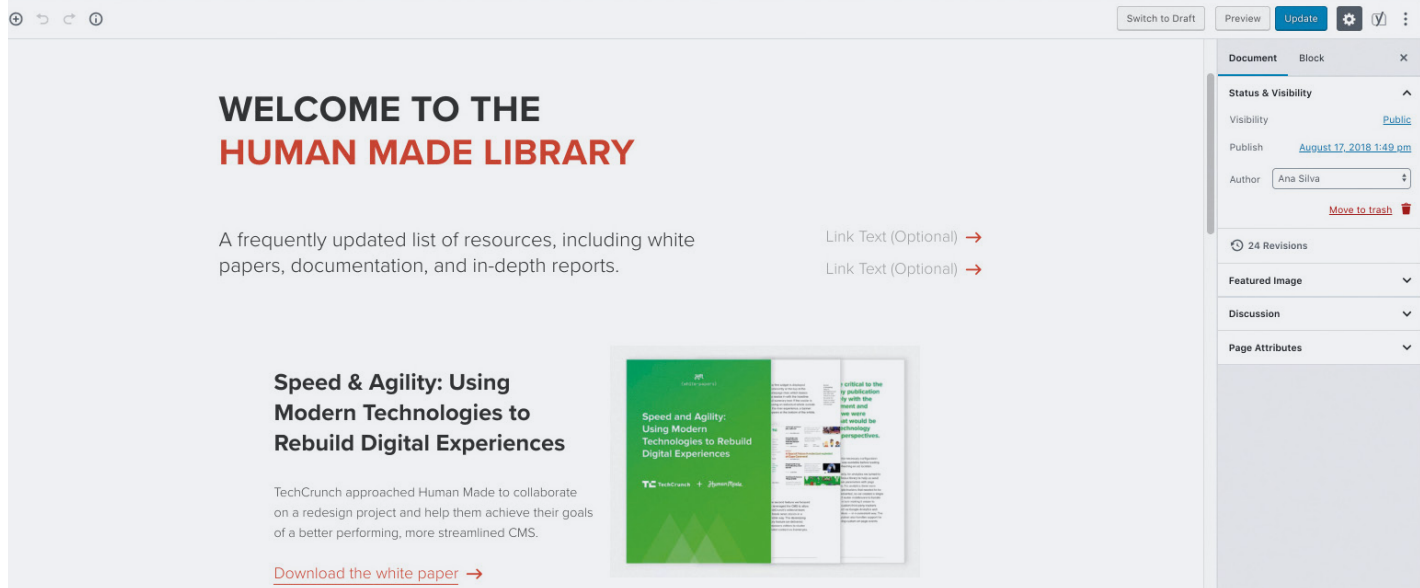
Noel Tock,
Partner and CGO at Human Made

completely refreshed editing experience and content model, with complete backwards compatibility for all content, and options to revert back to the Classic Editor with one click of a button. It has been a bold but considered step forward for WordPress, and a great first step in this transformational journey.

Gutenberg has made a dramatic entrance in the WordPress world because it stands to propel WordPress forward into a future that – to some – seems very new. But the vision for its content model is broad and the technical ambition profound enough that we all stand to benefit from this leap into the future. The block editor is reimagining content generation to move away from shortcodes and a singular HTML blob, recognising that the modern digital publishing stack requires

not rich text documents, but collections of independent, reusable objects that can be delivered inclusively to users on all ends of the technical and geographical spectrum. We're now seeing the fruits of that bold investment in a dramatic refresh of the world's most popular CMS.

With the block editor, WordPress looks substantially different compared to its last ten years, showing us some of the most exciting opportunities for the future.



Human Made: WordPress, Gutenberg, and OSS

Bringing the best of open source to big publishers and enterprise

Human Made have taken a 'Gutenberg-first' approach early on. Since 2017, we have explored how the new block editor can be at the core of the solutions we propose to our clients.

Integrating Gutenberg on our own site in January 2018 enabled

us to get first-hand experience of the editor, and the flexibility it provides, including some of the functionality necessary to ensure a site is usable and visually appealing. Although still in development at the time, Gutenberg has proven to be an extremely promising solution to many of our enterprise clients' requirements.

Human Made have been at the forefront of WordPress' transition towards tools like Node, React, and Webpack. We have released several projects that make it easier to use React within WordPress in the past; with Gutenberg, we have continued to explore state-of-the-art techniques, like Hot Module Replacement – a

*Above:
Gutenberg on
the Human
Made website
(Resources page).*

process that allows developers to dramatically speed up prototyping work and code iterations. A developer can now rapidly iterate on block code, achieving all the benefits of hot module reloading in a WordPress-specific context. This creates more efficient testing workflows, enabling developers and website owners to make experimental changes quickly and with less overhead.

Since its earliest days, we have made the block editor a first-class citizen within our development process at Human Made, and its positive reception by our clients has exceeded our expectations.

Human Made and WordPress

WordPress is an open source content management system used to power millions of sites, blogs, and applications. Its extensibility, speed of innovation, and mature development community are just some of the things that make it the most popular CMS in the world, powering over 33% of the web.

The WordPress software is a highly-flexible and customisable open codebase, allowing you to build sites with modern technologies such as React or Node. It has evolved dramatically from a simple blogging platform, and has continued to expand its presence in the enterprise space, competing with technologies such as Drupal and Sitecore. With the merge of the REST API in core, WordPress experienced an explosion in the number and complexity of integrations possible, significantly expanding its capacity as a robust, scalable, and extraordinarily flexible platform.

Not only does it remain the most popular CMS in the world, it's flexibility means it's used by some of the most visited sites in the world and has been instrumental in the development of online platforms for huge brands such as **News UK**, **TechCrunch**, and **USA Today**. WordPress has broad appeal and has continuously demonstrated its capacity to modernise and evolve.



Above:
*The Human
Made team
during a
company
retreat in Sri
Lanka, in 2019.*

Human Made

altis

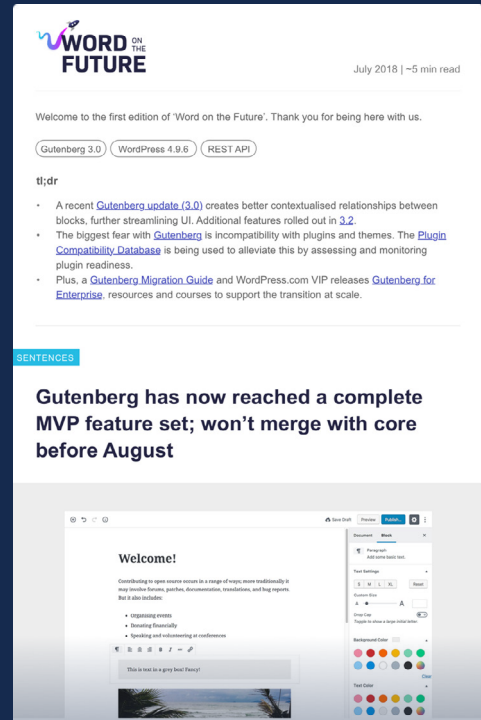
Human Made is an award-winning, global WordPress agency and leading providers of digital experience platforms for enterprise.

Altis is our next-generation digital experience platform: backed by 10+ years of globally recognised engineering excellence building solutions for enterprises and leading brands. With deep roots in open source, Altis is a proven end-to-end enterprise-augmented WordPress platform.

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