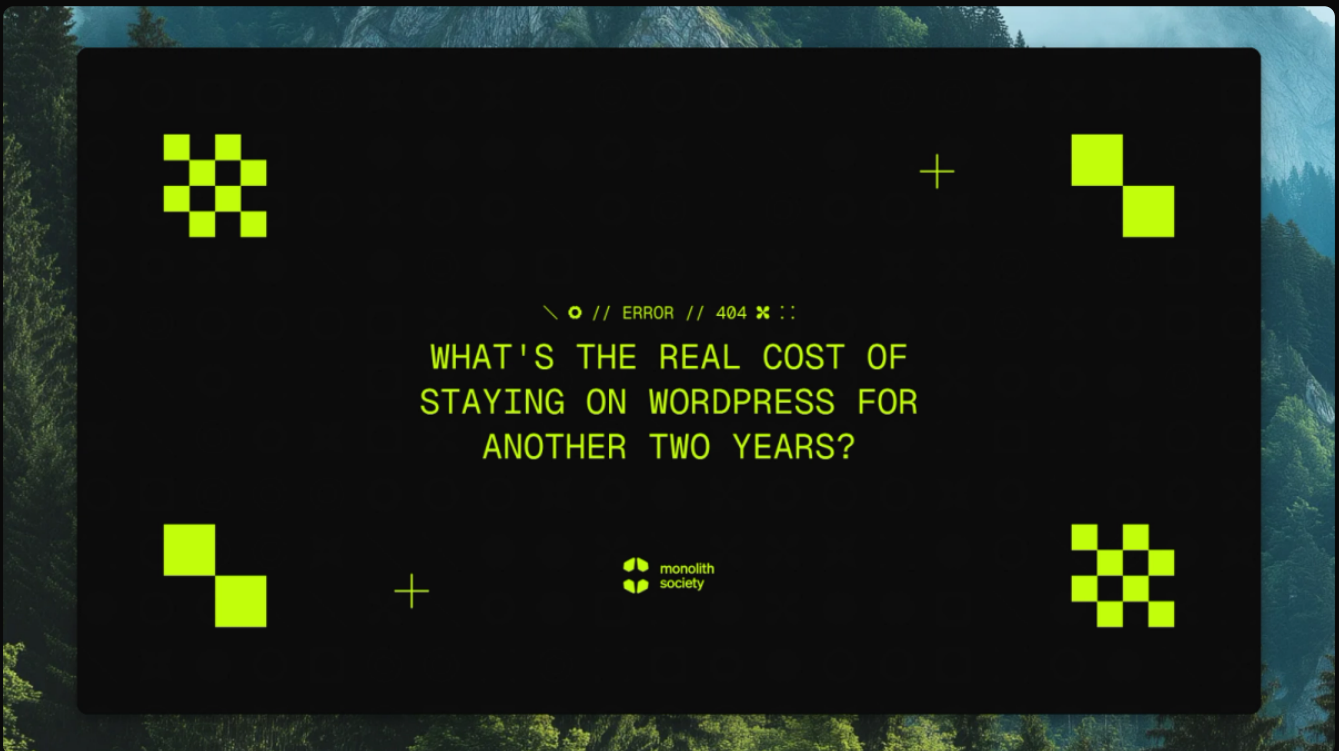


MARCH 8, 2026

# What's the Real Cost of Staying on WordPress for Another Two Years?

It's not just hosting and plugins. It's security incidents, developer bottle-necks, lost speed, and a growing AI visibility gap. Here's the math.



Let's start with something that might feel uncomfortable: your WordPress website probably works. Pages load. Content gets published (eventually). It hasn't been hacked (that you know of). It's fine.

And that's exactly why it's so expensive. Because "fine" is the most dangerous state a business asset can be in. It's not broken enough to demand attention, but it's not good enough to actually drive growth. So it just sits there, quietly costing you money in ways that never show up on a line item.

This article isn't going to trash WordPress. It powers 43% of the web. SEJ / W3Techs 2025 It's an incredible piece of software that changed the internet. For certain use cases, it still makes sense.

But for established businesses with \$10M+ in revenue, complex content needs, and real growth ambitions? The cost of staying is higher than the cost of leaving. Here's why.

## How much does WordPress maintenance actually cost?

The software is free. Everything else isn't.

For a business-grade WordPress site, expect to pay \$200–\$800 per month for ongoing maintenance — hosting, plugin updates, security monitoring, backups, and basic support. Nitramix 2025 That's \$4,800–\$19,200 over two years just to keep things running.

But that number only covers the basics. It doesn't include the developer time you spend on content changes. It doesn't include the premium plugin renewals — typically \$300–\$800 per year for the essentials like security, forms, SEO, and page builders. Splendid Web 2025 And it doesn't include the emergency fixes when something breaks after an update.

Here's what that maintenance time actually looks like in practice: WordPress sites need core, theme, and plugin updates 1–2 times per month. Each update cycle takes 15–30 minutes when nothing breaks. Marketpath But things break. Regularly. A plugin update conflicts with a theme. A PHP version change breaks a form. A security patch disables a feature your sales team relies on.

None of this is adding value to your business. It's not content. It's not campaigns. It's not revenue. It's just maintenance — keeping the engine from falling apart.

Compare this with a headless CMS setup. Sanity's free tier covers most small-to-mid projects. Hosting on Vercel has a generous free tier for most sites. There are no plugins to update. No themes to patch. No database to optimize. The ongoing cost is the retainer with your implementation partner — and that retainer goes toward building new features and content, not patching old ones.

**The difference:** WordPress maintenance dollars maintain the status quo. Headless retain-er dollars build toward something.

## How big is the WordPress security risk — really?

This is where the numbers get alarming.

In 2025, Patchstack tracked 11,334 new vulnerabilities across the WordPress ecosystem. Patchstack 2026 That's a 42% increase from the 7,966 vulnerabilities found in 2024. Patchstack 2025 And the severity is increasing too — more high-severity vulnerabilities were found in 2025 than in the previous two years combined. Patchstack 2026

Here's the structural problem: 91% of these vulnerabilities are found in plugins. Patchstack 2026 And 92% of all successful WordPress breaches in 2025 came from plugins and themes, not from WordPress core. Developpress 2025

WordPress core is actually reasonably secure. The WordPress Security Team does good work. But WordPress core doesn't do much on its own. You need plugins for forms, SEO, security, caching, page building, analytics, e-commerce — the average business site runs 20–30 plugins. Each one is an independent codebase maintained by an independent developer. Each one is a potential attack vector.

A Melapress security survey found that 64% of WordPress site owners have experienced at least one breach, and 96% have dealt with some form of security incident. Melapress 2025 That's not a small minority having bad luck. That's almost everyone.

And the threat is getting smarter. December 2025 saw a 45% increase in brute force attacks, largely driven by AI-enhanced botnets that can bypass traditional CAPTCHA systems. Developpress 2025

Perhaps most concerning: Patchstack found that more than half of plugin developers who were notified about a vulnerability didn't patch the issue before public disclosure. Patchstack 2025 That means even if you're monitoring for vulnerabilities, the fix might not exist yet when the exploit goes public.

**What does this cost you?** A security breach means incident response (\$5K–\$50K+), potential data loss, regulatory exposure, SEO ranking damage, customer trust erosion,

and downtime. For a \$10M+ business, a single breach can cost more than a full platform migration.

## What is slow page speed costing you in revenue?

We covered this in our website diagnostic article, but it's worth putting the numbers in context here.

B2B sites loading in one second convert at three times the rate of sites loading in five seconds. HubSpot / Portent 2022 Over half of mobile visitors leave if a page takes more than three seconds. Site Quality 2025 And conversion rates drop roughly 4.42% for each additional second of load time. Huckabuy

Now here's the thing that WordPress advocates don't like to talk about: **WordPress is architecturally slow.** Every page request follows the same pipeline — database query, template assembly, plugin execution, HTML rendering. That pipeline has a performance floor. You can optimize it (caching, CDNs, image compression), but you're optimizing around a fundamentally slow process.

The average web page in 2025 weighs 2.67 MB on desktop. HTTP Archive / Web Almanac 2025 Most of that bloat comes from JavaScript and images — exactly what WordPress plugins and page builders pile on.

Modern headless architectures flip the model. Pages are pre-rendered at build time and served from a CDN as static HTML. No database queries. No plugin execution. No server-side rendering on every request. The result: consistent sub-one-second load times. That's not a marginal improvement. It's a different category of performance.

Let's make this concrete. If your WordPress site loads in 4 seconds instead of 1 second, and you're losing roughly 4.42% conversion rate per extra second, you're giving up around 13% of your potential conversions. On \$500K in annual online-influenced revenue, that's roughly \$65,000 per year in lost conversions — just from speed.

Over two years, that's \$130,000. More than enough to fund a full migration.

# How much are developer bottlenecks costing your marketing team?

This is the cost nobody measures. And it might be the most expensive one on this list.

On WordPress, content and design are coupled together. Your words live inside templates. Changing the words often means touching the templates. Templates are code. Code means developer tickets.

Marketing teams on legacy CMS platforms spend roughly 20 hours per month just getting basic updates live. Ammo Studio 2025 That's 240 hours per year of marketing-team time spent on operational friction instead of campaigns, content, and revenue-generating work.

At even a modest \$100/hour loaded cost for marketing talent, that's \$24,000 per year in lost productivity. Over two years: \$48,000. For companies with larger or more expensive teams, it's significantly more.

But the financial cost is only half the story. The other half is the campaigns that never happened.

More than half of companies regularly miss deadlines because of approval delays and content workflow bottlenecks. zipBoard / Kapost & Gleanster And 40% of B2B marketers say their top challenge is creating content that drives the action they want. Content Marketing Institute 2026 The constraint isn't creativity. It's the gap between having an idea and getting it live on the website.

Think about the landing pages that didn't get built because the dev queue was full. The A/B tests that never ran because changing a headline required a code deployment. The competitive response pages that arrived two weeks late. The campaign ideas that died in a Slack thread.

You can't measure the revenue impact of campaigns that never launched. But your competitors — the ones on platforms where marketing publishes independently — are launching them.

# What does AI invisibility cost you starting right now?

This is the cost that's growing fastest — and the one most WordPress site owners haven't even considered yet.

AI referral traffic grew 7× between 2024 and 2025. SE Ranking 2025 AI platforms generated 1.13 billion referral visits in June 2025 alone — up 357% from the prior year. Exposure Ninja 2026 And visitors from AI platforms convert at 4.4 times the rate of traditional organic search visitors. Conductor / Semrush 2025

Here's the problem for WordPress sites: AI search engines like ChatGPT and Perplexity don't execute JavaScript. They parse raw HTML and structured data. WordPress sites that rely on page builders (Elementor, Divi, WPBakery) render content through JavaScript, which means AI crawlers often can't read the content at all. The site is literally invisible to the fastest-growing search channel on the internet.

And even for WordPress sites that serve mostly HTML, the content is typically unstructured — blog posts in one format, landing pages in another, case studies in a third. AI engines favor structured, consistent, semantic content. That's what headless CMS platforms produce by default.

The competitive dynamics matter here. Only 12% of URLs cited by AI platforms also rank in Google's top 10. Ahrefs / Position Digital 2025 Meaning: your competitors who invest in AI-readable content architecture are building an entirely separate visibility channel that your WordPress SEO won't touch.

And the trend isn't slowing. ChatGPT now sends more referral traffic than Reddit or LinkedIn. Conductor / Ahrefs 2025 Every month you stay on a platform that's invisible to AI is a month your competitors are building an advantage you'll have to catch up to.

## What does the total two-year cost look like?

Let's add it up. Here's a conservative estimate for a \$10M+ company staying on WordPress for another two years versus migrating to a headless CMS stack.

**Conservative total for staying on WordPress: \$108K–\$295K+ over two years.** And at the end of those two years, you have the same WordPress site, probably due for another rebuild.

**Migration cost: \$30K–\$80K one-time, plus \$3K–\$8K/month retainer.** But that retainer goes toward building new features and content, not patching old ones. And at the end of two years, you have a permanent content infrastructure that won't need rebuilding.

The math isn't even close.

## When does it actually make sense to stay on WordPress?

We said we'd be honest. So here's the honest answer: WordPress still makes sense for some businesses.

**Stay on WordPress if:** You have a simple site with under 50 pages. You have a dedicated WordPress developer on staff who handles updates and security. You don't need content to flow to multiple channels. Page speed isn't a competitive factor in your market. And you're not worried about AI search visibility.

**Consider migrating if:** Your marketing team can't publish without a developer. Your site takes more than 3 seconds to load on mobile. You've been breached or had security scares. You've rebuilt the site more than once already. You're invisible in AI search while competitors aren't. Or you're planning to scale the business and the website can't keep up.

The tipping point is usually somewhere around \$10M in revenue. Below that, WordPress's lower upfront cost makes sense because the opportunity costs are smaller. Above that, the hidden costs of staying — security, speed, bottlenecks, AI invisibility — compound fast enough that migration pays for itself.

## Frequently asked questions

## How much does it really cost to maintain a WordPress website per year?

For a business-grade site: \$2,400–\$9,600 per year in direct maintenance costs. Add developer time for content changes, premium plugin renewals, and security incidents, and the true cost for a \$10M+ company typically reaches \$50K–\$150K+ per year when you include lost productivity and conversion penalties.

## Is WordPress still secure enough for a business website?

WordPress core is reasonably secure. But 91% of vulnerabilities are in plugins, 92% of breaches come from plugins/themes, and 64% of WordPress site owners have been breached. The plugin dependency model is structurally insecure — each plugin is an independent attack surface you're responsible for monitoring.

## Why is my WordPress site slow even with good hosting?

Because every page request queries a database, assembles templates, executes plugins, and renders HTML server-side. That pipeline has a performance floor regardless of hosting. Modern headless architectures pre-render pages and serve them from a CDN, eliminating that entire pipeline.

## Can I make my WordPress site visible to AI search engines?

Partially. You can add structured data via plugins, ensure your robots.txt allows AI crawlers, and minimize JavaScript-rendered content. But if your content is built with Elementor, Divi, or similar page builders, the rendered HTML is often semantically meaningless to AI parsers. Headless CMS platforms produce structured, semantic content by default — AI readability is architectural, not something you can retrofit with a plugin.

## When does it make sense to stay on WordPress?

When you have a simple site under 50 pages, a dedicated WordPress developer, no multi-channel content needs, and speed and AI visibility aren't competitive factors. For

most businesses under \$5M with simple content needs, WordPress remains reasonable. Above \$10M with growth ambitions, the total cost of ownership almost always exceeds the cost of migrating.

## What's the alternative to WordPress for established businesses?

Headless CMS architecture — platforms like Sanity paired with Next.js. Content lives in a structured system, separate from the website. Marketing publishes without developers. Pages load in under 1 second. Content is AI-readable by default. Redesigns only require rebuilding the frontend — content persists forever. Upfront cost is higher (\$30K–\$80K), but three-year TCO is often lower.