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Switching WordPress themes without losing the site

WordPress & CMS

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Switching WordPress themes without losing the site

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Changing theme does not delete your content. Pages, posts, images, comments and users all stay where they were. What changes is the presentation, and it is at the edges of that presentation that things go missing.

What survives and what does not

Stays untouched	Has to be redone
Pages, posts and categories	Menus, or at least where they sit: every theme has its own locations.
Images and media library files	Sidebar and footer widgets.
Users and comments	Customiser options: logo, colours, header image.
General settings and permalinks	The front page, if the old theme had a layout of its own.
Plugin configuration	Anything built with blocks or shortcodes that belonged to the old theme.

Content built in a theme's own page builder stays locked to that theme.
If your pages were assembled with a tool that shipped with the theme, switching leaves square bracket codes or runs of plain text on the page. Nothing was lost: there is simply nobody left who knows how to draw it. Either you go back, or you rebuild the pages.

The order that avoids surprises

1. **Take a backup before touching anything.** Files and database. See **making and keeping your own backup**.

2. **Photograph what you have.** Screenshots of the menu, the sidebars and the front page. You will need them to rebuild, and memory lies.

3. **Install the new theme without activating it**, and use the preview to see *your* content inside it.

4. **If the site matters, rehearse somewhere else first.** See **a test site before touching what is live**.

5. **Activate**, and from here on work quickly: visitors are already seeing it this way.

6. **Put the menus back** under Appearance, Menus, assigning each menu to the right location in the new theme.

7. **Put the widgets back**, and the customiser options: logo, colours, typeface.

8. **Walk the site**: front page, an inner page, a post, a search result, and a page that does not exist. Those five screens are where the defects show.

9. **Look at it on a phone.** Most visits come from there, and that is where a new theme usually falls apart.

Switch on a quiet day, not on a Friday afternoon.
If something goes wrong you will want time and a cool head to fix it.

After the switch

Clear the caches: the caching plugin, if you run one, and the browser. If you have a delivery network in front of the site, clear that too, or you will keep seeing the old theme and think the switch failed. See **the cache that fools you**.

Check the speed as well. Themes stuffed with animations and web fonts cost you on every visit: **what actually makes a difference**.

NEED A HAND?

Switched theme and the site is unrecognisable? We keep daily backups and can help you step back.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **WordPress hosting**
- **Website creation**
- **Support Policy**

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