



TURNKEYWEBSITES

BLUEPRINT

TECHNICAL HANDBOOK

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Affiliate Disclosure: Some of the links in this book are affiliate links, meaning that at no additional cost to you I will earn a commission if you click through and make a purchase.



This book is intended for website professionals who have experience building websites for clients, specifically on the WordPress platform. If this is not you, this book will not make much sense and you can move on to other things. If this describes you, read on because this may change your life and business for the better!



INTRO

Welcome to the Turnkey Websites Blueprint Technical Handbook! I put this book together as a bit of a “brain dump” of all the resources and tech I’ve used to run my successful turnkey website operation.

I’ve earned over \$100k **on the side** of my regular web consulting work with my turnkey system. The best part is that, at this point, the whole process is automated! I spend no more than an hour or two a week maintaining the system and answering customer inquiries.

This didn’t come easy though. I spent nearly a year building out the turnkey system before I ever opened it up to my first paying customer. I spent that year experimenting with different plugins, wasting a lot of money, and going through a lot of trial and error.

Eventually I settled on the successful system I use now.

You don’t need to go through the same painstaking process. I want to save you all those months of trial and error and show you the exact tools I’ve found to be the most successful in building your own turnkey website business.

That’s what this book is about.

What Is This “Turnkey Websites” Thing?

Before going any further, I should define what exactly a turnkey website system is. This definition is completely my own, but I use it to establish the term so we can all move forward on the same page:

Automated Turnkey Websites: A website you build once and sell to multiple customers in a specific niche. It is delivered to customers in an automated fashion so as to minimize the amount of time needed for maintenance. It is sold at an affordable price to attract clients who can't afford a full custom website build, yet need a more customized solution than what other website platforms offer.

In other words, you:

- ◆ Build a website template for a niche market.
- ◆ Automate the site for easy maintenance and customization.
- ◆ Sell it at an attractive price to the niche market.

You may also hear this type of system referred to as WaaS, which stands for "Websites as a Service," a term that refers to the similarity between this business model and that of a SaaS.

You can read more about the WaaS approach in [this article](#) I wrote for WP Elevation. Now that you know what you're building, let me talk a bit about the turnkey website network that I built.

About Tech Site Builder

About 4 years ago, I started selling Tech Site Builder, which consisted of a WordPress (WP) theme and some training videos walking people through how to install it on their own hosting server.

It was cumbersome to support because each user had a slightly different server setup, had the ability to install their own plugins, and things just didn't stay consistent.

I knew simply selling a theme wasn't what I wanted to do. I thought there had to be a better way—a win-win where I could provide a consistent experience for my customers and also reap the benefits of a recurring revenue business model.

That's when I had the idea to build a turnkey system that would allow my customers to sign up for a website that they could configure on their own, but be hosted and maintained by me "on the back end."

Tech Site Builder has now been running as a turnkey platform for about 4 years and it's been a lot of fun to watch it grow. It now provides a steady, predictable side income for me that I can continue to grow as much or as little as I want.

On top of that, my customers are thrilled with the experience. They especially love that they still have control over their website, but don't need to worry about hosting, security, and updates.

The Dawn of "Turnkey Websites Blueprint"

It occurred to me that turnkey systems are a great business niche for part-time or full-time web consultants who are looking for a way to serve their lower-budget clients. I decided to start sharing the experiences of my own journey in order to help other web consultants build their very own turnkey website solution. That's what "Turnkey Websites Blueprint" is all about!

And this book is my attempt to compile a concise resource that will show you all of the tools you'll need to put together a turnkey website system like I did.

So, without further ado, let's get started!



PLATFORM

Before your journey begins, the first big technical decision that must be made is which platform you're going to use to deliver your websites to your clients.

The major benefit of a turnkey website system is that you have one (or a few) website configurations that you can easily "spin off" for your clients. That's the primary functionality that your choice of platform must be able to deliver.

Additionally, you can multiply the efficiency of your system by automating the entire process.

Finally, you want to be able to maintain all of the websites together for the sake of consistency.

When looking for a platform solution, you're looking for the ability to have your turnkey websites duplicated, automated, maintained, and remain consistent.

For this, I recommend using WordPress Multisite. But before I discuss why that is, let's look at some of the other options that are out there and why they don't quite fit the bill.

Cloning

The most straightforward solution is to simply build a website and then clone it. There are numerous ways to clone a website, such as using a server-side script or a duplicator plugin. Some hosts even offer the ability to copy a website with one click of a button.

This is a great solution for creating cookie-cutter websites that look the same when they're deployed, but issues can start to arise after that.

First of all, each website needs to use the full resources of a WP install, meaning a separate database instance and a separate install directory. On some managed hosting platforms, this means paying for an entirely separate account.

Secondly, there's no way to ensure consistency moving forward, especially when you want to deploy new features, plugins, or updates. Since each website is its own stand-alone WP install, even if you deploy everything exactly the same across all websites, there will naturally be some deviation amongst the websites over time.

Finally, management becomes costly and cumbersome once you reach a certain threshold. Currently, I have more than 150 websites on the Tech Site Builder platform. Managing all of those websites manually or using a service like ManageWP can start to get costly and prone to errors with that number of sites.

Multitenancy

Multitenancy is a specific software configuration that allows multiple websites to run off of one instance of WP. I'm honestly not an expert on multitenancy, and I think that's part of the problem.

In order to get this to work, you need to know the technicalities of server hosting and you'll need to configure it yourself on your server. WP-managed hosts don't support multitenancy, which means you'd need to set up and maintain your own server or virtual private server (VPS).

I think this approach is best if you're looking to save server resources for your custom client websites; for turnkey websites, it's probably a bit of overkill.

Plus, I'm not sure how you would automate the process for users to sign up and get a website. The goal of the platform is to be completely automated, and multitenancy doesn't quite cut it.

WordPress Multisite

I haven't found anything better than WordPress Multisite for automation, scale, and management.

Some reasons why I believe Multisite is the right platform for your turnkey solution:

1. It is a stable, well-supported platform.
2. Many plugins and services support it.
3. Many managed WP hosts support it.
4. Multisite is built-in to WP.
5. It's easy to keep your websites updated and consistent.
6. Theme updates and tweaks only need to be done once and they will apply to all of your websites.
7. No additional technical knowledge is required. If you can manage a WP website, you can learn to manage a Multisite install.

Note: When you install Multisite, you'll need to set it up to support subdomains (as opposed to subfolders) for your sites. This is crucial in order to allow your users to map their own domains.

Moving forward, I'll assume that you'll be managing your turnkey solution on Multisite.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [WordPress Multisite](#)



HOSTING

As the purveyor of a turnkey website system, you will essentially act as the web host for your clients, whether you like it or not. If their website goes down, they will look to you to fix it. No more handing off your client to third-party hosting support. You're it!

With that in mind, one of the most important decisions you'll make while building your turnkey website system is which hosting platform you'll build on. You can potentially have hundreds, or even thousands, of customers on your platform and you want to make sure that your hosting service is rock solid, both in performance and support.

Hosting Considerations

When choosing your host for a turnkey system, there are a few special considerations that need to be taken into account:

- ◆ **Multisite Support.** Does your host support multisite? Some hosting companies explicitly provide multisite installs and support, while others either explicitly don't support it or require you to install and configure it. While multisite is relatively easy to configure, it does take some technical knowledge, so it's best to find a host that will install it for you.
- ◆ **Test Environment.** A testing, staging, or development environment is a place where you can have an exact copy of your turnkey system to use for testing purposes. You can set one up yourself, but it can become cumbersome to copy the site back and forth yourself. Look for a host that offers one-click deployment to a testing environment.

- ◆ **Security.** Is security a priority for your host? Do they explain *exactly* what they do to make sure your environment is secure?
- ◆ **Wildcard Subdomains.** Part of the automation of the turnkey system is allowing users to map their own domain to their website. In order to be able to do this, each multisite needs to have its own unique subdomain (example: site1.turnkeysites.com). This is accomplished by the host using something called wildcard subdomains. Make sure your host supports this. Here's WP's explanation of what this is and why it's important: https://codex.wordpress.org/Configuring_Wildcard_Subdomains

For hosting, I recommend WPEngine. It fits all of the criteria above, plus they offer stellar support and stability. I've been running Tech Site Builder on WPEngine for years now and have had no problems with uptime or reliability. Their support staff has even helped me troubleshoot and resolve a few issues that weren't necessarily related to hosting. Best of all, a multisite install is only considered *one* WordPress installation, so you can have hundreds of websites and only pay for one hosting instance.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [WPEngine](#)



THEME AND PLUGINS

Now, let's get to the fun stuff: actually building out the website and setting it up to sell! You can tackle these in any order, but both the theme and plugins are necessary items in your system.

Theme

Theme selection and development is the piece of the puzzle where you'll have the biggest room for variance and creativity. The look of the theme will depend heavily on your client and industry niche.

While there are literally hundreds of choices you can make here, you'll want to keep a few things in mind:

- ◆ **Ease of Use.** The theme should be easy for a non-technical person to use. Remember, the whole point of offering a turnkey service is to remove the headaches associated with installing and configuring a theme.
- ◆ **White Label.** If you're using a third-party theme, ensure there's as little branding as possible to avoid confusion. You don't want your clients attempting to contact the original theme developer for support. An even better solution would be to develop your own theme so you have full control over all of these aspects.
- ◆ **Updates.** Make sure the theme is regularly updated (auto updates are a plus) and use a child theme to ensure your changes don't get overwritten by those auto-updates.

If your clients are tinkerers and love to have lots of choices to change the look of their website, then I recommend the Beaver Builder theme, which comes bundled with the excellent Beaver Builder page builder plugin (which I recommend later in the plugins section).

Otherwise, if you're using another page builder or simply don't like the Beaver Builder theme, another great theme is Astra Pro. It's light weight, flexible, and it's easy to make it look good. Although I don't personally use this theme, it comes highly recommended by other Turnkey Website builders.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Beaver Builder Theme OR Astra Theme](#)

Plugins

Now that you have a platform, host, and theme, you'll need to set up your turnkey website solution to allow visitors to sign up for a membership, make a payment, and access their website.

All of this can be accomplished with a few plugins.

The plugins I suggest below are multisite compatible, unobtrusive, and, if client-facing, minimally branded so that it looks like everything on the user's site is coming from your company. Some have free versions, but I recommend paying for the premium version whenever possible so you can get proper support and updates.

This is not a comprehensive list, and your specific needs may require more plugins. However, these are what I consider the bare-bones essentials to running a good turnkey system.

Site Subscription

This is the primary component that allows you to automate the entire onboarding process. This plugin will allow you to limit customer's access to features via different price packages. It will give your customers the ability to sign up for a subscription to pay for the access to a particular website package. Finally, it will create your customer's website automatically based on one or multiple templates you set up. The best plugin for this is WP Ultimo, which is purpose-built for turnkey websites.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [WP Ultimo](#)

White Labelling

It's important that you make the website look like it belongs to your company instead of WP. Why? You don't want your clients going off to WP support forums asking for help. You want them to come to you.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [WPMUDev Ultimate Branding](#)

Page Builder

The key to creating a completely automated system is to give your users the tools to make the site their own and build it out how they see fit. A page builder that you can white label is key to integrating this into your system.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Beaver Builder \(Agency Package\)](#)

Forms

Forms are typically a must-have item for websites, and your clients will expect this functionality. It's important that you find a form plugin that is easy for your customers to use and appears unbranded in the dashboard.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Gravity Forms](#)

(Note: This plugin takes a bit of extra configuration so that it works in a turnkey multisite environment. See [this article](#) for details.)

Dashboard Modifications

The default WP dashboard leaves a lot of confusing menus exposed to users. In a multisite environment, you'll be giving your clients administrator access to their sites, but you may not want to give them control over everything. You'll want to find a plugin that allows you to hide key areas of the default dashboard menu.

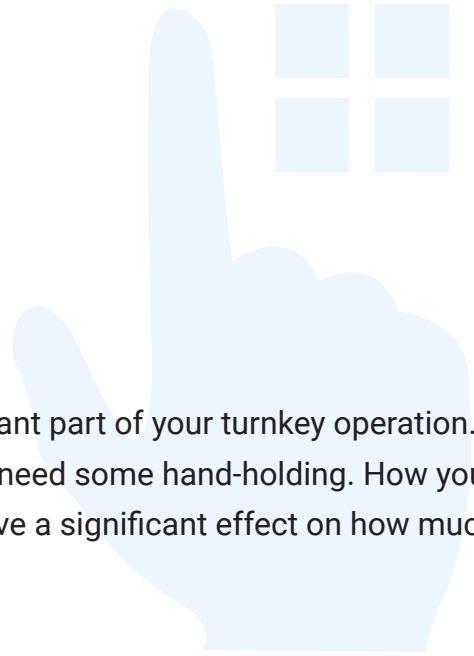


MY RECOMMENDATION: [User Role Editor](#) and [Admin Menu Editor Pro](#)



SUPPORT

Support is an extremely important part of your turnkey operation. Your clients will likely be non-technical and need some hand-holding. How you approach training and onboarding will have a significant effect on how much support you need to provide afterward.



Onboarding

A good automated onboarding sequence is key to ensure your customers feel taken care of while still allowing you to be removed from the process. I accomplish this with a series of videos and email sequences.

Videos

The videos should walk your client through setting up their site. The content of the videos will depend on the level of depth required to get the theme ready for prime time, but you should assume no prior technical knowledge. I find it best to just do a screen recording of me setting up the site and talking through what I'm doing.

To do the screen recording, I recommend [Screencast-O-Matic](#) for its ease of use and simplicity. Then you'll want to embed these videos somewhere in the dashboard of your client's site. For that, I recommend either Easy Support Videos or Video User Manuals (which also comes with a library of pre-recorded WordPress tutorials which may or may not be useful depending on your setup).



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Easy Support Videos](#) or [Video User Manuals](#)

Emails

I find that sometimes new users forget to log into their site or aren't sure how to get started. For these folks, I drip out a series of emails over time that prompt them with how to log into their website and what they need to do to "take it live," which includes watching the onboarding videos in the dashboard.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Active Campaign](#)

Extra Help (Upsells!!!)

The onboarding emails are also a good opportunity to mention any upsells or extra services you offer. Setting up a website may prove overwhelming to some of your customers so you should offer a premium concierge service in which you will set it up for them. I find this type of service sells best when it isn't mentioned up front, but instead is mentioned a few days after the customers sign up after they've seen first hand the work involved.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Gravity Forms with Stripe add-on \(Developer License\)](#)

Help Desk

No matter how awesome your onboarding is, there will inevitably be questions. It's imperative that you get a proper support desk system set up, but even more important than that is to have a solid Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section.

- ◆ **FAQ.** I've found having a robust FAQs section has a big impact on reducing the number of overall support requests that come in. People do actually read the FAQs, especially if you make the link to the page prominent in your user's dashboard and members area.
- ◆ **Help Desk.** There really isn't much to say about which help desk service you use, as long as you use *something*. You want to be able to track

issues. More often than not, the resolution to a help desk ticket will turn into an FAQ, so if you can use a system that has both help desk and FAQ integrated together, that will be very helpful.

Freshdesk combines both FAQs and a help desk into one system. What I really like about Freshdesk is that it also allows multiple “brands” under one account, so I can support both my regular web consulting clients as well as my turnkey clients all in one dashboard.



MY RECOMMENDATION: [Freshdesk](#)



CONCLUSION

Implementing these tools and putting them in place will get you started on the right track with your own turnkey website system. It most certainly takes a good bit of up-front work, but the final result will be a system that runs with little oversight, serves your low-budget clients, and provides real automated recurring revenue.

Continue to follow the blog on <http://www.turnkeywebsitesblueprint.com> for more content and resources for turnkey websites.

Happy automating!

Matthew Rodela

P.S. Here are a few more free resources we've put together to help you on your turnkey journey:

- ◆ [Turnkey Websites Blueprint Facebook Group](#)
- ◆ [Updated list of turnkey-compatible plugins](#)
- ◆ <http://www.turnkeywebsitesblueprint.com/contact/>