



Lesson #21

Packaging Your Theme

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WordPress Theme Guidelines

When developing for applications as a third party provider like we are doing here, we usually have to abide by a few simple things. The biggest part is the structure of your theme folder. In the Blog Theme Bootcamp theme, we have followed the structure perfectly so there is little else to do. There are a few additional things you should add to your theme before distributing and we will talk about them in this lesson.

While these are not rules set in stone but they help ensure uniformity. Every time someone downloads a WordPress theme they more or less know what to expect. If you do not follow the protocol then it creates a lot of confusion for users and work for you because they will want to come back to you for explanation. We want to avoid that.

Create A Screen Shot Of Your Theme

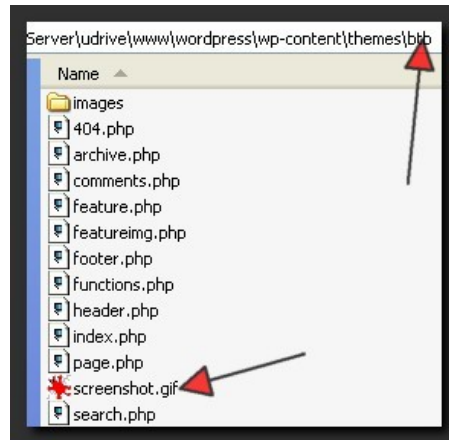
In our Blog Theme Bootcamp theme I have already included a screen shot of the theme so you don't have to do this. But you could if you wanted to. When you are creating a brand new theme of your own, you definitely should not skip this step. If you do, then when people go to activate the theme they won't be able to clearly pick out your theme.

I personally use Screenshot Captor. You can get it free from DonationCoder. If you want to get rid of the nag screen, all you need to do is make a little donation – at the time of writing, the amount is your choice – on their site and they will give you a lifetime license to use any of their software.

I like it because it includes a basic image editor that you can quickly add text, shadows or resize the image. In this case, you'll almost have to resize the screen shot of your theme after taking it.

Here's how to take a screen shot of your theme after you have created it.

1. Log in to your Sandbox. You should have your theme uploaded and activated if you've been working on it. If not, do so now.
2. Visit the Sandbox blog's home page.
3. Fire up your screen shot software and take a shot of the blog with your theme.
4. Resize the screen shot. Chances are, your screen shot would be too big to use. So resize it down to about 240 x 180 px. It doesn't have to be exact fit. You can make it a little larger around 300 width and it doesn't have to be the exact same dimensions either because WordPress will resize it for display on the Themes page anyway.
5. Save your resized screen shot as screenshot.png or screenshot.gif or screenshot.jpg. It doesn't matter what the file extension is (gif, png, jpg). What's really important: the file name **must** be screenshot. No ifs or buts about it or your screen shot will not be recognized by WordPress.
6. Copy screenshot.png/gif/jpg into your theme folder (no sub-folders). For example, our theme folder name is /btb/ we copy it into the /btb/ folder.



Making Sure Files Are In The Right Places

The WordPress theme structure is pretty simple. Theme files go into the theme folder and images go into the images folder inside the theme folder. There is rarely anything else or any additional folders... unless you want to get fancy.

When you buy premium themes, you will see some have complex folder and sub-folder structure. This is not necessary especially if you're converting a client's custom theme. If you get to a point where your skills advance enough to warrant additional non-standard theme files then you may want to use additional folders just to keep things neatly organized. Otherwise, don't sweat it.

Test Your Theme

There's no worse advertising for you and no worse experience for your clients than to have blog theme what breaks when viewed on different browsers. But it does happen to the best of us – I've been there many times. Which is why, always check, check and check some more.

Very often, after adding your client's content to a theme things change drastically because each site is different. For example, you get more Pages than you are expecting and the whole navigation at the top or sidebar goes out of whack. Or your client enters a picture that's too wide and pushes one of your columns all the way down. That's OK. It just means you need to fix it before revealing to your client.

If you are distributing to a large audience like WordPress theme directory or even on your own site, you never know how the theme is going to behave. Which is why in the beginning we try to add dummy posts with common factors in them like bulleted lists, numbered lists, images that are aligned left, right, centered or not aligned etc. This is also why we should create a README file which we will cover later.

At the most basic level, we have to ensure it displays well on as many browsers as you can test them on. [Browser Shots](http://BrowserShots.com/) is a site that would simulate various browser renditions. Just bear in mind that these are just simulations, not the real thing. Sometimes the design looks OK on Browser Shots but not on a real browser. Best thing is give a shout out to your friends and ask them to assist you, preferably with a screen shot.

Create Your **README** File

WordPress does not require you have a README. But it's always a good idea to help you minimize support. Your README file should be created in plain text. You can use Notepad or PsPad if you wish to create it. Doesn't matter as long as it is a .txt it'll be fine.

Do not use Word or any word processor. If you want to check for spelling mistakes and so on you can use a word processor to draft your README content but do not distribute your README file in a word processor format. It must be able to be opened by as many people as possible which is why we use plain text.

Before we do into that, what are we going to include in the README file? There are no rule here. It doesn't even have to be in any specific format. However, the following are what I suggest you include.

- Author name – yours or your company name of course
- Your URL
- Credit for any code, images and graphics
- License information – can others freely distribute it? Can they modify your work? A quick note about licensing. If you want to distribute on WordPress.org's theme directory your theme **MUST** be GPL license. Generally, that means anyone should be able to distribute and modify it. You still hold the copyrights but you can't dictate you must have a link back or that people can't put it on a CD or eBay and sell it. If the included images require additional licensing by users do state it here.
- Instructions – granted, most people should know how to install a WordPress theme and especially now with one click upload/install on WordPress 2.7, it is easy. Still, we have to assume they don't know how.
- A list of FAQ's – This is especially important if you use codes like `wp_list_pages` where you list all the Pages on the sidebar or any navigation buttons on the top. Explain how people can get rid of unwanted Page links

so they don't clutter up the navigation or mess up the design. If you have special plugins used in the theme, tell them where the plugins are from with URLs please so they can always grab a copy of the latest themselves. Don't forget to tell them plugins are supported by the individual plugin developers. Also, give instructions how to install those plugins.

- Any other information you feel should accompany the theme – you might also want to add a short advertisement blurb for your Blog Evangelist business giving information how to contact you if they want this fully customized or want someone to do it for them instead.

Include All Necessary Files And Folders

If your theme requires a plugin or any special Javascript to make it work please include them in your package. Plugin files should not go into your theme folder but **outside** of them. This is because they have to be installed separately. If you have external Javascript, those typically go **inside** the theme folder so that when the theme is installed, everything points to the right place.

ZIP It All Up

Run through your little checklist to make sure everything is good to go then zip it up. If you have a friend to help you, send them the zip file and ask them to install it without your help. If they can get it done without problems, you're ready to release it.

In our Blog Theme Bootcamp theme we don't have any plugins or external Javascripts. Our screen shot is already done. So I added a README template so you can see how the final zip looks like. [Download](#) the final basic theme to compare if you need to.

Next Lesson...

We are officially done with basic theme development and heading into

the third phase – adding on, improving and more advanced theme work. What you learn in this phase could be applied to just about any theme. Not just yours. So if you work with a lot of premium themes or themes from other developers this will help you a lot. We are going to kick this phase off with a lesson on installing WordPress in a different folder while giving the illusion it is installed in the main folder.

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