



Lesson #15

Versioning

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Foreword

In the process of working for your clients, often times you will find yourself editing work you or someone else has done earlier. Sometimes, these edits are minor and other times not so.

Any good web developer worth their salt will tell you, backup, backup, backup before you make changes. That is also my advise consistently to anyone who does this for yourself or for clients. I cannot emphasize this more.

But, how? When a client asks you to change the wording on a sidebar heading.

"Lynette, surely, you're not going to backup the whole web site and database just for a minor change."

Well... you could and for a long time that's how I did it too but then realized I was wasting too much resources. Why? Because some client web sites and blogs are huge. I mean just mega sized. Running the backup alone takes a long time let alone downloading it. Besides, you're eating up your clients' bandwidth doing that. Imagine if you have to do it several times a week? No way.

But you cannot be reckless either. Don't think just because it is one spelling error edit it won't hurt. Those of you who worked on web sites regularly know that it is these small edits that sometimes wreak the most havoc.

That's why I'm going to show you how to practice versioning. Versioning is a great way to do mini backups if you will of every file you edit. It also makes it super easy to roll back to the previous state if anything goes wrong. Versioning also creates a record of all the changes you made and finally, you save resources.

What is versioning?

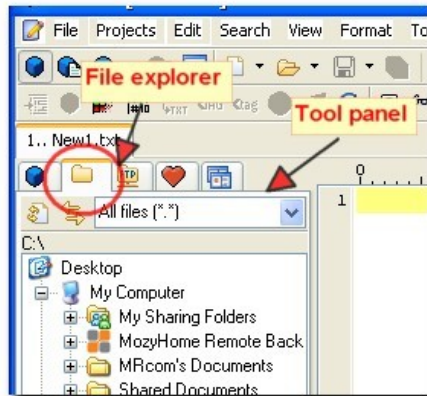
Briefly, it is a method of keeping different versions of the same file. When you compare two files, you can quickly pick out what changes were being made to each.

A great example of versioning is built right into Wordpress. From versions 2.6 and up, WordPress will keep a version of your post every time you save the file. Don't believe me? Log into any of your WordPress blogs, go to Manage >> Posts. Choose one that you've edited or changed recently. At the very bottom you will see a list of older versions of the same post.

How to do it

Versioning works for any file you can edit. From static HTML to scripts to WordPress themes. Even the files you use on your computer like your articles etc. But we're not going there. Since this is Blog Theme Bootcamp, I'm going to show you how to do versioning by using a WordPress theme as an example.

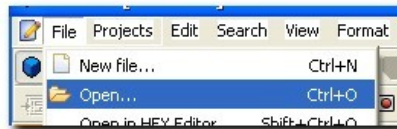
The process is super easy. First, you need to open PsPad. Click File >> Open from



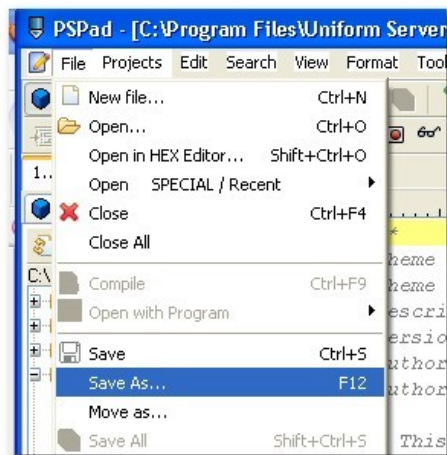
the menu, or click the built in file explorer in the tool panel.

Navigate to the theme you want to practice on. You should already know how to get there by now. Quick recap – mine is in [C:\Program Files \Uniform Server\www\wordpress\wp-content\themes\btb](#). If you are going to practice this on your Sandbox that is installed on your web host, use the built in FTP.

[Instructions are in the knowledge base.](#)



Open a file. Any file. It's not important. I will open style.css and suppose we are going to edit this file. Before we do anything, we will create an old version. On the PsPad menu, click File >> Save as or F12.



In the dialog box, add today's date to the end of the file name. For example. If today is January 2nd 2009, then you type -090102. This date format is very typical in many programming languages where the year comes first (09) then the month (01) then the date (02).

You don't have to follow this format exactly. Use a format you are most comfortable with. But whatever you use, make sure you **stick with it**. Do **not** mix and match formats or you will get really confused when you have to roll back several versions.

I like this format because it orders the files properly when you sort them. I used to write out the month name in short hand (jan) but when I had to sort and check all the changes I made by date, april, february and march files would be sorted first because computers are pre-programmed to sort by alphabet and numbers. This made it difficult to see which file came first. That is why I use this method because 09 will always be sorted after 08 and 01 will always be sorted before 15.

Back to the file name. My file name would now be:

`style-090102.css`



Click save. You should now see two stylesheets in your theme. The one you just created and the one that is active style.css.

Now we are ready to make the changes. Style-090102.css will be your old version. This is your backup. You do not edit this file. Instead, close it and re-open style.css. Make your edits here. Bear in mind that any changes you make on a live website will go into effect immediately.

When you're done with the edits, save style.css.

Now you have two versions. Old one (style-090102.css) and new (style.css). If you made a mistake that you need to roll back quickly, simply rename style.css to style-active.css and rename style-090102.css to style.css.

How's that for a quick put-it-back-together-again strategy? This also allows you some time to work out the possible problems in style-active.css and work on them.

Keeping versions like this makes it easy for anyone coming in after you too. Hopefully, you will keep your clients for a long time but sometimes we just aren't able to for a wide variety of reasons. Sometimes you may just need to go on vacation and bring in temporary help.

I've also found that doing versioning helps me trace my steps for old clients. Some clients will only contact you once in a blue moon. You can't always rely on your memory or paper work for all you've done in the past. Looking through the different versions is like peeling back an onion skin to re-trace your footsteps.

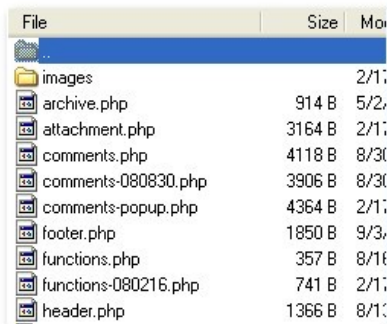
Cleaning up

After a while, you may have many versions of the same file. Once a year or once every six months if you prefer, you may want to archive them. My programmer does this every year on our scripts. He moves all the files that begin with 07 or 08 into a folder, name not important. If you want you can name it year-template-archive. e.g. 08-btb-archive.

He will either move this folder out of WordPress or wait till I download it and delete it off the server to conserve space.

How often you do this depends how often you work with a client. The ones who contact us once in a blue moon I don't normally bother. But the ones whom you work with every week, you might want to clean up every so often.

This is a live example of one of my blog's theme folder.



File	Size	Mod
images		2/11
archive.php	914 B	5/21
attachment.php	3164 B	2/11
comments.php	4118 B	8/30
comments-080830.php	3906 B	8/30
comments-popup.php	4364 B	2/11
footer.php	1850 B	9/30
functions.php	357 B	8/16
functions-080216.php	741 B	2/11
header.php	1366 B	8/11

As you can see I've edited the comments.php and functions.php files. The date I've done so is pretty clear.

But won't it hurt the theme?

Not at all. WordPress is smart enough to recognize which are theme files and which to ignore. So any file that does not match names that are in the theme hierarchy (index.php, author.php, archive.php, page.php, single.php etc) it ignores. So it won't hurt the theme at all.

In closing

This was pretty simple wasn't it? Sometimes the most helpful things are not that high tech at all.

As briefly mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, you can use versioning for anything in your business to keep things straight. It is not always easy to check back on work done before. Never trust your memory. There's just too much code and it is just not necessary to take up valuable space in your head to remember them.

Notes get lost and also because notes are not tied specifically to the theme or files in question it's often difficult to match your notes to the edits. Takes more time too. I've tried many methods and this is so far the best method for me. I hope it is for you too.

Next Lesson...

Time to get back on the horse. We will start 'phase 2' of our theme development next week. Now that the theme is functional, we will begin to flesh it out with other optional template files to make the theme more complete. Talk to you then...

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