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Transcript

Wynne Leon

Welcome to the sharing the heart of the Matter podcast, where we celebrate the storyteller in us all. I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode Vicki Atkinson and I are talking with author, Blogger and WordPress Pro Mark Petruska. This year is marks 15th year blogging on WordPress. Any blogged on a different platform before that? Clearly he is a pro. So he walks us through the many things that he's done to keep things fresh over the years. Switching themes, changing site names, even combining 2 blogs and changing URLs. His advice as a veteran? Know the purpose of your blog and keep it in mind as you redesign. Mark tells us about December snow and for us relatively new people to WordPress. It's some cool history. One of the takeaways that I love from this conversation is that Mark talks about site design as a creative act in and of itself. So if we are ever stuck in a riding rut, it's one idea to get us out. This is a really encouraging episode. That on the surface, is about the considerations behind designing a good site and all that goes into a WordPress blog. But really, it's about knowing your purpose and embracing change in any area marks. Long experience is both illuminating and emboldening. I'm confident you'll love the scenic and beautiful places we explore as we share the power of storytelling. Not only in our words, but also in our sight designs. We know you'll love it.

Mark Petruska

Hi, Mark. Hello Wynne. Hi Vicki.

Wynne Leon

So good to see you.

Mark Petruska

Likewise, it's been a while it has.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, but we're we are always happy to see you. Yeah.

Mark Petruska

Well, thank you. Same. How are you guys doing?

Wynne Leon

It's a Tuesday. I like Tuesdays.

Vicki Atkinson

Ohh that's good.

Mark Petruska

I've always said. It's the most underwhelming day of the week. If there's much of A personality.

Wynne Leon

Ohh. Hmm.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, yeah.

Mark Petruska

Monday, Monday Wednesdays, Hump day, Friday, TGIF. Thursday. Almost what does 2 mean for it?

Wynne Leon

Right, true.

Vicki Atkinson

True. Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's typically a podcasting. We do a lot of recording on Tuesdays, so you know, there's that, right.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Speaker

And so.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, yeah. I don't know.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Maybe its biggest virtue is that it's not Monday. Maybe that's it.

Mark Petruska

And that's huge. Not going to lie.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, for our friends that are listening or watching, we had a party discussion about all the discussions that we can have with you, Mark. But we decided to stick with what was planned for today. That doesn't mean that we. Don't kind of delve into uncharted territory

another time, but today we were going to kind of piggyback on an episode that we recorded not that long ago, when about. Really, having courage when it comes to making changes, not just, you know, with your WordPress theme or you know how you approach, you know bringing your content forward. And one of the things that went and I touched on and it was so good to connect with you about it Mark is that it's a balancing act. Even for Someone Like You, who is? You know a communications pro and we love that. You see all facets of storytelling and messaging. And you know what the intended outcomes are all of that, the metrics and all of that, because it is it's. A balancing act between the aesthetics and function, and I confess that I get really fearful about making changes because of all the lying downstream swirly stuff that that can play out. But you have been a longtime Blogger and you recently made some pretty expansive. Wholesale changes. So we'd love for you to kind of talk to us a little bit about the, the impetus to make the changes, but also how did you start and you know what, what's the game plan? You know, when you begin to do this, walk us through.

Mark Petruska

Well, the game plan is world domination, of course.

Wynne Leon

OK. Good to have those. Yeah, yeah.

Mark Petruska

I have to say it's kind of ironic that you guys wanted to talk to me about something that's even remotely design related just because in my professional career I've notoriously been the odd man out when it comes to anything related to graphic design. I've been on marketing teams where we've had to vote on logos, layouts, magazine covers, you name it, and. 10 times out of 10 I picked the one everyone else. Hates. I'm the guy who's gung ho over that comic Sans font that everyone else despises.

Speaker

So much.

Vicki Atkinson

Well, maybe that just means that you have a unique vision and people ought to be paying attention, you know, to maybe that outlier perspective, right.

Mark Petruska

I'm not going to argue with that. Thank you. I've just always kind of viewed Comic Sans as a cuddlier version of Ariel and everything love that. So give it.

Wynne Leon

Maybe yeah.

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

Break. Give the little guy a break. He's.

Wynne Leon

I he's cute.

Mark Petruska

Cute.

Vicki Atkinson

And you know you've descended into hell proper when you have a meeting with people and you're discussing fonts. I'm just telling you that's that's bad.

Mark Petruska

Maybe we should have stuck to the Uncharted topics.

Vicki Atkinson

Mm-hmm. Yeah, maybe.

Mark Petruska

No going back to the meat of your question though, I think all three matter form function and aesthetic. And basically what I'm trying to accomplish, whenever I switch up my theme or whatnot is just to keep things fresh. Obviously in my personal life, I've always embraced change and I would say the same goes to my online life as well.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. And I think you do that so well and and you do it with an intent to improve. But I also think from a reader's point of view, you're thinking about the audience and making your content accessible. That part matters to you too. And I think, you know from some of what you shared is also where some of the consternation.

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Comes from.

Mark Petruska

Very true. And every time I've made a change, it's just been because I've been trying to accomplish something differently. In the early days when I was just focused on blogging, I chose a very simple

theme. Just wanted to let the word shine and then at another point in my professional career, when I was promoting my freelance.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

MHM.

Speaker 2

MHM.

Mark Petruska

Services and looking for a new job as we were moving all across the country. At that point, I was focused more on a portfolio theme, adding a hire me page, that sort of thing. So obviously different WordPress themes are going to appeal to different needs and really most of the time that's what has been the driving force behind my decision to change up my theme.

Wynne Leon

MHM. Mm-hmm.

Mark Petruska

Today I'm happily working for cheese Gov. As you know, not looking for work. And I do have fiction to promote, though, so my theme today it's more of a combination of factors I want.

Speaker 2

MMMM.

Mark Petruska

The. Sign. But also if you want to buy my book or know more about me, even look at My Portfolio. It's all there online.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. And so each of each of those changes in purpose is driven your change in in theme, yeah. And I think that's great to start out with that purpose and vision. I mean, that's so good to have that driving. Bores.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. I think so too, because one of the things that we heard in comments from folks when, when, and I talked about this a couple weeks ago and you know I was so generous to actually, you know, give us some examples to look at is if you don't think about the navigation and the function of things and what you're trying to do, some themes will really disappoint you. And you will chase your tail

trying to make it do something that it was never intended to do. And so that's a little bit of what is the expression caveat emptor, buyer beware like, you know, right. Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yep.

Mark Petruska

Yeah. And honestly, just a lot of times I just wanted to freshen things up. You know, I get bored. The same old look all the time, so.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Are there any witches or things that you're really focused on when you change yours?

Mark Petruska

Do you think fix that?

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Say that.

Mark Petruska

There are. I like to have. To me, an easy way to find a blog archive, I always have a widget on there with a drop down menu where you can search, search by month and year, and I've been blogging so long that menu goes down and down and down.

Wynne Leon

MHM.

Mark Petruska

All the way back to December 2009, which by the way means next month is my 15th anniversary. Of this flow of this I've blogged elsewhere.

Wynne Leon

Wow, that is. Yeah, you you have staying power. That's awesome. Yeah.

Mark Petruska

So yeah, I like being able to find old blog posts. That way I like social accounts. I like to have a link to my book. Yeah, those are the important ones to me.

Speaker 2

MHM.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

I love that you you cause you worked on this. We were in touch, you know, talking about other things connecting, you know on WordPress about regular you know business and things we were doing. But from start to finish you it seemed to me like you gave yourself a healthy amount of time to work on the revisions because it sounded like you were in progress. For a bit and so I took that as encouragement that people don't need to, like, flip everything over right away. Was that an accurate impression about how you approached it?

Mark Petruska

Definitely, yeah. Are you kidding? I was. I'll admit I was scared to death to flip the switch, if you will. Especially when I merged 2 blogs into one, I was terrified that I was going to lose all my posts. So yeah, I was very careful and methodical. I did a lot of research, but fortunately, WordPress.

Speaker 2

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Mark Petruska

At least there may be.

Speaker

The.

Mark Petruska

Podcast listeners who blog on other platforms. I can't speak to those, but.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, yeah for all.

Mark Petruska

The complaints people have about WordPress and I do hear quite a few, I think that they have really good tools that make it easy to make these big scary changes and also again in my experience their customer support has always been pretty top notch.

Wynne Leon

Nice, yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Nice. That's good to hear. Well, and I was no, I was just going to ask about the URL stuff because I I is that you go when because you were.

Wynne Leon

Sorry. No, that's what I was going to ask too.

Vicki Atkinson

Going to follow. I mean, yeah, no, go.

Wynne Leon

Because it's one thing to change the theme and and a name, but a URL is an interesting thing to change as well.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Speaker 2

MHM.

Mark Petruska

Right. And I've done it. At least three different times. When I first joined well, when you first sign up for a blog, you get a free URL. Whatever butits.wordpress.com I didn't want that. So my very first URL I tried to make it unique. I think it was Mark. My word site.com have a long story about trying to.

Speaker

Hmm.

Mark Petruska

Get the URL for markmywords.com but that involved a very greedy person who wanted millions of dollars and. I wasn't gonna help.

Wynne Leon

Right. Well the URL's are like the Internet land grab.

Mark Petruska

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And then they came out with some subdomains dot blog. So I scooped up mark my words dot blog. Which I thought was pretty cool.

Speaker 2

Mm-hmm.

Mark Petruska

And then we did this move to South Dakota. And I adopted the name swing cat, which is referenced to the state. Long story I don't really want to go into it now, but swing cat.com was my third URL and then I just got to the point where I was managing my website which is just Mark petreska.com.

Wynne Leon

Mm-hmm.

Mark Petruska

Goodness. Nobody else scooped that one up, but I had, like I had My Portfolio stuff and my professional writing on there and then I had the blog separate and it just got to be a lot of work to maintain two different sites. So I said, well, let's just merge them into one. We'll have the blog, we'll have everything under Mark petruska.com. And. That was my decision to just combine everything and that was the scariest move that I made. But again, WordPress has built in tools step by step instructions. I made sure to export my content into a downloadable XML file. Then I imported it into the the the main site by uploading the file and pretty much everything was done from that point.

Wynne Leon

Mm-hmm.

Mark Petruska

It really wasn't that hard and.

Wynne Leon

Did you maintain 2 URLs for a while?

Mark Petruska

For a while and then, because you buy a URL for a year at a time. So I just let the subscription expire and. Now if you go to swingcat.com, you won't find my blog. Actually, don't go there. It's it's a little bit of an unsavory site. Now. I don't know what to think about that.

Speaker 2

OK.

Vicki Atkinson

Ohh OK. All right. But I was going to ask the same thing because I I think you know when, when and I talked to author.

Wynne Leon

1.

Vicki Atkinson

Years and people that are trying to develop their presence, which really is the overarching goal of all of this. You know people are are trying to be seen right. And I think for authors that are working on,

you know, what comes next, they've already got, you know, a book under their belts. It it does make sense to have everything. Cohesively represented in one spot. That it it just makes it easier and I'm not in that situation right now. And so I've been, you know, paying close attention to what you've shared, Mark, because there is a lot of this like pointing and you know, I feel like, you know, the scarecrow, you know, the Wizard of Oz, if you want that you go here, if you want that you go there. You know and then as Wynn and I are are juggling, you know, our personal blogs, we're also leaning into sharing the heart of the matter, you know, and certain things are there. But I I don't know that people who who want to find what we're working on or want to track back to something they read they saw, they listened to. I I think it's on the content creator to make it easy. Do you guys agree?

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

I do. I I would also add that it does make sense in certain situations to keep them separate. Like I had mentioned I was. I was out of work for a long time, almost two years, which it just seems unfathomable to me now, but at that time I was like, very open on my blog and I was very anti corporate. Damn the man.

Speaker 2

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

And really, do I want potential employers?

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

Yeah, finding my website with My Portfolio and then reading my blog and seeing how much I hate corporate America. Probably not.

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Called such a good point, and I actually worked with a client recently, so I'm so glad you said that. Who has some regrets about having been underemployed for a while and kind of, let's say, grinding his gears for a while, not just blogging, but on social media generally. And man, that stuff sticks, yeah.

Speaker 2

6.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, great point.

Mark Petruska

It doesn't tell you my parents never were afraid to let me know that. Are you sure you want to be sharing that on the blog, you know? Employers read that stuff. Yeah, they were right.

Wynne Leon

Right, right. Yeah. So what advice do you give bloggers, you know, contemplating the changes in? Themes are. Names or whatever.

Mark Petruska

Honestly, I would say just go for it. Don't be afraid. Embrace change. Just like in life. What's the worst thing that can happen? You people think they're going to lose all their content. They won't. As long as you have that downloaded file. As long as you follow the steps, you're not going to lose your information and your leaders are still going to find you every time I made the URL switch.

Wynne Leon

Mm-hmm.

Mark Petruska

The very next blog posts nobody had disappeared. They were all there. That's what.

Wynne Leon

We are for right? Yeah, yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

But I think what you said.

Mark Petruska

Sorry.

Vicki Atkinson

Oh, I was just going to say what you said and what Wynn has said, it all makes perfect sense, but I also think for people that are worried at the very outset about all of that, separate from the doing, people need to take care of their emotionality about it. Because when the fear rises when and I joked about this a little bit, you start to get a little click happy. And that's when you might do some damage.

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

How so?

Wynne Leon

Well, because then you start making change after change after change and you can't go back. You know, if you get a little like, oh, I'm frantic and I'm just, oh, my gosh, I'm going to click this button after I've clicked five other buttons. Yeah, good of going back and undoing. Then sometimes you get, you know, the little Hansel and Gretel problems you get. You don't can't find your bride.

Mark Petruska

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

OK. Yep. Yeah.

Mark Petruska

Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. So you you have a good point about emotionality, Vicky. That's so true.

Vicki Atkinson

Well, I'm just. I had a friend recently called it Doom clicking, not doom scrolling, but Doom clicking when you assume you've done the unthinkable and you just you think you'll just, like, make it right by making you know. Yeah.

Wynne Leon

Yes.

Vicki Atkinson

Right. Yeah, but what I love about that Mark, is that you know your advice, I think about how to make the change. Change you know, and being confident about it and leaning into WordPress makes a lot of sense, but I'm also guessing that there's a little runway to prepare, not just the emotionality stuff, but also just like get your ducks in a row, know what you're trying to accomplish. Like when said, what's the purpose? Why are you doing it so you can stay kind of mission focused. About what's the point? Yes.

Mark Petruska

Exactly. I think that's especially true for the the whole domain name URL thing. That's those. Those changes are usually mission related, whereas changing your theme, that's just like freshening up. You know, if you bought a house in 1975 with the kitchen look the same today, probably not. You would update it. Same goes for a blog styles and trends change and I think status quo is boring.

Wynne Leon

MHM.

Mark Petruska

I've I've also found personally that if I'm kind of stuck in a rut. I don't get writers block very often, but there's occasional times when when I start wondering OK, what am I going to write about next? And I. Feel less inspired. Just doing something simple like changing the theme in those instances is actually been inspirational for me and kind of.

Wynne Leon

Oh yeah.

Speaker 2

Like kind of like take those.

Mark Petruska

Gears into motion and got me running again.

Wynne Leon

Changing themes as a part of. Activity, yeah.

Mark Petruska

Exactly. It's exciting. And this this last theme that I changed again a lot of people complain about the block editor on WordPress. I've just kind of always embraced it. But I will say changing the theme, it required a lot of.

Wynne Leon

MHM.

Mark Petruska

Additional work that I hadn't done in the past when I'd switched themes, so it was kind of a learning experience, but.

Speaker

Mm-hmm.

Mark Petruska

I worked my way through it and. We joked earlier that I'm not a very technical person, so if I can do it, trust me, anyone can. Do it.

Vicki Atkinson

Well, what I love is that I think in your. Recent blog post you wrote about a compliment that you got from. I won't get it right, but it was someone within your workplace at a senior level. Who? I just. I was blown away by this, but basically recognizing this piece of writing as Marks and I was like, Dang, that's why we suffer through. That's why you worry about the themes and the, you know, the this and the that and the widgets because you want your voice to come through and and I think that's. Just shot in the arm for writer in all the different places where you're doing your writing. Mark, that has to be, you know, to your point and wins about changing things up and feeling inspiration when you get a gem like that feedback wise.

Speaker 2

Whoa.

Mark Petruska

Yeah, it's a huge. Compliment. I think I mentioned in that post that. At least for me, that's pretty much the whole point of writing. You want to establish your own identity and have your own voice. And if people recognize it, that's great.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

And I think yeah, part of that does come back to. Your identity includes your website and includes your blog, your theme.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

Even the widgets you use.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. And it's it's all there and I think you're you're so talented at. I'm not sure how to describe it when help me, but it's, uh, I know I'm going to go on a a little bit of a ride and it's going to be fun when I read something that you've written because I don't know where the clip or the funny or something that's just so quintessentially you. I don't know if it's gonna be, but I know I'm gonna get a couple of like.

Wynne Leon

Really, like full on grins. Yeah, there's it's so good. And what Mark does so well is the transitions he can weave together three different events or ideas or thoughts or. Yeah. And. And he pulls them together and with great links back to his other content. So yeah. It's so such a fun ride.

Mark Petruska

I've always prided myself on my segways.

Wynne Leon

You're good at the stay.

Mark Petruska

Nothing wrong drying off a day. If you were the inventor.

Wynne Leon

Good.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. Yeah, so good. Well, so if we no go ahead, sorry.

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Mark Petruska

Now I wanted to say, Speaking of blogging for 15 years, for the past year, year and a half, I've just been reading through every old blog post of mine in order been doing.

Wynne Leon

Wow.

Mark Petruska

It so long. Even after that much time, I'm only up to. Fall of 2013. So I have over 10 years.

Speaker 2

Oh.

Mark Petruska

Of blog posts left to go, and it's interesting like. My mechanics are different. I had a lot of. Things like cringe at now. Just again, not what I was saying so much. It's just like long paragraphs and. I have definitely evolved where my writing is like. Shorter paragraphs and sentences, much more succinct, which I owe to. My boss and mentor in South Dakota, but despite all that, I do think the voice is still there. Like I still sound like me. 2010 mark sounds like 2024 marks, so I'm proud of that.

Speaker

Oh.

Mark Petruska

Yeah.

Speaker 2

I love that, yeah.

Speaker

It's.

Mark Petruska

It's been, yeah, another thing I've been doing. Another reason for this is. Which I can't help but stress enough. Do pay attention to those redirects. I wasn't savvy enough. Again, going back to my lack of technical knowledge early on to know much about them, so a lot of those old posts are directing to like swing cat.com or mark my words site.

Wynne Leon

Hmm, of course.

Mark Petruska

Yeah, every post. I just go in and I manually update it and I know I could probably do it quicker, but I figure I'm in there anyway and it's not likely that someone is randomly reading my blog from 2014 anyway so.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Speaker 2

I'll get through it.

Mark Petruska

But just one more thing to keep in mind. That's why when I think you mentioned earlier to be very methodical about it. In your approach.

Wynne Leon

MMM.

Mark Petruska

Don't rush in. Just plan things out. But yeah, do that. Everything will go fine.

Wynne Leon

Yeah. So you 2 and we were talking about problems. We're going back and forth about December snow, what's that?

Mark Petruska

Well, when I first joined WordPress and probably for the first couple of years every December. I guess they had a plug in where snow would begin falling on your blog. You could turn it on. Or turn it off.

Speaker 2

Really.

Mark Petruska

Yeah, come December 1st, readers would pull up your blog. They'd be reading your post and the snow was falling down the screen. And if you move your cursor, the snow would follow the direction of the cursor. It was pretty cool. It was very popular and for some reason they did away with. It.

Wynne Leon

Right.

Mark Petruska

I don't know. I just added a little festivity and cheer to the holidays and apparently there are plugins now where you can add it, but for a plug in you need a business plan and that costs something like \$264.00 a month or not a month a year. There's still a lot of money, so we just we'll just remember the snow fondly and pretend it's there.

Wynne Leon

Yeah, yeah. Ohh right. It it predates me, so I didn't know anything about it.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, I'm not sure I would like that. I always worry about accessibility. You know, for things in reading. And and I wonder like technically if that creates problems for.

Wynne Leon

Hmm.

Vicki Atkinson

Readers like on the technical side of things or readers, meaning humans, I don't know.

Mark Petruska

And that could. Be one of the reasons why they got rid of it. You're absolutely right. Back then you didn't care about accessibility so.

Wynne Leon

Thanks.

Mark Petruska

Much. Nowadays it's definitely front and center. So The funny thing is. I'll be reading comments from readers from like December 20. Kevin and yay, the snow is back and. I don't now so.

Wynne Leon

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson

Oh my God.

Wynne Leon

Well, you know, while we're glad you know what? What? We're glad it's back as you and we're so glad that you came back on to talk to us and and tell us about how you've approached these things that are. Good decisions and as you said and one of the things that I picked up that changing the theme, the organization that is an active creativity in and of itself so good.

Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Thank.

Mark Petruska

Well. For.

Vicki Atkinson

Thank you. Ah, our pleasure, creativity and a little bit of courage. And then, you know, friends.

Mark Petruska

Yeah. And we talk, we're going off the rails.

Speaker 2

All right, that's it. That's the next one. It's on all right. Till next time. Bye.

Mark Petruska

It's on.

Wynne Leon

Thank you for listening. Our music is composed for sharing the heart of the matter by the exclusively talented duo of Jack Canfora and Rob Koenig for show notes and more great inspiration, please visit our site at sharing the heart of. Thematter.com.

