

PagePipe reveals ignored or unknown creative ideas by examining a websites parts. In this example, we take apart the Foxy WordPress theme. This issue contains:

- Why we created this site.
- Investigation of themes, plugins, images, colors, type, and other component decisions.
- Presentation of findings with comparisons of benefits and pitfalls.
- Recommendations based on experiment results.

► StacyMJones.com finished site.





Steve Teare
Web Engineer

When building a WordPress website, we work with “found objects” and create a simple montage or collage. Found objects include choice of theme, plugins, fonts, colors, and images. These objects are then the limitations or design boundaries. The collage must contain these objects – a puzzle to solve. We explain why these will work together.

Each PagePipe issue is about why a site evolved the way it did. Especially about decisions, opportunities, and problems that pop up along the way. Our focus is more on the “Why” (philosophy) than on “How.” The skills utilized are not timeless since technology changes. But good design principles are classic. We mention skills but they’re secondary and not explicit. There are many ways to solve problems.

Stacy Jones, a Texas-based professional writer, bought the WordPress Foxy theme before we met. It had some features we didn’t need but they weren’t in the way. If features do slow down a site or cause visual noise, we’ll remove or disable them. ■

The story of a creative journey.
There’s a professional satisfaction when you deliver an orchestrated work that’s a perfect fit.

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So what? Why should I care?

Speed – or page load time – is always the first aspect of a website users encounter. If the page load is too slow, the viewer will discard the site. It doesn't matter how attractive it is. They never saw it. People are impatient.

Branding (or aesthetics) is important for web credibility, too. It's the second judgment made by viewers. And it's made so fast it's subconscious. If they don't like the look of the site immediately, you've lost the opportunity to make a good first impression. Yes. People do judge a site by the landing page decoration before any text content.

This case study focuses on choosing a color palette and images that create feeling and mood. Choosing colors should never be based on the mere choice of a favorite color. A single, solitary color is not a palette. Feelings, memories, or color psychology is usually formed from combinations of colors. Best practice of using two or three colors is all it takes.

We chose the theme from the main image and finally sampling colors to keep the website feeling cohesive. See for yourself and use these creative color ideas on your next project. ■

Also in this study:

- Do social links help or hinder?
- Be suspicious of “premium” WordPress themes.
- Search Engine Optimization limitations.












Create a serene mood from a proportional color palette.

Foxy Case Study

40 percent of pixel colors are “serene.”



◀ We fell in love with this stock image Stacy purchased. We built our color palette based on the dominance of “serene” feelings. Feelings remind us of memories. Stacy agreed serene was the right mood for the site.

	#c0e0e0 23.51% serene
	#a0c0c0 17.33% cool
	#e0e0e0 16.88% serene
	#c0c0c0 8.22% classic
	#202020 6.11% classic
	#c0e0c0 5.46% romantic
	#e0e0c0 5.37% naturals
	#e0a080 4.65% warm
	#e0c0a0 4.43% warm
	#a0a0a0 4.3% classic, ntrls
	#c0a080 3.75% ntrls, warm

▲ We were guided by a proportional palette of colors extracted with software from the main image.

Theme defaults and custom CSS color additions.



▲ **A favicon (favorite-icon)** is a 16x16 pixel image and displayed in the browser address bar or window tabs or in a bookmark list. It's a small but valuable detail for branding and credibility.

Color is most memorable. Our style or signature favicon is made from a solid-square of dominant color, which produces the lightest-weight favicon. It's our tip-of-the-hat to simplicity and speed. We've seen favicons weighing 47k. Fat! We use an online favicon generator and then optimize by exporting the file from GIMP, a free image processor. This usually produces a favicon of 200 bytes.

Also, if a favicon is not on your website, a 404 error occurs behind the scenes for each request. This slows down page loads.



CSS Colors



Our color selection used a technique developed at TeareLabs (our sister company). The process uses several online conversion tools and a proprietary tool of our own.

An image goes into “the machine” and out the other end comes the percentage of coverage of the top-ranked colors. These are then compared to our “mood” database based on the psychology of color combinations.

The final proportional results help us make a decision of what palette of colors to use. It's best to keep things simple. Three colors is ideal. ■

▲ These are the page colors created by the theme and our custom selections (indicated with callouts and swatches) Orange was default for navigation. Stacy liked it. We did too, as an accent color. It happens to be the complementary color of cyan (light blue). So we replicated it in headlines, lines, and bullets to guide the eye.

The Writer

Easy font choices: Raleway and Open Sans.

This is
Raleway
medium.

Stacy Jones
Stacy Jones
Professional Writer

▲ **Do you really need a logo?** With logotypes, the main thing is consistency and simplicity. Not clever or poetic in anyway. We recommend using web fonts or web-safe fonts for logotypes. This streamlines the decision-making process. We used Raleway Heavy.

History jogs our memories and memories remind us of feelings. Raleway's font history is traceable to the London Underground subway signage system. It's distinctive "W" makes it interesting typography with Bauhaus design roots. It's used for decorative headlines and dropcaps on Stacy's site, not for body text. It's aesthetically expressive.

Raleway and Open Sans are Foxy theme

default fonts and Stacy loves them. It's one of the reasons she bought the Foxy theme. We downloaded the freeware True-type font set and sent it to Stacy.

We also sent her Open Sans which is the transparent body text font. It's a modern sans-serif open-source type family. Both font families come in many weights. That improves the contrast or palette of the type. With these she can create her own themed documents – like quotes or invoices. We used Raleway and Open-sans to build her logotype on the website.

It's possible to use other Google fonts with Foxy but we liked Stacy's choice. ■

Raleway is a fast-loading font. We've used Raleway in hand-coded experiments loading from a different obscure source (not Google – see below) and it loaded extraordinarily fast. It's usage depends upon the application.

Generally, we prefer not using fonts called from an outside server. Speed is the first and primary credibility indicator. Your site can never be too fast.

```
<LINK REL="stylesheet"
media="screen" HREF="http://
openfontlibrary.org/face/railway-
sans" TYPE="text/css" />
```

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz Open Sans

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz Open Sans Light

This is Open Sans Bold 1234567890

This is Open Sans Semi-bold abcdef!@#%\$

This is Open Sans Ultra-Bold ABCDEFGH

g

HOME

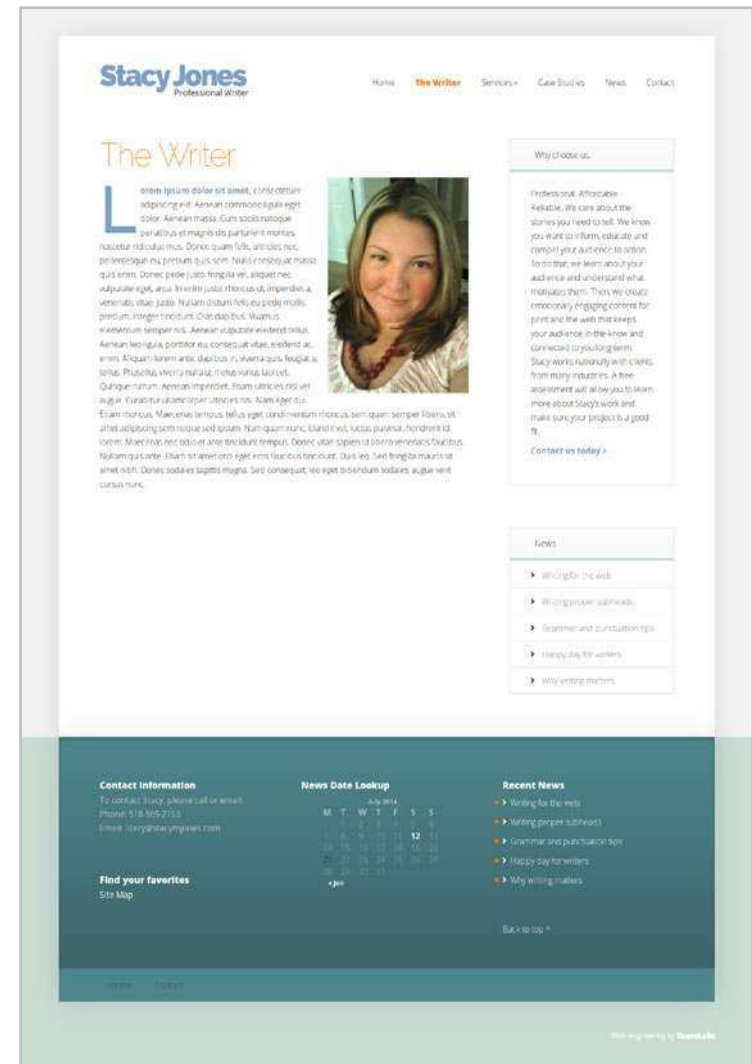
THE WRITER

Stacy's testimonial

"I absolutely love my new website. Because I'm a writer, highlighting the content of my own site was very important to me but I didn't want to have to sacrifice design to do that. My website has achieved a very happy balance between the two.

There are terrific design elements that give a warm and welcoming feeling for visitors but work in a way to highlight the content rather than take away from it. The navigation is seamless and pages load quickly allowing my visitors an easy transition from page to page.

I particularly love the colors that stand out and the layout of the footer and news pages. Really, I look at my site and am happy with every design element and feature. It exceeds all the goals I had for the site."



COPYWRITING

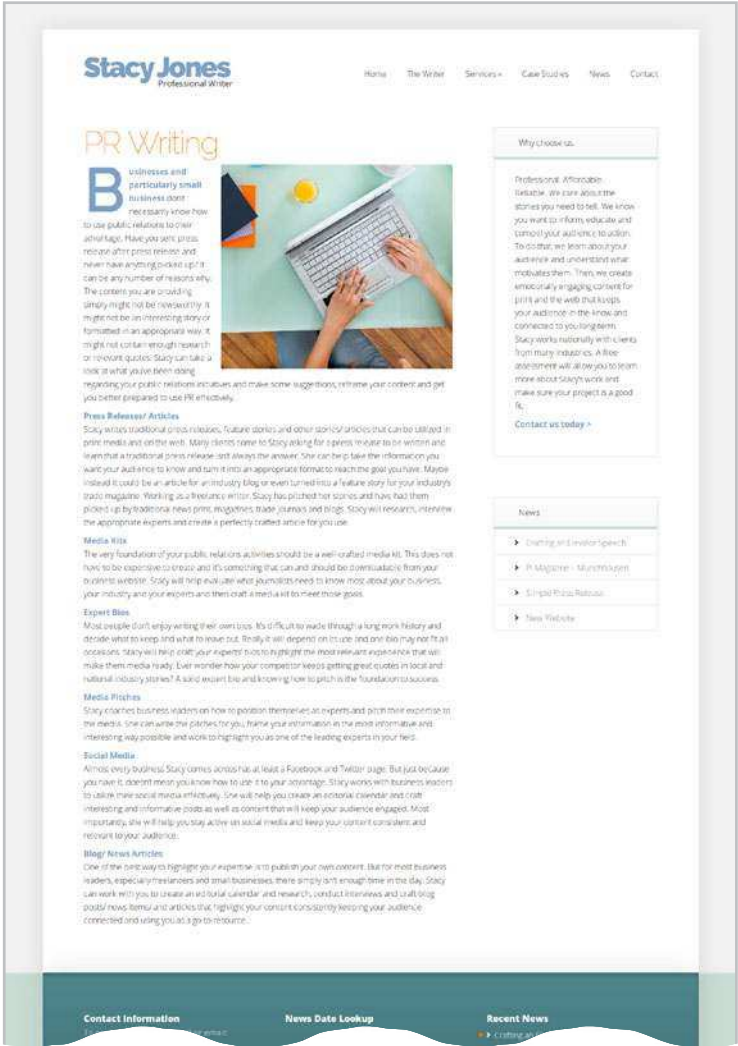
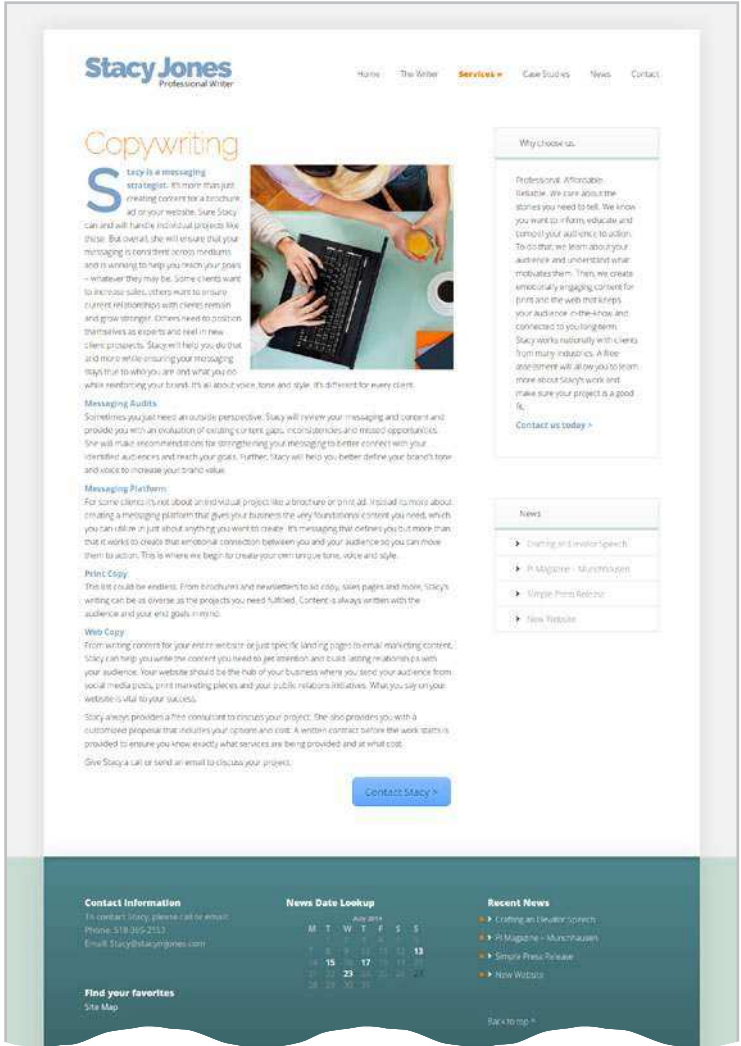
PR WRITING

Stacy was an ideal client.

Not only was Stacy prepared but she knew the direction she wanted to go – and what to emphasize. Working with her was a pleasure. That isn't always the case with some clients.

Below are client behaviors that cost web designers money. They are all people and organizational things. They have little to do with the web project. We call them *web therapy*.

- The client contact has to get committee approval / red tape for decision making.
- The client contact isn't decisive, or doesn't play the internal "consultant advocate" role well.
- The client contact is prone to huge email threads over small issues.
- The client contact wants daily / frequent phone calls or meetings
- The client doesn't have a clear business plan, and will need a lot of advising.
- The client's payment schedules are bad.



NONPROFIT

CASE STUDIES

Home Page Specifications

Yslow grade 95 A

Theme Foxy by Elegant Themes

Zip file size 3.1M

Decompressed 4.2M

Load time cache cleared / full

1.4 seconds / 1.1 seconds

Page weight 160.7k / 5.7k

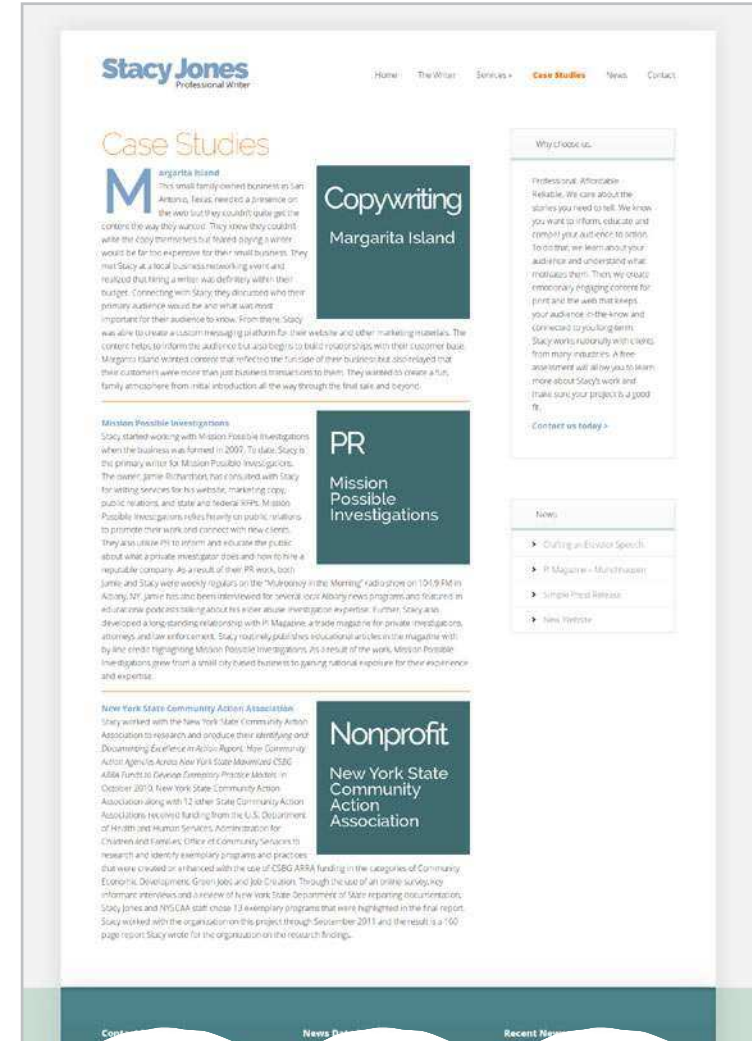
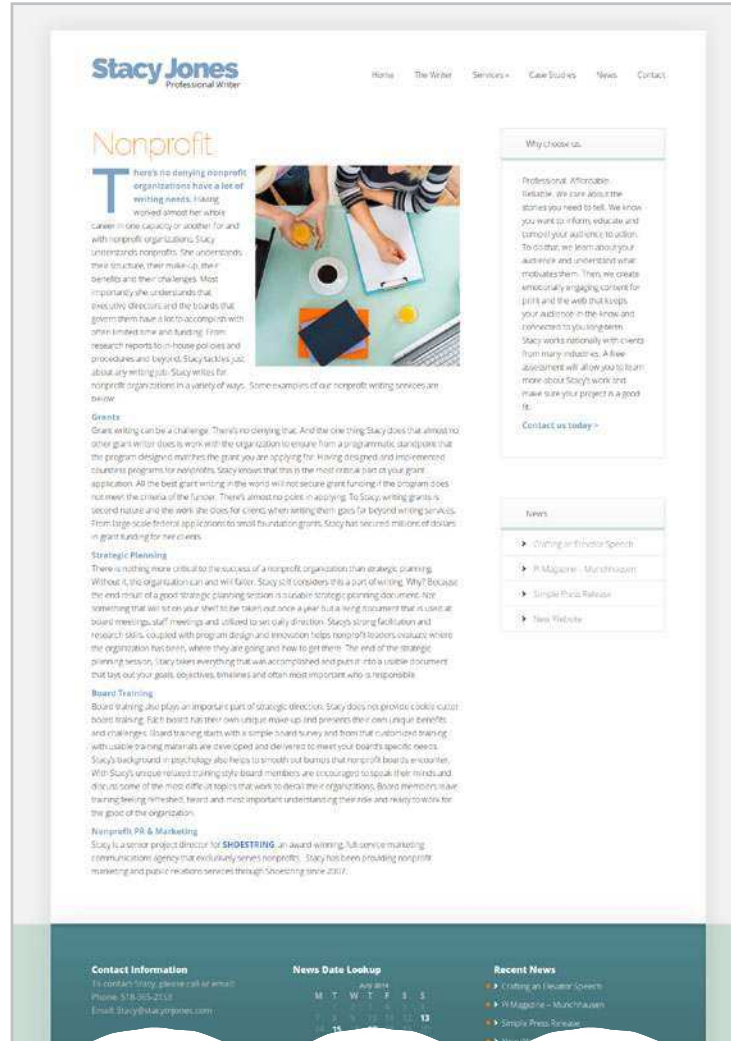
CDN: none

Plugins Drop Caps (customized)

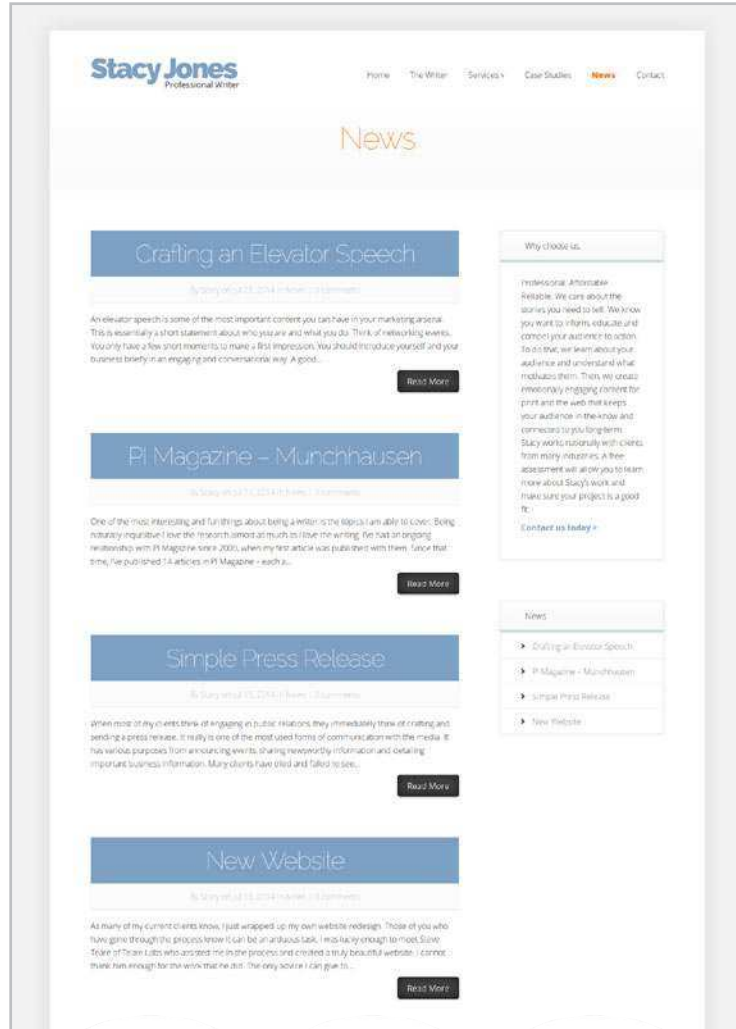
Fonts

Raleway and Open Sans web type families (8k, 2 calls to Google Fonts).

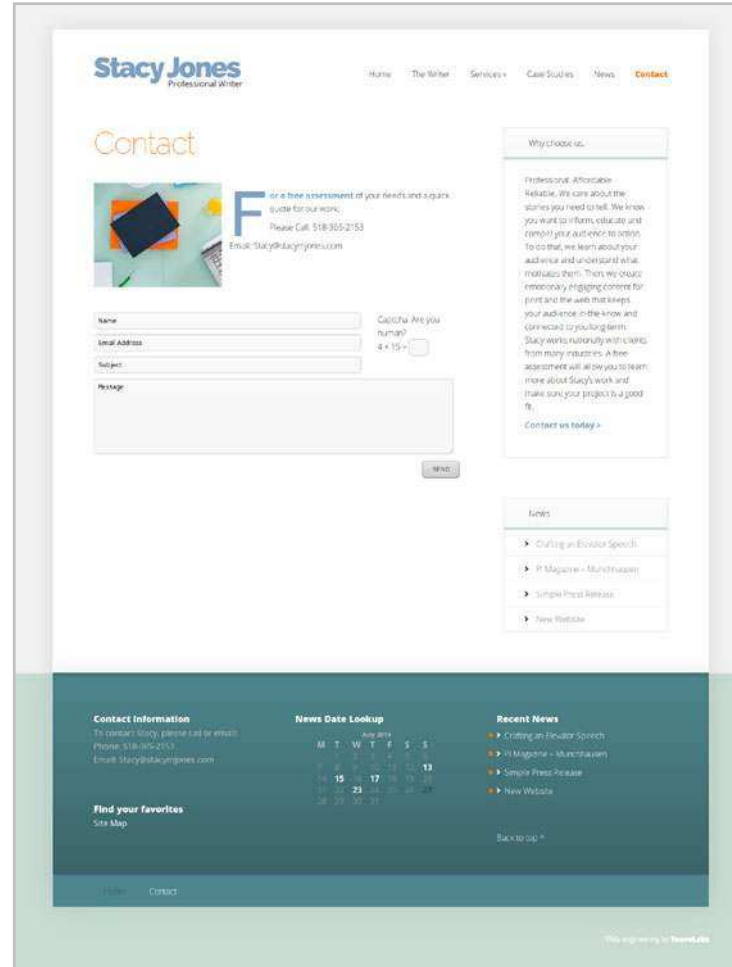
► **We changed** the WordPress Foxy theme for speed, convenience, and serene colors.



NEWS



CONTACT



Foxy theme has shortcode options in it. These allow clients to make fancy stuff like columns and buttons. But it makes clients think every time they use them. That's complexity. So we created "automatic design" with CSS modifications.

For example: When Stacy writes the first character of the first line in an entry, it'll automatically create a blue, 4-line, Raleway-font dropcap. This tells viewers where to start reading. To make this "decoration," a plugin was added and customized.

We kept an eye on automation so Stacy wouldn't have to remember a lot – like bolded subheads are colored immediately. These are not theme options but help make her writing life easier and the site attractive. She appreciates those extra details.

Do social links help or hinder?

Stacy asked, “I have Twitter and Facebook - not using either right now for business but they are set up. Possible to add those buttons?”

We explain our reasons for not doing social links. ▶

The Foxy theme has options for adding social links. But there are reasons why you shouldn't add these links without some thought first. Social links work for consumer selling. But for B2B and corporate selling, it's been ineffective. The only business-oriented social link that's beneficial is LinkedIn.

If social links were just benign, we wouldn't even blink. We'd put it on any site just to make the client smile. But ...

Few things slow down a website like social links (except huge images). Social links “call” off-site code that's out of our control. There's waiting for information going back and forth. Social “code” is not optimized. Clients don't realize how it can drag down page load times.

Social creates link clutter. “Foxy” theme is pretty good at placing the link icons low on the page in the footer. But it's still just another potential distraction.



Social links don't buy credibility for business websites. Sometimes it indicates the wrong goals. Social links say, “This is my personal blog.” (i.e.- not business.) What is better is regular scheduled email promotions for your business. Several ROI studies have examined this and our business experience reinforces the idea that social media isn't beneficial for business sites. If you're selling cars or cola drinks or phones, it's great.

You must constantly add content to Facebook and Twitter. It's hard enough to maintain just a blog. Do the benefits of having these social pages really outweigh the time needed to keep up the task?

If a client desires (insists on) having social links, we'll do it. It isn't hard. No big deal. But the benefits of social links for B2B are vaporous and faddish. It can't be accurately measured either. Our job is revealing the bad news and let you choose for yourself. ■

Stacy believes in SEO limitations.

For StacyMJones.com, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) was not a big concern. Stacy's been in the business world long enough to know a small website is a drop in the huge Internet bucket. The best way to get qualified traffic is simply to invite her *people* in person or via email.

Knowing exactly who is your niche market is the key to success. That means you already have a list of prospective names and email addresses. If we were Amazon, we'd care more about SEO. But Stacy already anticipated the limitations and reduced expectations for a small-business website.

A website is a professional indicator. Your client's customers expect it to exist. Not having a site indicates low credibility.

Search Engine Optimization

Below is a perfect example of how shysters selling snake oil attempt increasing anxiety with SEO lies. These claims **don't** really work:

- First your keyword must appear in the title.
- Then it must appear in the URL.
- You have to optimize your keyword and make sure that it has a nice keyword density of 3–5% in your article with relevant LSI (Latent Semantic Indexing).
- Then you should spread all H1, H2, H3 tags in your article.
- Your keyword should appear in your first paragraph and in the last sentence of the page.
- You should have relevant usage of bold and italics of your keyword.

Of course, none of this SEO “hoodoo” makes any difference whatsoever in search rankings. It's pure drivel. Nothing replaces relevant content. If your content is not addressing a need that consumers or businesses have, you won't have Internet traffic. All the gamesmanship and trickery to fool Google will **not** work. They've been running search engines for years and recognize manipulation and keyword stuffing from real content. ■

Be suspicious of “premium” WordPress themes.

How are WordPress theme developers compensating us for the lost time navigating a labyrinth of options? We curse every feature that’s available. We toggle options on-and-off trying to figure out how to get the theme to look like the demo we thought we were getting. Fooled again.

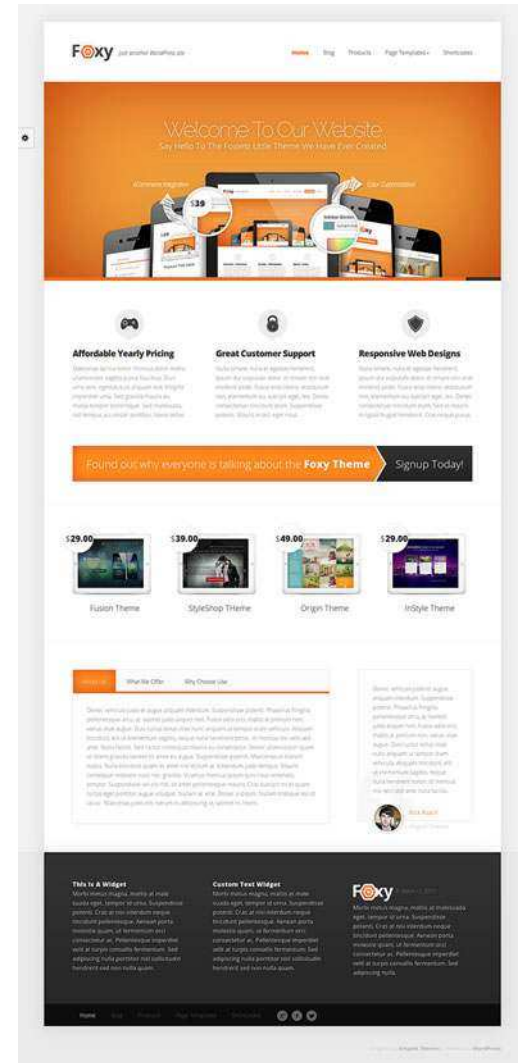
We prefer starting with a free, stripped-down WordPress theme and adding only the features we want. This results in a less complex, faster, and manageable website.

We purchase a WordPress theme because the demo looks great. After installing the non-refundable theme, we sadly find what a significant amount of work it takes to get the theme to look like what we just saw.

This is what happened to Stacy Jones. It’s happened to us. It’s not the first time we’ve had a client buy a theme and then find it more frustrating and complex than imagined. We mourn our \$50 to \$100 cash loss and just move on.

Who can make a decent WordPress theme decision with so much deception happening? Foxy theme publishers, Elegant Themes, neglected mentioning so many details needed to make Foxy theme look beautiful like their online demo. It’s false advertising or a propaganda strategy of leaving important facts out – the warts.

We did use Foxy by customizing it. But it doesn’t look anything like the online demo. And we’re happy about it. ■



◀ The Foxy demo page.

Smooth web collaboration with Stacy.

Collaborating with Stacy on her website, we found we had a common philosophy of *simplicity is best*.

We asked, “Do you want comments switched on or off for the blog?” And she replied, “Off, off, off ... no one is commenting! No time to moderate that sort of thing.”

We agree completely. No commenting is another good choice. So we exorcised the comments file (code). Normally, users have to switch comments off in a control panel page-by-page and post-by-post – or install a plugin.

Now Stacy doesn't even have to think about whether comments are on-or-off. No worries about spammers either. Erasing PHP code like we did, of course, is something unconventional and coders would probably freak out. (We like that thought). The comments file still exists so nothing breaks – but it's empty of instructions. All com-

ment forms then disappear. They don't even leave a “hole” in the page.

Did Stacy want a form on her contact page?

She did and we installed the theme default form with a little customization. It had an unwanted “clear” button which is poor usability. When a user has written their comments, they can get frustrated if they push the wrong button and erase everything. It's best to just get rid of that useless button. We did that in the PHP file, by removing one line of code. If the user wants to edit the form, they can just place the cursor in a form field.

We also changed the form *submit* button to read *send*.

We frequently remove page and post titles but Stacy preferred to keep them. They worked fine after we made the *Raleway* type big and orange colored like the main navigation. ■

Stacy wasn't nervous about not installing Google Analytics code. We're of the same opinion. Web statistics aren't significant for small sites. The traffic is just too low to worry about and analyze.

We're not saying Analytics isn't valuable but it isn't needed by everyone. We can always add it later. Google Analytics also accounts for ~15.5k of page weight (after compression) and three extra requests – if it's installed.

**Stacy's
the real
project
hero.**

Making images feel cohesive.



We want the same flavor of image on different pages but we don't want the boring monotony of pure duplication. Our trick is to crop sections out of the main image. This works and satisfies our secret desire to be frugal. Here we get 4 extra images out of the high-resolution original. ■



Best practices are guidelines – not rules.

▲ Our common-sense approach is stripping out unnecessary site features.

Today's content management systems, like WordPress and themes, can be sophisticated. They contain features that theme developers want – not necessarily designers or site owners. Some complex themes almost need as much effort to learn as a new computer operating system – or a programming language. Foxy theme has some of these problems even though it's not the most convoluted theme we've encountered.

Just because theme features exist doesn't mean we have to use them. Because we design on theme pages that often have, for example, a three-column format, designers and editors feel obligated to fill that third column. Often that content is just noise.

It's unfortunate when clutter distracts from a site's main emphasis. It's our job to remove clutter. When a site clutters up with bits of content that serve no purpose whatsoever – other than to make someone in the organization happy – remove it. ■

StacyMJones.com is responsive for mobile devices.



The old way of designing a site meant drawing little sketches either on paper or screen in Photoshop. These static pictures were presented to clients for approval before any coding work began. Once approved, then coders started the backend work. This process is the Waterfall sequential design process.

Rapid Prototyping is a new trend and requires designers to know good design practices and also what code makes a website work. They build onscreen. We like this faster method.

Good general “rules” will apply for many years. Try to avoid anything that dates a site, but find general principles that transcend technology and specific media. Timeless design ideas give sites longevity.

There are a lot of sites that just don't work. And there are a lot of sites that work surprisingly

well – despite the neighbor's kid putting it together. It's wrong of us as designers to be elitists.

Take the sites built by the neighbor's kid or look like Craigslist. They're still successful, but aren't defined with by-the-book definitions. Why do we love them? They're fulfilling a need. ■