

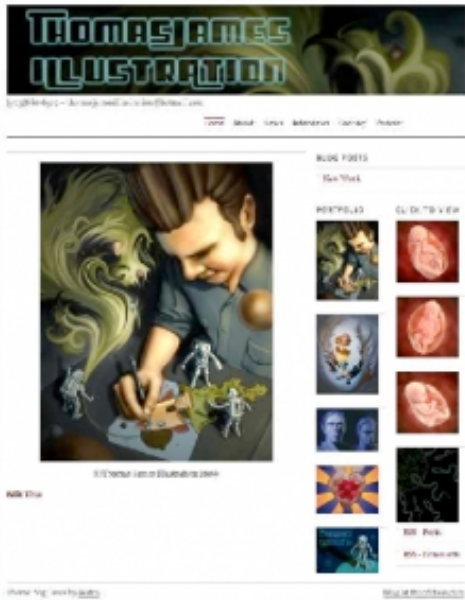
How to Create a Free Portfolio Website Using Wordpress.com

By Thomas James



**A Step-By-Step Tutorial for Illustrators, Graphic
Designers, and Other Creative Professionals**

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The Artist's Dilemma

Every creative professional needs some form of online portfolio where they can share their work and present themselves in a positive light, and while it's a good idea to post your profile at some of the many portfolio sites available on the internet ([Carbonmade](#), [deviantART](#), and [Coroflot](#) to name a few), it's crucial to have a home base to direct people to. That way, you can control the message you're trying to project about yourself, your work, and how to contact you.

Unfortunately, designing your own website can sometimes be a daunting task, and not everyone has the time or the skill to master CSS or HTML, not to mention the funds to hire a web designer. And yet, sacrificing customization for affordability isn't exactly an appealing Plan B.

The Solution

There is, however, a way to find a healthy balance while still presenting a professional portfolio that combines the essential elements of a gallery, *About* page, and *Contact* page with the added bonus of an embedded blog. I recently devised a method of achieving all of this in just a few hours by making creative use of a

free [Wordpress.com](https://wordpress.com) blog template. The intention of this article is to show you how you can do the same. But first I'd like to explain the reasons that you might want to take this approach.

The Why

The most obvious benefit of this technique is the minimal investment of two of your most important resources: time and money. As I mentioned above, I created my site in just a few short hours and spent the whopping sum of \$9.97. You can do it for free if you don't mind keeping the ".wordpress.com" suffix on your domain, but for that extra professional touch I recommend spending the money to get rid of that. The most you'll have to spend is \$14.97 to register your own domain, but in my case all that was required was the transfer of my own domain from a previous website that I was unsatisfied with (hence the \$9.97 that Wordpress charges to do this).

Another benefit that's not so obvious was brought to my attention by Jeff Fisher of [Jeff Fisher LogoMotives](#), in a recent interview that I conducted for [Episode 5 of the Escape From Illustration Island Podcast](#). In our conversation about social networking, Jeff told me about his concept of the "blogfolio", where you use your blog as the main portal for sharing your work and promoting your business. Jeff explains that this allows your site to show up more often in search engines due to the fact that people tend to update their blogs more often than their portfolio websites.

To be sure, using a free Wordpress blog template means giving up

total customization, but in return you get a professional-looking, standards-compliant, search-engine-friendly website and the support and security that Wordpress has to offer. The beauty of using Wordpress is that it's one of those rare occasions where something is easy, fast, free, and valuable all at the same time.

The How

Through my experiences with using Wordpress to create [Escape From Illustration Island](#), I learned to appreciate the fact that you can make a blog feel more like a website through the use of pages. This allows the visitor to navigate to different places on your site, rather than just scroll through your latest blog posts. That being said, I hadn't quite figured out how to include a gallery that allowed people to click on thumbnails to enlarge the images they wanted to view. After all, there are indeed limitations to how much you can accomplish with Wordpress.com sites.



That all changed when the team at Wordpress introduced the "Image" option to the list of widgets for the sidebar. With this option, you can turn your sidebar into your thumbnail gallery, allowing visitors to click on each one to see a full-size version. (The *Text* widget offers another way to do this, but

requires some basic knowledge of HTML that I won't cover here.)

Here's how it works:

The basic idea is to have each portfolio image on its own page, with an accompanying thumbnail in the sidebar.

First, register a blog and choose your template theme. In my case, I found the *Vigilance* theme to be best suited for this approach. Next, create a page, but **do not name it**. This ensures that it won't show up in the menu bar, which we don't want to happen because this page will only contain an image in our portfolio, which we only want accessed by clicking on its future thumbnail in the sidebar.

Simply place the image of your choice and publish the page. Then click on the "View Page" button underneath the empty Title box. Ctrl-click (Mac) on your image and copy its address, then go back to the Wordpress Dashboard and choose *Widgets* under the *Appearance* section. Here you will find the *Image* Widget. Paste the image address on the "Image URL" line, then enter the URL of the page that the image is on by going back to that page and copying it from the browser.

Lastly, set the width to 125, and leave the height blank. If you do this for all your thumbnails, they will all be the same width on your site, which will be visually pleasing for the viewer.

(Note: For some reason, any time you rearrange the thumbnails in the sidebar, you'll need to clear the *Height* box again. Otherwise, the height of your image will be stretched to its original size.)

So now you have an image on its own page and a thumbnail in the sidebar. Just repeat this process for every image that you want to add. One of the added features of this approach is that your thumbnails will appear on every page of your site, giving your visitors every opportunity to see your work.

Once you've uploaded all your images, and created corresponding thumbnails, you can create the other essential pages of your site, such as the *About* and *Contact* pages. I like to keep my sidebars clean, so as to not distract from the thumbnails, but I did decide to add the *Categories* Widget, and title it "Blog Posts", so that people have a way to get to the blog portion of my site.

Well, there you have it. If you're reading this somewhere other than my portfolio website, check out [my version](#) of this approach.

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