Guide to Using Your Blog for Social Selling

Creating Content with WordPress

There are literally hundreds of books and articles about creating content with WordPress. In this guidebook, we'll focus on techniques that specifically support Social Selling to help fearless bloggers making a foray into engaging with their buyers via social media. We don't expect you to be a technical expert. This guide is useful to the first time blogger eager getting started. Consider this your resource for such basics as working with the formatting editor, how to select the right plug-ins, and how to use images in your posts – the essentials that you need to know to be able to engage and begin sharing your own unique perspective and insights with interested readers.

Working with the WordPress Editor

We'll start with the WordPress editor, the workhorse of online editors. The Editor is not really an organic part of WordPress. It is third-party software called [TinyMCE](#) that has been modified for use in WordPress. TinyMCE can do a lot out of the box, and even more with available advanced capabilities plugins. However, when using the Editor to create content, it is VERY important to understand that, while the Editor is technically WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get), the final output in the Visitor's browser is dependent on how that browser interprets the style sheet, a document supplied by the active WordPress Theme which calls out the style of the web page, including font size/style, color, spacing, margins, just about anything to do with the presentation of the content as opposed to the content itself.

Separation of presentation from content is fundamental to good web design, and one of the main reasons you can change WordPress themes while retaining your content. It can drive new users crazy as they try to overcome the style sheet, putting in extra lines and indents to force the content into a desired format. Fortunately many modern themes make it fairly easy to change the style sheet through the Dashboard, These tools are usually grouped under the Appearance tab in the sidebar, or a custom selection in the sidebar (usually the name of the theme appears in the sidebar). Just remember, if you change your style sheet, those changes will usually apply to ALL of your posts and pages, including ones you wrote before you made the style changes. This can impact past articles. So, when you write a post use **Preview** to check the actual presentation. If you don't like the way something looks, see if you can change it in the theme style sheet. If your theme does not have the tools to do this, it is best to ask the theme authors what to do through their Member forum (if you paid for the theme) or in the forum at wordpress.org.

The editor emulates the user experience of many popular word-processing systems. Most people master its function after a few posts.

Creating External Links

Embedded links in articles are fundamental to social engagement. Links support facts stated, and as a responsible blogger, you must attribute quotes, stats and charts to the original author. Links also provide useful information to the Visitor, which establishes the writer as a helpful resource, an essential part of the social business relationship. Most experts will tell you that links are good for SEO as well.

The WordPress link insertion tool is straightforward and intuitive, but can be hard to learn for some document editor veterans. You must type the link text and highlight to activate the link editor icon (a little chain in the toolbar). When you insert the target URL, it is best to open a second browser window, navigate to the content you want to link to, copy the address from the browser address window, then paste it in the create link dialog. Make sure you have one and only one "http://" at the start of the URL, or the link will break. In many years of debugging WordPress, having no http:// or more than one is the most common broken link bug issue I have seen.

Tip: Check that your links are working using Preview Mode.

One other thing about inserting links; I highly recommend that you consider using a link shortener service (such as bitly.com). These are online facilities that will convert your giant WordPress permalink to many fewer characters, essential if someone wants to tweet some part of your content that contains a link. Remember, a tweet can only be 140 characters, so your article link can't use up a lot of those.

Importing Text from Microsoft Word

Many people like to originate content in a word-processing system like Microsoft Word, then import it into WordPress. In the near past, you needed to click the "W" icon in the Editor toolbar to open an import window. Today you can just copy your Word document and paste it into the WordPress content window. WordPress automatically does the conversion. Be sure to check links, images, etc. to see that they all imported correctly.

Line Break vs. Carriage Return.

Because WordPress generates HTML, it makes a distinction between line breaks and carriage returns. A carriage return is inserted when you hit the ENTER key. WordPress closes the current paragraph and starts a new one. However much space between paragraphs is called out by the style sheet is also inserted. Sometimes this is not desirable, the author just wants to start a new line for some reason. That's where line break comes in.

To create a line break, **Hold down the shift key, then push Enter.** NOTE: why don't they just make inserting a line break a menu item? It sounds strange, but because of the way HTML is styled today, line breaks are considered unnecessary, and bad coding. So they are to be used sparingly, and only when there really isn't a better formatting option.

Block Quotes

Quoting other authorities is another essential part of creating content for Social Selling. Many people use the indent capabilities of WordPress to format quotes. The proper formatting tool is the block quote tool, which is represented in the Editor toolbar by an icon with left double quotes. Either type or paste in your quote, highlight and click block quote, or select block quote and begin typing. Block quote is another entity that is styled by the style sheet, and you may not appreciate the Theme Authors approach. Again, this is something you might be able to change through the theme controls in the dashboard.

Working with WordPress Plugins

Plugins are the good right hand of WordPress. There are countless plugins for every purpose. Basically, if you think, "I wish I could do this with my blog," someone has a plugin to help you. The majority of plugins are available for download free from wordpress.org (NOTE: some plugins are "Freemium" which means that for a fee more capability can be purchased.)

Installing plugins today is as simple as searching for the plugin from your WordPress account, then directing WordPress to install it. A bit of configuration work, and you are done. Congratulations.

However, with great power comes great responsibility.

Plugins, even the ones listed under plugins on the WordPress.org site, are not produced or vetted by WordPress. While they may have been coded by a highly responsible individual or group, most likely they did not have the quality assurance resources of IBM or Oracle. So you are taking some risks.

Before we get started, let's talk about plugins and the special class of plugins known as widgets. Plugins are add-on programs that provide increased functionality to WordPress blogs. They generally register for some WordPress event (or "hooks") through the WordPress Application Programmer Interface (API), which tells the plugin that it is time to perform whatever function for which the plugin was designed. This arrangement means that a blog owner can add just the functionality needed to WordPress, making the entire

blog package as lean as possible. Because plugins do not alter WordPress' core code, updating to the latest version of WordPress is usually very easy. WordPress publishes an extensive guide to the API and instructions to programmers for writing WordPress plugins, so you can expect a certain level of performance out of any plugin that is carried in the WordPress.org plugins repository. A "widget" is a special kind of plugin that presents some sort of content directly on a web page. You might, for example, place a widget in your page sidebar that shows the excerpt from the last post, or an image, or text, or whatever. Widgets make this easy to do.

The most typical problem with plugins is compatibility with WordPress. Every time WordPress publishes an update, plugin authors are on the hook to test their plugins against the latest version to make sure that their plugin still works. If it doesn't, they publish their own updates. The flexibility of this system, which is one of its strengths, is also a weakness. Some users may not update plugins when they update their version of WordPress. Or the plugin is no longer supported, but the legacy version is still functional at some level. Or the plugin author just plain missed a problem during testing. Either way, a plugin incompatibility could lead to lost functionality, or worse, a site crash.

What to do to avoid these problems? First, we pick good plugins. It's really not that hard, and **no technical knowledge is required.** Let's see how.

Picking a Plugin

Log into WordPress as admin and select **Plugins->New**. In the search box, type in a short description of the function you require (example "share buttons"). It may take you a few tries to get a list of plugins to review that look like they might work. This display has a lot of information that can be very useful:

Not all plugins are created equal. More experience is better.
Check for higher ratings, recent updates, and more than 100 downloads.

- **Rating**: The 1-5 star rating appears in the lower left corner, with the total number of ratings in parenthesis next to the rating. If a plugin has less than three stars with more than 100 ratings, it's probably best to look for something else.
- **Downloads**: Right under the rating is the total number of downloads. Look for at least 100 downloads, and 1,000 is even better. We're not against new plugins, but if you don't have some developer experience, it's probably best to let someone else work out the bugs.

- **Last Update**: Bottom right corner is the date when the plugin was last updated, and whether or not it has been tested with the WordPress release you are currently running. These two belong together, if the plugin has not been tested with your revision and you have had that revision of WordPress more than a week, the Developer either has not gotten around to it, or he/she is having trouble with the new release. You might come back later if the plugin looks like what you need; for now, it's time to move on. Any more than 6 months without an update is a warning, anything more than a year is unacceptable, the Developer has probably abandoned this plugin.

If you have not rejected this plugin yet, it's time to click the more details button. A window will appear for this plugin.

The Developer should provide a detailed description of the plugin's functionality. If they only provide a few vague sentences, rest assured that they will answer your support questions with the same brevity. Move on. If they do give a good description, read it carefully to ensure the plugin does what you want it to. If you aren't sure about what they are telling you, consider asking on their support forum. Be sure your question has not already been asked and answered. We'll get to the support forum later in this guide.

Ratings on plugins can be very arbitrary. If there are several hundred ratings, look for a smooth curve starting from a peak at five stars and going to just a few one-star ratings (you can't make everyone happy). What you don't want to see is a bimodal distribution, where you have lots of five stars and quite a few one-stars. This can mean that the plugin was pretty good, but the last release had issues. Read the one-star ratings to see if they are recent and to get an idea what the issue was. If there is a defined issue, it's not time to move on yet, you can find out if the developer fixed it.

Click the link to go to the wordpress.org page for this plugin. Then click on the support tab. Take a look at 10-20 support threads. If there is an issue you should find that out. If the developer fixed it or is working on it, you should find that out also. If the Developer is simply not responding, you will know that too, and it's time to move on. As I mentioned previously, you might find an answer to your questions about the plugin. If not, click back to the plugin page and look at the FAQ, sometimes your answer will be there.

To conclude, if the plugin is current with the current WordPress version, has a good ratings record, does what you want it to, and is well-supported by the Developer, your next move is to install and activate it. Then it's time to adjust the plugin's settings to better serve your

needs, which is called configuration.

Configuring Plugins

Configuring plugins really depends on the plugin. Depending on its function, you might find a plugin's configuration panel as a separate item in the sidebar menu, or as a submenu item under settings, or a submenu item under appearance. Widgets will always be found under appearance->widgets. If you can't understand how to configure a plugin, it might be because it really does not do what you wanted it to do. It might be better to not fight with this one and install another choice. When you get a plugin running the way you want it to, remember to uninstall and delete the ones you did not use. It's good housekeeping and security.

Sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, a plugin will break your blog. Before you get help, go to plugins on your admin panel, and de-activate them one at a time, each time checking your blog to see if it is working again.
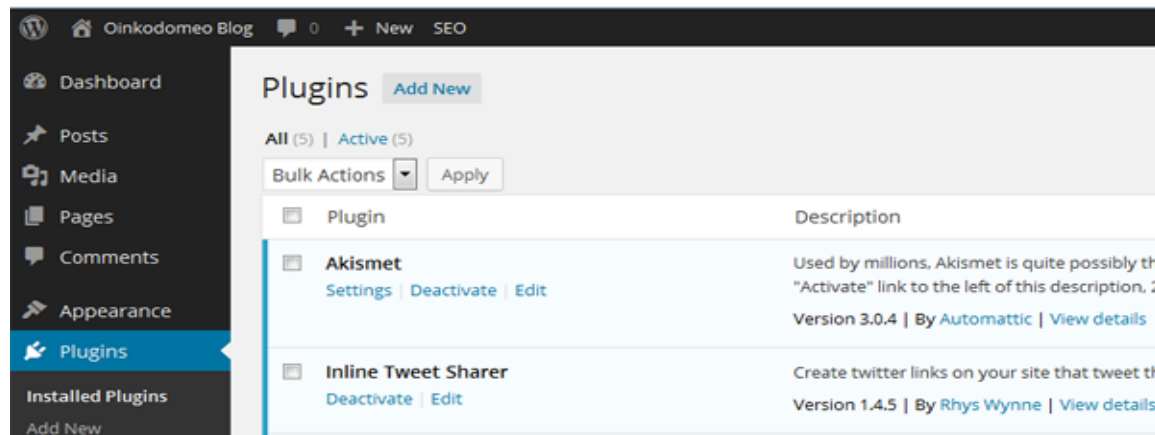
If you can't find the offending plugin, turn ALL of them off, and then re-activate them one at a time to see which one breaks the blog. When you have identified the plugin, you can post a question to the wordpress.org troubleshooting forum. You may have noted when you visited a plugin's support page that every poster had a link to the plugin's page in their post. Copy this link and paste it in the bottom of your post so that the plugin author can find it and it appears in that plugin's forum. Note the WordPress version you are on, describe the issue in as much detail as you can, identify the steps you went through in order to isolate the plugin, include a link to your broken blog, and list the other plugins you have active. If it is clear from your post that you are trying to help yourself, the response

can be swift and very helpful, sometimes from Users other than the plugin author.

Plugins are an incredibly efficient way to increase the capabilities of your WordPress blog, and enhance the Visitor Experience. Yet, many people don't use them because they believe there will be coding involved. We freely admit that some plugins require more expertise than other, but many more are easy to use and install if you follow our simple rules for picking plugins.

Social Sharing Tools

The type of plugins you will need to be sure to include are the set of social media sharing tools that allow your Readers to share your content on LinkedIn, retweet or post to Twitter, or whatever their favorite social platform is. After all, getting interaction and driving traffic to your blog are some of your primary goals. Many sharing tools also have analytics that let you know how engaged your audience is. Many of these are free. Do be sure that they are compatible with a range of browsers. Not everyone is just using the latest and greatest Chrome.

Inline Tweet Sharer Plugin

I'd like to highlight one plugin because it is particularly relevant to our Selling with Social mission, and also it does not have much of a history yet, so under our selection criteria, you might overlook it. It's called the Inline Tweet Sharer , and it allows you to "highlight" text in your WordPress blog that activates Users Twitter feeds when they click the link. We tested it; you can see it working our site. This is a good example of how you can use plugins to enhance the Visitor's experience as well as make it easy to retweet those phrases you really want re-tweeted. It also pushes you to write more "tweetable" material. How did we find this plugin? The same way you probably will, we saw it in another blog we admire, wondered if there was a plugin for it, and went looking on the WordPress plugin database. This is how you build your blog's capability to support your Social Selling efforts.

SEO Plugins

The other type of plugin we want to highlight are the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plugins. There are more than a few of these, but the best known are the All in One SEO Plugin and WordPress SEO by Yoast. We have used both for Client websites, both offer a great deal of value. I suggest that you review these and pick one or the other according to your preference, and then refer to it whenever you post new material. SEO continues to take hits as Google and other engines target common practices with filters and algorithm changes, but you can still get a lot of value from a good plugin, as it can help you write better titles and content that is more "keyword friendly". For example, WordPress SEO by

Yoast will grade the SEO quality of your post, and inform you of things like too many characters in your title (or not enough), the number of times a focus keyword appears in your title/blog content, etc. (A focus keyword is a word or phrase that you want to highlight as part of your SEO strategy) At first it can be a bit annoying, but following the rules established by Yoast or other SEO plugins will make your content more "friendly" to search engines. NOTE: no plugin can guarantee you a high search engine rank. Good ranking requires good content, good habits and timely topics. SEO plugins can help with at least some of this.

After you install an SEO plugin, there are extensive settings available in the settings panel for the plugin, which can be accessed from a sidebar menu selection (Example is Yoast)
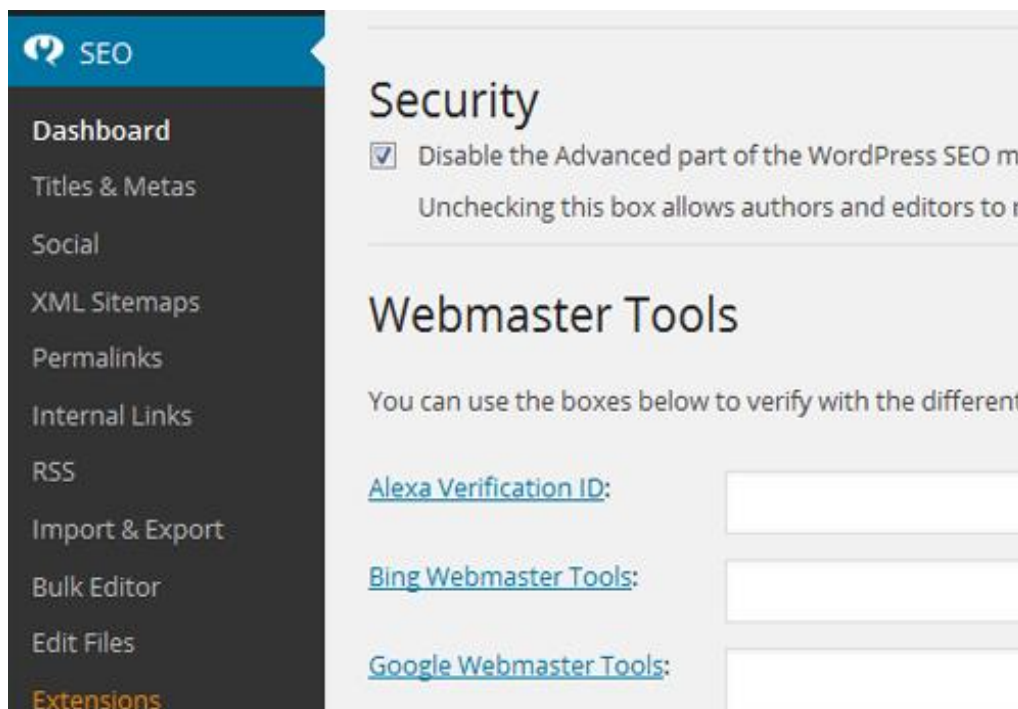
However, the real work is at the post level. On your new/edit post page you will find the Yoast tools under your content block. This is where you can get help in evaluating the "friendliness" of your content. It is very important to be consistent with these tools, whenever you post, you should evaluate, then edit. But don't contort your content to the point where Visitors find it unreadable. The Visitor Experience always comes first when you Sell with Social.

Working with Images

People engage with images inserted in the content, whether they are simple pictures for illustrating a point or complex charts and graphs. Recent surveys have identified photos as the primary social media content posted today on social media boards such as Facebook. Inserting images into WordPress posts has at times been difficult over the years, but today the WordPress media system is quite robust. WordPress integrates its own media library with the TinyMCE Editor. All WordPress "media", which in this case are images, videos, and attached documents are uploaded and managed by the library. Before upload, it is usually best to prepare images for the web. And before THAT, you have to obtain the right to use those images. Images appearing on web pages are NOT free (unless you created them yourself), although under some circumstances you can use them with a simple attribution to the owner of the image. Others you may have to purchase, either from the owner or a stock photography house or broker, such as Fotolia, Shutterstock, and BigStockPhoto. Sometimes you are offered a range of quality/price for a single image. Later in this guide we'll talk about getting the right "size" image. When you are buying photos online, it is important to remember that "royalty free" is not the same as "free". You will pay a one-time use fee for royalty-free images. Royalty-attached images are usually available on fee schedules based on number of impressions for online use, and they can be expensive (although the quality is generally better).

Image Basics

Digital images are made up of little bits of information called pixels. To work with images online, think of their dimensions in terms of number of pixels across by number of pixels high. There are really only a few basic rules for preparing web images, but if you are used to dealing with word processors and publishing programs, the rules for online can be difficult to really comprehend at first.

Rule 1—Image "resolution" should be set to 72 dpi (pixels per inch). This is the standard for virtually all PC-type monitors (for Mac monitors it's really 96dpi, but 72 works pretty well on it). A printer or an image setter can deal with other resolutions, such as 300 or even 600 dpi, but your basic PC monitor cannot, it only sees 72 dpi. This surfaces one good reason why you should only work in pixels, say you have an image that is 5" across that you want to post to your website. If the resolution on that image is 72 dpi, then its horizontal size on screen will be 72x5=360 pixels. If you have a screen that is 1200 pixels across total screen resolution, then this image will take up a little less than 1/3 of the width. Suppose that same 5" image has a resolution of 300 dpi. Its size on screen will be 5x300=1500 pixels, which is quite large and will fill many screens. If you reset the image resolution from 300

dpi to screen resolution (72 dpi), your image editor should resample the image to produce a "new" image at the new resolution. Typically the editor will also reduce the image width/height in pixels proportionately. You can reset this to a larger pixel size, but be careful, if the image is a JPEG saved originally at low quality (for smaller file size) then the overall quality of the image may suffer. Run some tests, being sure to save your original. In reality, an image editor cannot add relevant information to an image, it can only take away, so your original, whatever it is, is the best image you have. When you are prepping a JPEG image for use, try to save a maximum quality, which usually shuts off the JPEG compression. Successively applying JPEG compression to an image can seriously degrade the quality.

Rule 2—you can't increase the size of an image to be wider than its total pixel width. So, our 5" photo at 300 pixels/inch has a total pixel width of 1500, we can't make it bigger than that when we reset to screen resolution, or the image will have fuzzy edges.

Rule 3—when you adjust width, be sure that your image editor is set to adjust height at the same time to maintain the original aspect ratio, or your image will appear distorted.

When we buy royalty-free images online from a stock shop, we are presented with a choice for an image something like this:

Print Images (300dpi)

Size	Credits
300x600	3
600x1200	6
1200x2400	10

Web Images (72dpi)

Size	Credits
300x600	1
600x1200	2

Note that there is no 1200x2400 image for web, that's actually more pixels than the small print image, so you might as well buy the print image. This brings us to our next rule:
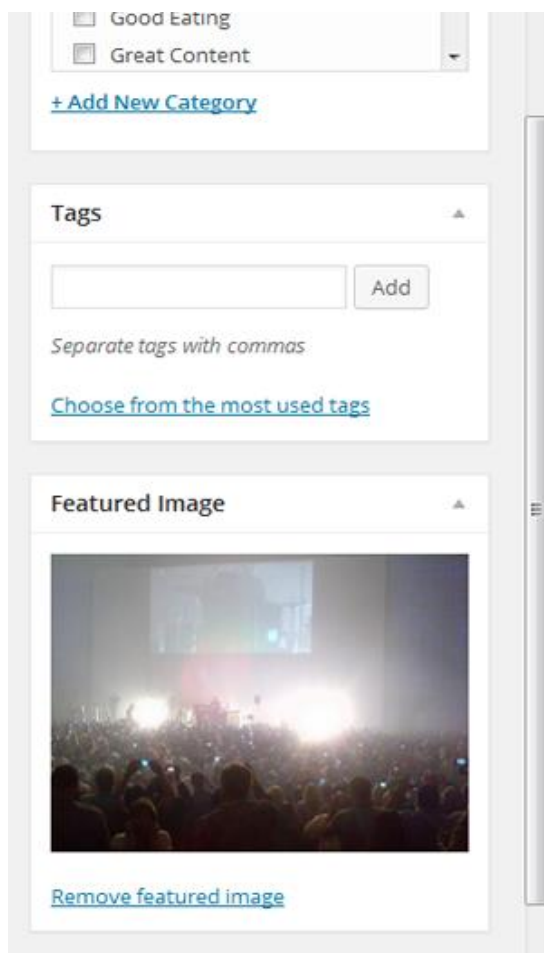
Rule 4—You can decrease the resolution of a high-resolution image to screen resolution without a loss in quality. You cannot go the other way, at least not without decreasing the width/height of the image by a ratio proportionate to the increase in resolution. In short, don't do it. Don't buy a low res image if you know that you will need to reproduce it in a print job later. You might not be able to obtain the hi-res version of the image when you need it. Buy an image that will work at print resolution, and size it for web.

Rule 5—ALWAYS save your original. Do not write over it. If you made a mistake in your prep, you can do it again until you get it right

These five rules can be tough to master. So grab an image from your pictures folder (one of the 42 images you took of the hummingbird last Spring will do) and work with it until you think you have something that will display well on a WordPress page. If you only took pictures at 72dpi, reset your digital camera to acquire at a higher resolution and go shoot something that has at least some contrast, it doesn't matter what. Once you have an image prepared, log into WordPress, select POST->NEW. Type in a title like "image test". Since we won't be publishing this page, it doesn't matter. Let's insert an image.

Working with Images in WordPress

Depending on the theme, there may be a "featured Image" associated with each blog post. The theme you selected may or may not support featured images. If featured image is available, you should find a link somewhere in your blog post sidebar that says "set featured image". If you click this, you will be taken to the media library where you can upload your image (it's pretty easy). Press the set featured image key in the bottom right corner of this screen and you will be returned to your post. In most cases, the image will not appear in your post text, because the theme authors have elected to place it over the title bar in your post (this is really common). The theme authors also define a size for the featured image, which may not match the size of the image you prepared, and it is often left justified. You might be able to change the featured size and alignment in the Appearance tab of the dashboard, or in a customization tab associated with the theme. Just remember that your settings will apply to ALL featured images, even ones you put in before you changed the settings Theme documentation will usually tell you the set size and aspect ratio of the featured image. It is good practice to prepare your images to

match the dimensions the theme calls out.

Now it's time to insert an image in the content. First input the paragraph of text that you want to illustrate with an image, then place the cursor in the top line of the text to the left. Click the Add Media button just over the main content window and either upload or select an image. When you have an image selected, the image info appears in the right sidebar. You can use the editing tools available in the media library to resize and crop the image, but it is usually best to do that offline. Now hit Insert into post, you will see that the image appears at the insertion point and your paragraph is underneath it, which looks awkward.
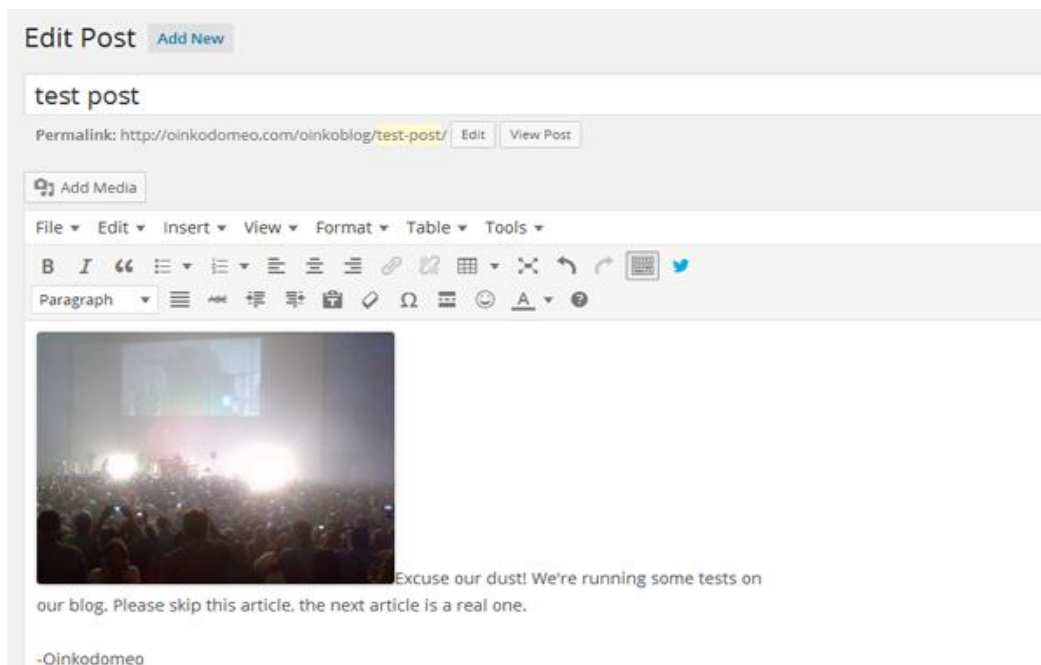
Click inside the image to illuminate the delete ("X") icon and the edit ("pencil") icon. Click the pencil icon, then in Display Setting-align change "none" to "left". Click update, your text will now appear next to your post.

Be a Fearless Blogger!

It is actually rather hard to break WordPress, and if you do there is lots of good free help available. Once you start, be sure to blog regularly but avoid "blogspam". Your blog content serves as the payload for your interaction with your Buyers. Blog about what you know, and follow our advice to make your posts findable, readable and sharable. Then start Selling with Social!

Contact us with questions or comments at http://oinkodomeo.com/contact.html

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