
1 An (Almost) Blank Canvas

First, let's talk about what a theme is - and isn't.

A theme, or template as some systems call it, is a collection of files in Drupal that governs some general visual styles. Themes dictate the main colors of a site, textures, buttons and typefaces.

That's it. It doesn't have anything to do with image sizes, whether an article has two or three columns, or whether there is a box for Twitter on the home page. Much of your website's look and feel relies solely on **what you put into it**.

Think of it in artistic terms. A theme is like the media that you would use to paint a picture (oil on canvas, watercolor on paper). But what the picture looks like is entirely up to you.

Another analogy: Think of a theme as a mannequin in a store. You've seen some that are lifelike, some that are more abstract, some with arms and some with no legs. But very few people pay attention to the mannequin. It's the clothes that are on the mannequin (the content) that matters most.

How did you come up with the themes?

It was a pretty long process.

When we were migrating sites from Vignette to Drupal in 2011, we had an opportunity to redesign the sites. But with 50 sites to migrate, we couldn't create 50 different designs based on 50 different requirements and tastes - it would make the process impossible to manage.

We saw a need to have a common user experience among all sites. Many times you just couldn't tell if a website was part of the State of Georgia. By creating this common experience you'd assure users that they were on a legitimate site and give them some familiarity when browsing these sites.

At the same time, we also recognized that agencies needed their own identity. We didn't want a cookie-cutter approach where every single site looked the same. We needed to find a middle ground.

We did this by dividing agencies up into areas of interest. Many agencies share the same constituents and have a common goal or purpose. They share the same values. But all are not the same. For example, the Department of Human Services and Georgia Bureau of Investigation have two totally different purposes; one probably does not want to look like the other.

So we created [different themes](#) ^[1] encompassing six different types of websites: Patriotic, Official, Friendly, Classic, Environmental and Portal. (We'll discuss each theme in a little more detail later.)

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