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WordPress is the platform of choice for this year's Online Pacemaker Finalists

Posted by [Aaron Manfull](#) • June 12, 2013 • [Contests](#) , [Design](#) , [Featured](#) , [Honored Work](#) , [Software](#) , [Tips](#) • [Add Comment](#)

```
<link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="http://elstoque.org/wp-content/themes/daily_headlines-new/style.css" />
<!-- SEO Ultimate (http://www.designsolutions.com/wordpress-seo/) -->
<meta name="description" content="Monte Vista High School - Student News" />
<meta property="og:type" content="blog" />
<meta property="og:title" content="El Estoque" />
<meta property="og:description" content="Monte Vista High School, Student News" />
<meta property="og:url" content="http://elstoque.org/" />
<meta property="og:site_name" content="El Estoque" />
<meta name="twitter:card" content="summary" />
<!-- /SEO Ultimate -->
<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml" title="El Estoque &rsquo; Feed" href="http://elstoque.org/feed/" />
<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml" title="El Estoque &rsquo; Comments Feed" href="http://elstoque.org/comm" />
<script type="text/javascript">
// Google Analytics
var _gaq = _gaq || [];
_gaq.push(['_setAccount', 'UA-11112501-1']);
_gaq.push(['_trackPageview']);
(function () {
var ga = document.createElement('script');
```

CMS Pacemaker Themes PLATFORMS

I wish the idea to write this post was an original, it's not. It's inspired from one [Bryan Murley](#) posted back in April on the [Innovation in College Media](#) site. Bryan took a look at college news sites that were named Pacemaker finalists and wrote [this piece](#) detailing what he found.

I found it so interesting I did the same with this year's crop of high school sites named Pacemaker Finalists by the National Scholastic Press Association. I went through the list of finalists and compiled their URL, high school name, city and state, platform that runs their site, theme (if applicable), and whether they were a Pacemaker Winner or just a finalist. You can view the full spreadsheet here:

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Site	School	City/State	Platform	Theme (if applicable)
dartnewsonline.com	St. Teresa's Academy	Kansas City, Mo.	Wordpress	Academy
hilite.org	Carmel HS	Carmel, Ind.	Wordpress	Academy
lakotaeastspark.com	Lakota East HS	Liberty Township, Ohio	Wordpress	Bark
redwoodbark.org	Redwood HS	Larkspur, Calif.	Wordpress	Bark
thecspn.com	William Mason HS	Mason, Ohio	Wordpress	Canvas
mustangmorningnews.com	Mira Costa HS, Daniel Pearl Magnet HS	Manhattan Beach, Calif.	Wordpress	Canvas
thepearlpost.com	Mira Costa HS, Daniel Pearl Magnet HS	Van Nuys, Calif.	Wordpress	Canvas

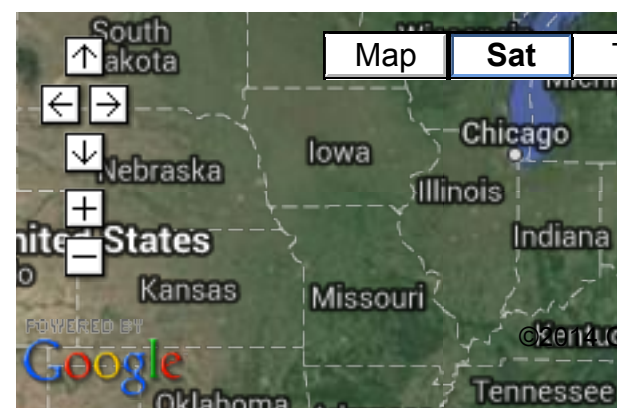
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HS MEDIA ONLINE MAP



View [HS Media Online](#) in a larger map

STAFFS WITH A SOCIAL

2013 Pacemakers

I'm sharing this information for what it is, factual data. While I will give a couple takeaways that jumped out at me, I am going to echo a couple things Bryan said in his post:

1. I am not pushing people to use one platform over another in this post. I'm just sharing data.
2. This list represents a small portion of schools that are online throughout the country. If we wanted an accurate picture of what high schools everywhere were using we would need to reach out to a much larger pool.
3. This data on this list might be a little inaccurate as I collected the data in June and sites were judged months ago. Staffs could have changed platforms and/or themes since finalists were announced. The spreadsheet and data below show what the finalists were running on June 1, 2013. I'll work to be a little more timely with the post next year.

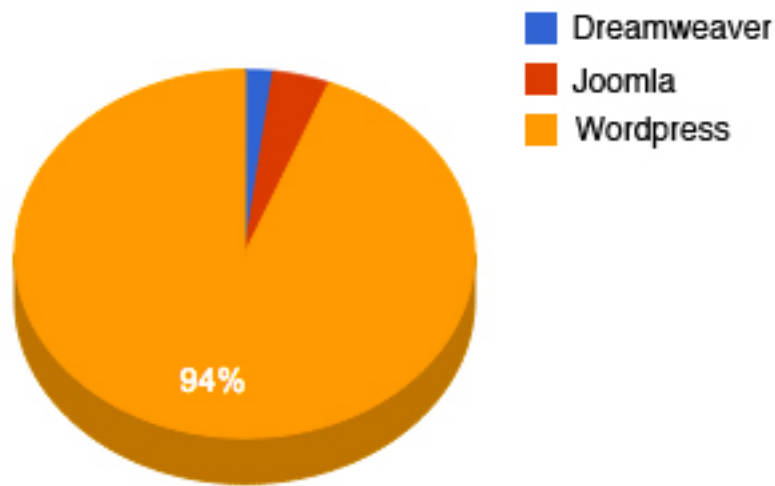
Having said that, there were three things that jumped out at me.

I figured WordPress would dominate the group, but I didn't expect it to destroy it

It wasn't that I was surprised to see WordPress as the platform of choice for the masses, what I was surprised by though was the degree to which it was chosen by these schools. 94 percent of Pacemaker Finalists (47 out of 50) used WordPress to power their sites. Two staffs used Joomla and one uses HTML/Dreamweaver. While WordPress also dominated the college sites with 70.4 percent, there were quite a few other platforms that collegiate staffs were using.

I was
most

Platforms of Finalists



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HS Journalism Advisers
on Twitter

surprised with the variety of themes used

Originally, I wasn't going to track this but once I got into collecting the data and saw that WordPress was dominating, I began to wonder if a specific theme would do the same. I honestly thought there would be 10 or 15 different themes – tops. Much to my surprise, if I'm reading all the code correctly, 38 different themes are represented in this list. While the SNO Flex theme was represented by 9 different sites and the Daily Headlines theme was represented by three, only a couple other shared a similar theme and most had a unique one in comparison to others on the list. The majority of the themes have been purchased and tweaked, however, there are a few that staffs seem to have built themes themselves or had one custom made.

It's the content that counts

...or at least that's what I take from this. Sometimes, staffs wonder what they can do to become a Pacemaker finalist or do better in critiques and competitions. The data above tells me that it's not as much about what theme a staff has as much as what they do with it. Sometimes, I see staffs getting caught up in spending weeks on picking the 'perfect' theme and then they spend three hours deciding how they are doing to populate it with content. Content is king. It always has been, and the fact that there are 38 different themes represented on this list reminds me that sites aren't just 'good' because they have a "good theme." They stand out because they do a lot of things well.

Wondering how to do things well? Here's a nice guide to flip through. It's a presentation [Logan Aimone](#) put together called "Setting the Pace Online."

Setting the Pace Online

Learning from Online Pacemaker finalists



JEA/NSPA San Francisco Convention • April 27, 2013

Logan Aimone, MJE
National Scholastic Press Association

This presentation is available at slideshare.net/loganaimone
and permission is given for educational use.

SlideShare April 28, 13

Setting the Pace Online 2013 from **Logan Aimone**

Related posts:

1. [NSPA announces 2010 Online Pacemaker Finalists](#)
2. [NSPA Names 31 2012 Online Pacemaker Finalists, CSPA Names 27 Online Crown Finalists](#)
3. [3 Places to Find Premium Responsive WordPress Themes for Your News site](#)
4. [Premium v. Free WordPress Themes: 5 Reasons to Go With a Premium One](#)
5. [\[Presentation\] From Meh to Epic: Learn from the Online Pacemaker Finalists](#)

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About

Aaron is in his 15th year of advising student media. He is



currently the Director of [Student Media](#) at Francis Howell North High School in St. Charles, Missouri. He is the Journalism Education Association [Digital Media Chair](#) and co-Director of [Media Now STL](#). He created [The Next 26](#) and is a former Dow Jones News Fund National Journalism Teacher of the Year. You can find him on Twitter [@manfull](#). He's a proud father. A transplanted Iowan. And an avid Hawkeye Fan.

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