

WordPress's Troubled Real-Time Collaboration Feature via @sejournal, @martinibuster

WordPress delayed the release of the highly anticipated version 7.0 of the CMS because the real-time collaboration (RTC) feature was not yet stable. The delay has caused some to question whether the feature is necessary in the core, while others say that the delay is a symptom of deeper issues within WordPress itself.

Real-Time Collaboration (RTC)

The Gutenberg project has been on a four-phase development track: Gutenberg block editor (phase 1), Full Site Editing (phase 2), Collaboration (phase 3), and multilingual capabilities within core (phase 4).

WordPress 7.0, initially due to be released on April 9, was supposed to be the rollout of phase 3, as well as other important features that make it easier to use AI within WordPress.

RTC enables multiple users to simultaneously edit content and block-based design within the block editor, a functionality that will be useful to publishers and agencies.

RTC Has Been Tested

The commercial side of WordPress, Automattic's WordPress.com,

has made RTC available to beta testers since October 2025. These beta testers are enterprise-level customers of WordPress VIP. WordPress's documentation states that RTC works best with native WordPress blocks and implies that the feature could be buggy with blocks that don't strictly abide by best practices.

A post on the official WordPress.org site provides this information about RTC performance:

"The most consistent feedback: real-time collaboration works seamlessly when sites are built for modern WordPress. Organizations using the block editor with native WordPress blocks and custom blocks developed using best practices reported smooth experiences with minimal issues.

One technical lead at a major research institution noted their team has invested in a deep understanding of Gutenberg and, as a result, "...have not run into any issues."

...Multiple teams tested the limits by:

Adding dozens of blocks simultaneously.

Copying large amounts of existing content in parallel.

Having entire teams edit the same post together (one team specifically noted "this is so fun").

In these stress tests with native blocks and modern custom blocks, real-time collaboration held up remarkably well."

Those tests were with a version that reused existing tables to store the editing events. That method resulted in multiple bugs, leading to a delay after it was decided to create a dedicated table for the RTC feature in the database used by WordPress sites in order to improve stability.

The beta-tested version of RTC had to limit the number of users who could simultaneously edit together.

A GitHub issue ticket explains what's wrong with the old version of RTC:

"It is known to be limited on a performance and scaling basis, but provides an easy way to see collaboration working.

By limiting the provider to a set low number of collaborators by default, the chance of overloading is reduced."

So that's one of the issues being solved by introducing a new database table. Once that is done, the RTC feature will need to be tested, and this is the area that WordPress web hosts will be concerned about.

Symptom Of Deeper Issues?

Joost de Valk, founder of Yoast SEO, recently published a blog post that made the case that WordPress is in need of rewriting existing code to make it more secure, modern, and efficient. He called attention to the troubled state of real-time collaboration as a symptom of the problems with the core itself.

He wrote:

"The recent deferral of WordPress 7.0 illustrates the problem in real time. The release was delayed because the team needs to revisit how real-time collaboration data is stored – the initial approach of stuffing it into postmeta wasn't going to hold up. They're now considering a custom table. This is exactly the pattern: a new feature runs into the limits of the existing data model, and the team has to work around it or pause to rethink."

That's one person's opinion, and not everyone shares it. A lively discussion on the Post Status Slack channel showed that some in the WordPress community strongly disagreed that

WordPress needs to be refactored.

Impact To WordPress Hosts

A concern I have heard privately is that RTC could have a negative impact on shared hosting providers. But it's hard to know because the RTC feature is still evolving from what was tested on WordPress.com, which is supposed to make it more stable.

Shared hosting environments will have to make a decision as to how to accommodate this feature.

- How will the hosting environment be affected by thousands of RTC customers editing all at once?
- Will they need to limit how many users can edit within the block editor?
- Will they have to place an upper limit of simultaneous editors for one tier of customers and a higher limit for other customers?

Should RTC Be A Plugin?

WordPress professional Matt Cromwell (LinkedIn profile) recently published an opinion piece that called attention to whether RTC should even be in the WordPress core and should instead be developed as a plugin. His reasoning is based on WordPress's core philosophy that any new feature introduced into the core should be something that the majority of WordPress users will need.

The reason for that design philosophy is to make WordPress usable for the majority of users and not ship with features that most will not use. This keeps WordPress lean. His article quotes the official WordPress design philosophy:

"Design for the majority

Many end users of WordPress are non-technically minded. They

don't know what AJAX is, nor do they care about which version of PHP they are using. The average WordPress user simply wants to be able to write without problems or interruption. These are the users that we design the software for as they are ultimately the ones who are going to spend the most time using it for what it was built for."

Cromwell writes:

"If a feature isn't needed by the vast majority, it belongs in a plugin. It is the reason WordPress remains lean enough to power 43% of the web.

Real-time collaboration fails this test spectacularly."

Although Cromwell insists that this feature wouldn't be used by the majority, an argument could be made that this is a feature that people want. For example, the Atarim collaboration plugin, with the free version currently installed on over 1,000 websites, states that the plugin has been used on over 120,000 websites by agencies and freelancers.

It could be that RTC is indeed an important feature, especially to designers, agencies, and editorial teams working together on articles.

AI In WordPress

The four-stage WordPress roadmap was created six years ago in 2018, and there was no way to know then how important AI would be today. Yet arguably it's AI, not collaboration, that's the most anticipated integration for WordPress 7.0. Nevertheless, real-time collaboration will very likely land in WordPress 7.0, enabling freelancers and agencies to work together with clients as well as with internal teams spread out across countries. That seems like a valid reason to ship a stable

feature within core as opposed to within a plugin.

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<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/wordpresss-troubled-real-time-collaboration-feature/571201/>