



# Drupal 7, 8 and 9

## Be Prepared

With the New Year just around the corner, it is time to **plan and prepare** for the next step in your website's technical progression. With so much change and growth within the Drupal community, there is a lot of knowledge we would like to share with you. We have gathered the most current and relevant Drupal information for you below. Our goal is to help you make the best decision in regards to your website's security and future success.

### **End of Life for Drupal 7 & 8 - November 2021**

#### **What does end of life truly mean?**

It means that the Drupal 7 and 8 platforms will no longer be supported by the Drupal community. The Drupal community will no longer provide contributions to those drupal cores, modules, or security. Don't worry though, there will be paid programs and organizations that will ensure your site is still manageable and updated as best as it can be. Even if you cannot pre-plan or organize a website upgrade before 2021!

Have you secured a developer partnership that is ready to get your website moved off Drupal 6 or 7 to Drupal 8 and help you prepare for Drupal 9? We know any move is tiresome, long, and ultimately costly, however, it is time to move upwards with your beloved platform. We hate to say it, but in the tech world, vintage is not trendy!

With a lifespan of over a decade, Drupal 7 is ending as well as Drupal 8. As Drupal moves forward as technology progresses, we too must embrace these changes. Why do we have to be progressive in technology? The answer is simple. More unique and enhanced features for user experience, administrative experience, flexibility, scalability, performance, stability, and certainly, security. As technology advances, so does the increased threat of having your site compromised.

Implementing newer technology with all these improvements and enhancements, helps you get to a positive Return On Investment (ROI) faster. Organizations that are consistently growing and upgrading to the latest platforms, are more likely to increase their long term revenue, while at the same time, saving money by reducing



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costs on administration, and menial repetitive business processes the technology can automate.

### **Drupal 9**

With a projected release date of June 3rd, 2020 for Drupal 9, the Drupal Association is recommending upgrading to D9 within 18 months of the release date in order for your website to stay secure. This timeline can create the feeling of being rushed for many site owners, as planning for a proper, successful migration takes a lot of time. Since Drupal 9 will contain the same features as Drupal 8, we recommend not waiting for Drupal 9's release and instead, spend that valuable time in mapping out your website's next evolution.

### **What's the difference between Drupal 8 & 9?**

The difference between Drupal 8 and Drupal 9 is simple. When Drupal 9 is released, it will have all DEPRECATED CODE REMOVED, and will have the latest and greatest supported version of Symfony - one of the main reasons D9 was created. Other than that, Drupal 9 code will mimic the last minor version of Drupal 8, with all of the same features.

### **So what is deprecated code?**

In plain speak, code in Drupal is marked as "deprecated" when it should no longer be used. Typically, code is deprecated because there is a better alternative that should be used instead. It is a natural part of the evolution of software, as technology improves, some features become obsolete.

That being said, deprecated code in Drupal 8 will need to be updated, as it was commonly felt that Drupal 8 had too many ways to generate links (yes, that happens!), so much of that code was removed as part of the clean up for Drupal 9. However, it should be noted that Drupal 8 modules that do NOT use deprecated code are compatible with Drupal 9!



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### **When should you start updating your code?**

Now or as soon as possible! Why not benefit from all of the improvements of the latest and greatest API's? There is no need to wait until the release of Drupal 9. Updating your Drupal website will smooth your migration path and your site's functionality. (It is also important to note that deprecated code will continue to work for some time, so no need to stress right away).

### **How do I know if I have deprecated code?**

Your development team can help you check your site's codebase for deprecated code by running a static PHP analysis tool called [drupal-check](#), or you can try installing the [Upgrade Status Module](#) to help you check the readiness of your site for a migration to Drupal 9 without a developer.

### **Why Drupal 7 to 8? Why not straight to 9?**

If you are still on Drupal 7, the smoothest, eventual transition to Drupal 9 will be to **not** bypass Drupal 8. If you are already on Drupal 8, you are in a great place. It is expected that migrating from D8 to D9 will be as quick and seamless as possible.

What makes Drupal 8 the best interim choice? For one, Drupal 9 is actually built in Drupal 8. We see no benefit for your business to wait until the release of Drupal 9 when you can reap all that Drupal 8 has to offer right now! You and your business can stay cutting edge and secure, while saving on costs that may arise from the more complicated upgrade from D7 directly to D9. Upgrading from D7 to D8 will also give you the time you need to plan a proper data migration so you do not potentially scramble change your important data.

A Drupal 7 to Drupal 8 upgrade will also give you the opportunity to rethink your website's theme, as Drupal 7 (and older versions), uses a totally different theme engine than both D8 & D9. This is the perfect time to address issues with content placement on your site, and enhance or remove features that have not been optimal on your site. You will need to make a decision on which Drupal base theme works



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best for you and your business. With so many options to choose from, it is a great idea to start planning now.

With a Drupal 7 to 8 upgrade, you may need to think about a redesign. Since you are, for all intent & purpose, rebuilding your website, this is a golden opportunity to refresh your online imagery, or possibly even rebrand.

### **What other similarities do Drupal 8 & 9 share?**

Both platforms are reliant on Symfony. While Drupal 8 is dependant on Symfony 3, which has an end of life in November 2021, Drupal 9 will be released with Symfony 4 or 5. The new updates to Symfony will bring in more capabilities and ease future updates.

What is Symfony? It is a PHP framework used to build web applications and websites. (PHP is a programming language that developers use in web development).

So, what is the big deal about Drupal 9? Well, to be frank, nothing. Drupal 9 will be Drupal 8 on steroids, and continue to be one of the most robust, flexible and secure platforms ever. It's the good kind of nothing.

### **What we love about Drupal 8**

With over 200 new and improved features, Drupal 8 is the biggest, baddest update ever in the Drupal community. This version is faster, thanks to PHP7 support, and highly scalable. This is great news for those businesses who have complex websites with loads of content. Drupal 8 has vastly improved the administrative user experience, so creating, updating and moving content has never been easier, which will directly benefit your target audience's user experience.

Every Drupal 8 brings mobile-first to the forefront, as every base theme is responsively designed. We love it when we don't have to worry about breakpoints!



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Drupal 8 also has new Multilingual features and is available in over 100 languages. It also provides advanced accessibility features that allow your website to be available to all different groups of users.

### **How to Prepare for the Drupal 9 Migration?**

As mentioned previously, the smartest way to be prepared for Drupal 9 is to be on an updated Drupal 8 platform.

Regardless of what version of Drupal, or any other platform you may be on, a full Site and/or Content Audit is highly recommended. The goal of any migration, in addition to upgrading the technology, should be to make your site better! How to deliver a better user experience (frontend and backend), and how to make it lighter, faster, more stable and secure. This begins with understanding what your site is comprised of and how well that stuff is functioning.

How else will you know what content types, taxonomies, modules, nodes etc... SHOULD be migrated? In other words, how will you know which data to keep or discard? Do you have broken links? A site audit can save you time and money by not migrating broken links, unnecessary content and so much more.

Once you have all your facts, we recommend you execute a Discovery Phase with your development partner. Combine what you have learned here with the goals of your website. Work with your vendor to put together a realistic budget, timeline, and strategy for upgrading your website. This may sound daunting, but working through a migration plan now will save you a lot of time and money in the long term. With an in depth, well thought out discovery, you can rest assured that you are moving ahead in the best possible way for your website.

### **Is Drupal the Best Fit for Your Website?**

While we love Drupal, and often refer to it as the legos of Content Management Systems (if you can dream it, we can build it), YOU need to decide if Drupal is the best platform for you and your business.



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Yes, Drupal is powerful, scalable and incredibly secure, but will you utilize all of the features that Drupal has to offer in your website? Do you need to? Then there is the cost to consider. As a well known Enterprise level platform, websites built on Drupal have a tendency to be very complex and therefore, expensive. We don't want to scare you off this amazing CMS, but this is something to consider when moving forward

with an upgrade to your site. Here are some key questions to ask yourself to help you make the best decision for the next iteration of your website:

- i. Is your website complex? Does it require a lot of advanced functionality overall?
- ii. Do you need multiple admin users, roles and permissions?
- iii. Do you have really large volumes of content?
- iv. Does your site have thousands of users?
- v. Do you require a lot of custom code?
- vi. Do you have plans to scale your website dramatically in the future?
- vii. Do you require enterprise level security?

If you answered no to more than half of the questions above, it may be worth discussing Wordpress as an option with your vendor. The Wordpress Content Management System is a great alternative and powers over 34% of all of today's websites.

### **Can You stay on Drupal 6 or 7?**

With Drupal 6 no longer receiving community support since 2016, it is highly recommended to upgrade your website to Drupal 8. Without regular security advisories, updates or bug fixes, your site is at risk. It is also likely that your website is not mobile friendly. There are programs in place, such as D6LTS (Drupal 6 Long Term Support), as well as independent Drupal agencies, that offer site maintenance & support **for a fee**. Another key factor to consider on why you shouldn't stay on Drupal 6 is it is likely that your website is not mobile friendly. Responsive design is essential for the success of today's websites.



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Drupal 7 will receive full community support until November 2021. This is great news for D7 users, BUT, this is the time to start planning for that eventual upgrade. It is

recommended to keep your D7 site as updated as possible to stay secure, in particular, your sites PHP version. Running the latest PHP version ensures that site is protected against vulnerabilities identified in older versions. Like Drupal 6, there will be programs, such as D7ES (Drupal 7 Extended Support), and Drupal vendors that will offer maintenance & support **for a fee**.

### Conclusion

There is much to learn and absorb when preparing for an upgrade to your website, but you are now on the right path! It cannot be stressed enough how important **proper planning** is for a successful website migration. This knowledge should also give you the peace of mind you deserve so you can navigate through 2020 confidently and prepared to take the next step for the best web presence possible for your business.