



# One Man's Blog

Specialization is for Insects.

[About John P.](#) [Contact](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#)



Get OMB via e-mail:

E-mail Here

Submit Email

1601 readers  
BY FEEDBURNER

Join John P. on: [in](#) LinkedIn [f](#) Facebook or [t](#) Twitter.

[Previous / Next Post](#)

« [How to Change Time Machine's Backup Schedule / A Little Poem About Gossip](#) »

## An Open-Source Look at the Cost of WordCamp Dallas

Posted on Jul 13, 2009 - 1:05am by John P. in [Finance](#), [Wordpress](#)



14  
tweets

I've had many people asking about what it takes to actually put together [WordCamp Dallas](#), and there have been a lot of questions specifically involving the costs associated with the event.

I've been hesitant to share all the details up to this point for a variety of reasons including:

- Confidentiality for our event sponsors.
- No desire for second-guessing from the bleachers. (aka – I could have done it cheaper!)
- Privacy for myself since it involved cost I picked up.

However, I've decided that in the interests of the community I will share as many details as possible so that others who are looking to put on an event of this kind will understand what it's going to take before they attempt to do it. The last thing we need are surprises, especially where money is involved.

Keep in mind that the costs outlined here were to cover around 350 attendees, plus live streaming of the event to a few hundred more around the world. Also know that WordCamp Dallas 2008 had a similar outcome, but at around 65% of the values here.

### Significant costs:

- **Food: \$8,750** – Lunches, morning coffee & muffins, and afternoon snacks.
- **T-shirts: \$3,500** – Two sided, two color shirts, plus filled requests for sizes to 5XL.
- **ASL Interpreters: \$1,600** – To provide sign language for the deaf.
- **Venue Costs: \$1,500 (est.)** – Misc. costs associated with the venue.
- **Welcome party: \$1,200** – Friday night bowling party for about 90 attendees.
- **Speaker's Dinner: \$1,000** – Saturday night dinner, as a thank you to our speakers.
- **Speaker Travel: \$900** – To cover speaker expenses only where necessary.
- **Name badges, etc: \$500** – Badges, signs and supplies.
- **EventBrite / PayPal: \$500** – Fees for processing

### Recent Comments

Spewer, the Game! Trust Me, You're Gonna Love it!  
Ted: OMG I can't stop playing that. haha.

Aaron Hall: This game has that "old school" feel, probably...

An Open-Source Look at the Cost of WordCamp Dallas

John P.: Jared, I did not delete any comments off of...

the one and only ridor: And Aaron Hall is an attorney? I...

A Direct Comparison of Picasa for Mac vs. iPhoto

Peri: Is there a way to import albums from...

13 Billboards (I laughed, I cried, I posted.)

Morgan: That one was proven photoshopped by buisness week...

The Magic of Photoshop, Photography and SUPERMODELS!

Paul: Good work and fantastic effect. I saw once...

### Meet the Commenters

[Lisa Marie Mary](#) (3)

[Nehh](#) (3)

[joseGregorio](#) (2)

[Katie Radisson](#) (1)

[Cali Lewis](#) (1)

[Natasha C](#) (1)

[beefy d](#) (1)

[Concerened citizen](#) (1)

[ShaDow](#) (1)

[Lisa](#) (1)

### Friends and Family

[Cali](#)

[Elie](#)

[Matt](#)

### Sites Worth Supporting

[Folding@Home](#)

[The Freenet Project](#)

Search for:

Search

All Things John P.

### friendfeed

• [Flickr](#)

[Seagull in flight](#)



1 hour ago - [Comment](#)

• [Twitter](#)

"Inconceivable! My iPhone if freakin' dead. DAMMIT!!!"

47 minutes ago -

[Comment](#)

• [Flickr](#)

[San Francisco's Feral Pigeons](#)



2 hours ago - [Comment](#)

• [Twitter](#)

"@lisamarlemary Lightning comes first, speed of light is faster than sound. Each 1 second delay = 1 mile away."

2 hours ago - [Comment](#)

• [Twitter](#)

"Spewer, the Game! Trust Me, You're Gonna Love it! - <http://bit.ly/ENFzn>"

4 hours ago - [Comment](#)

[View my feed - Subscribe to me](#)

transactions.

- **Power cables, etc.: \$350** – Venue specific needs.
- **Other: \$1,000** – Miscellaneous stuff that adds up quick.

Total: **\$20,800**

## Income:

- Ticket Sales: \$8,970
- **Sponsors: \$6,600** (\$2,000 received so far)

Total: **\$15,570 (\$10,970)**

So, as you can see, there is about a \$5,000 shortfall from the event, plus another \$5,000 that needs to make it's way through from the sponsor's Accounts Payable departments. This can be handled a few ways:

1. Plan the event much farther in advance and give sponsors a hard deadline for payment.
2. Be willing to float the deficit until sponsors come through with payments (what I opted for).
3. Charge more. A ticket price of \$50 would ensure that the event was closer to break-even.

The point of the math here is that an event of this magnitude needs a benefactor. There must either be a company or an individual behind it for decision making purposes, financial responsibility, and accountability. Attendees, sponsors and venue personnel must have trust in the entity standing behind it.

## Alternatives

### *Meet-Ups!*

It doesn't require a huge weekend long venue to get people together for a common interest. [MeetUp.com](#) will allow you to organize small groups of people and you could have Meet-ups at a home, restaurant, park, or some other reasonable venue.

There is no need to feed people, or buy T-shirts, and indeed you can avoid the majority of the costs from this event. Assuming you can get enough folks together you should be able to attract a few speakers who are willing to come share their experience.

### *BarCamp Style*

You can also always go the BarCamp route. If you've got a group of folks who can go with the flow, and you can forgo most of the niceties such as WiFi and power for everyone, professional A/V recording, tables and chairs for meals, etc. then you can put together an event at any old place that offers to accommodate you, and invite sponsors to contribute whatever it takes to handle the event without any money changing hands.

People have events like this quite often, but keep in mind that *someone still has to take responsibility*. So if you are going to organize the event you will be on the hook from a liability standpoint. I highly recommend an [Umbrella policy](#) from your insurance provider.

## Other Costs and Notes

This year we didn't have to do it, but last year we had to provide [event insurance](#) to cover the city for providing the venue. Event insurance for around 200 people ran about \$500-600 as I recall. Be prepared to provide this for just about anywhere you go if you are planning on an organized event. For an example, see the [Sacramento State University's requirements](#).

Often times, certain venues will require that you use their catering service. This can really increase the cost of an event, so double check to make sure you want to go that route.

Finally, you are going to need a LOT of volunteers. You will need people to do all sorts of labor, otherwise you are going to have to pay out the nose for it. These things include:

- Creating / printing / assembling nametags and signage.
- T-shirt / poster / banner designs and creation.
- Organizing pre or post event parties
- Registration duties
- Q&A (running mics) and Time keeping for speakers
- Event setup and teardown
- Staffing a Genius Bar (to answer WordPress questions for free)
- Videography / Photography
- Webmaster duties and inbound question handling
- Registration management and accounting

That's just the top 10. You may come up with more.

## The End

So, this post is not meant to scare anyone from taking on the challenge of organizing a WordCamp, but rather to serve as a sort of blueprint from which to start the planning. You can scale the various elements up or down as needed depending on the size, budget and type of people who will be attending.

As always, I'm happy to answer questions, or if you need someone to give a lecture and my schedule permits I'm always up for a good WordPress party. Cheers!

---

Tags: [Finance](#), [WordCamp](#), [Wordpress](#)

## Related Posts

- July 25, 2009 -- [WordCamp Dallas 2009: Cali Lewis – Building A Vibrant Community \(5\)](#)
- July 23, 2009 -- [WordCamp San Francisco 2009: Chris Pirillo – Community WebVisions \(6\)](#)
- July 21, 2009 -- [WordCamp Dallas 2009: The WordCamp Panel Discussion \(1\)](#)
- July 7, 2009 -- [Matt Mullenweg's™ State of the Word: WordCamp San Francisco 2009 \(6\)](#)
- June 6, 2009 -- [WordCamp Dallas 2009 is Three Weeks Away! Spread the Word! \(8\)](#)
- September 20, 2008 -- [WordCamp 2008: Lorelle VanFossen – 260 Ways to Break WordPress \(1\)](#)
- September 4, 2008 -- [WordCamp 2008 San Fran: Stephen O'Grady – Open Source Business Models \(2\)](#)
- September 3, 2008 -- [WordCamp 2008 San Fran: Lloyd Budd – Switching to WordPress Painlessly \(0\)](#)
- September 2, 2008 -- [WordCamp 2008 San Fran: Ben Huh – LOLcats and the Secret of Virality \(2\)](#)
- September 1, 2008 -- [WordCamp 2008 San Fran: Andy Skelton Sings 'Deserve' \(0\)](#)

### Previous / Next Post

« [How to Change Time Machine's Backup Schedule / A Little Poem About Gossip](#) »

**20 Comments in 13 threads.»**

Comment by [Joe Chuang](#)  
2009-07-13 01:41:28

2009-07-13 01:41:20

Wow John,

Thanks for the semi-detail break down of the behind the scene cost for running of these event, I had no idea it would cost so much... words can not express my level of gratitude..... Thanks SO MUCH for everything!

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Jeff Hurt](#)

2009-07-13 08:44:55

First, thanks to you and your organization team for planning the event. It was outstanding.



So, for those of us that attended the event, where can we give you donations to help cover the shortfall? If each of the 350 attendees gave you another \$15, we could make up that difference quickly. I know from my nonprofit association work that typically, 20% of the membership/attendees will actually make up 80% of the revenue. So if 70 of us gave you \$75 each, we could make up that difference for you so youâ€™re not underwriting the event.

As a professional meeting and event planner, I can appreciate wanting to meet budget and was amazed the registration fee was not higher. I can't be a sponsor but I can give more and it was worth more than \$30! So where is your online donation link & site?

Also, I wrote about my WordCamp2009 experience from the perspective of a meeting and event planner. [Tips For Planning An Unconference: Lessons Learned From The Trenches](#) .

Thanks again John!

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Jeff](#)

2009-07-13 09:32:49

I'm sure the Dallas WordPress users group plays a part in helping out with WordCamp. Do they help develop sponsors (and speakers) throughout the year? If the group volunteered to do this with intention, it might relieve a lot of the last-minute monetary pressures.



The event exceeded my expectations in every way (again). Thanks for your significant personal commitment that made it happen.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Lisa Marie Mary](#)

2009-07-13 13:53:53

Thank you, John – for providing all of this information. I'm sure it will be super helpful in getting other WordCamp's up and running!



And thank you so much for all of your hard work and time and own personal money making this event so wonderful! It really, really ROCKED! I still can't get over having seen all that cool research stuff – that was so awesome of you to get that set up!



[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [fas](#)

2009-07-13 14:19:40

That is really detailed. I never knew its so expensive to hold a wordcamp.



[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Eddy Susanto](#)

2009-07-13 22:25:18

Maybe it need the sponsor to cover expend.

I have in this same event in Januari 2009 in Indonesia. It's very interesting event, Matt can share the knowledge , vision and mission of wordpress.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Matt Hargus](#)

2009-07-14 16:35:07

Thanks for the insight into the costs of putting on the Dallas WordCamp. I was definitely surprised at the expense, and personally took a lot away from the event. I felt that the \$30 fee was low myself, and think you could have bumped it up and still gotten an excellent turnout. Hindsight, of course.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Aaron Hall](#)

2009-07-15 21:46:18

If you cut out the T-shirts and interpreters, you would break even.



[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Lisa](#)

2009-08-04 07:30:01

You saying about cutting out the interpreters is NOT very nice.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Shannon Jenkins](#)

2009-08-04 08:40:10

True, cutting out interpreter does cut a huge cost. Unfortunately, it also cuts out the opportunity for many people to attend. The internet has opened up an opportunity for Deaf children, teens, and adults to make their voices known in ways that were previously unavailable-blogs, video phones, emails, all allow the Deaf population to talk to one another, share their thoughts and views, and communicate with people who would not have ever seen them or "heard" their voice without this technology. I think cutting out interpreters cuts out a vital part of the community you are supposedly trying to reach.

Make the tshirts a purchased item, because many people there will buy them anyway, but please don't make the conference unavailable to many people who would love to be there by cutting out the interpreters.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Trina](#)

2009-08-04 11:45:52

Aaron, are you serious? Really? You'd rather leave a whole population of people in the dust just to save \$1,600? It's people like you who make life a whole lot harder for those of us with hearing loss. (I'm including culturally deaf and late-deafened, hard-of-hearing, cochlear implant users...many of whom still rely on interpreters). Someone mentioned you're an attorney. I can not believe someone who supposedly knows the LAW would suggest such a thing. We're in the year 2009, not 1959. Try living a day in my shoes, then you won't be such a jerk. I promise.



[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Levi Coplen](#)

2009-08-04 15:48:54

Are you really joking that cutting the cost of interpreters will save the money? The way you speak like that is considerable as a discrimination against the Deaf, Hard-of-hearing, and Hearing-Loss People. As if you are trying to be a racist against the color people or a sexism against the one of a gender. In case if you haven't noticed that there's America with Disability of Act (ADA) which are required to provide the interpreter anywhere the Deaf people made a request.



Since I noticed that you are an attorney, in case if you are new to ADA, please go back to the law school where you get your degree from and relearn the law all over again while you are still at it.

I suggest that you should think twice before speak like that especially if you are an attorney.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Ted Henry](#)

2009-08-04 16:26:35

Aaron Hall, FYI, You mentioned about cutting off the interpreter truly appalling me.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Lorelle](#)

2009-07-18 10:40:35

The event was amazing, and yes, the ticket price could have been more. However, the goal of WordCamps is to make them affordable and the lower price is in line with the national averages and the goals and desires of the WordPress Community.



The cost of the interpreters is a tough one as "public" events are required by law to provide them, especially if requested. Like insurance, these are things you cannot avoid if you do such an event.

Some WordCamps, as John pointed out, can be less formal, with speakers housed in homes not hotels and everyone volunteering their time and energy, more Barcamp style. I've been to a lot of WordCamps that topped \$3,000 to \$5,000 max, including t-shirts and interpreters, much of the high overhead donated. They don't have to be expensive.

I love the idea that many organizations and associations use which is to raise money all year long with various activities to help offset the cost of the annual event. That makes sense, and it's fun to involve more people and have fun with the fund raising. Think of family events, pizza making parties, digital rummage sales, and all kinds of ways people can raise money to help offset the costs of their monthly meetings as well as the annual

can raise money to help offset the costs of their monthly meetings as well as the annual WordCamp. I love it!

Some great work done here for the second annual WordCamp, and a lot of lessons being learned by all. Thanks for sharing!

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Austin Passy](#)

2009-07-19 20:18:06

Very nice write up on your WordCamp organization experience. Will look over it as I prepare for WordCampLA.



[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [brad](#)

2009-07-20 10:17:00

really nice work

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [Jared Evans](#)

2009-08-04 16:11:51

Why was my comment for Aaron Hall deleted?



[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [John P.](#)

2009-08-04 21:12:53

Jared,



I did not delete any comments off of this thread. It is possible that Akismet flagged something as spam if you used a word that triggered it. Feel free to re-post whatever it was; however, I'm getting very upset at the comments directed at Aaron, so if people don't lay off him I will begin deleting freely.

This blog is not here to insult fellow participants, so if people want to put forth rational arguments about why private citizens should pay to subsidize the needs of others, then so be it. But I'm putting everyone on a short leash here.

John P.

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by [the one and only ridor](#)

2009-08-04 19:59:27

And Aaron Hall is an attorney? I think I'm more appalled that people in Minnesota actually relies on him to defend them ...



R-

[Reply to this comment](#)

## Please review the Rules before commenting.

372,140  
spam comments

Name (required)

(Comments with keyword names WILL BE DELETED!)

E-mail (required - never shown publicly)

(Don't worry, read my [Privacy Policy](#))

Web Site

(Comments with spammy looking links WILL BE DELETED!)

Your Comment (smaller text box | larger text box)

(Seriously, I'll delete spammy comments. Don't waste your time.)

You may use `<a href="" title="">` `<abbr title="">` `<acronym title="">` `<b>` `<blockquote cite="">` `<code>` `<del datetime="">` `<em>` `<i>` `<q cite="">` `<strike>` `<strong>` in your comment.

Add comment

### Read well over 500,000 times:

- [How I'd Hack Your Weak Passwords](#)
- [Amusing Little Helicopter Game](#)
- [A Compendium of 150 Monty Python Sketches](#)
- [10 Worst Drivers Ever Caught On Video](#)
- [Get Your Virtual Haircut and Other Auditory Illusions](#)
- [How Crack Cocaine is Made](#)

### Read well over 300,000 times:

- [13 Billboards \(I laughed, I cried, I posted.\)](#)
- [The Massive List of Genius - People With the Highest IQ](#)
- [Matt Cutts's™ Lecture - Whitehat SEO tips for Bloggers](#)
- [What It's Really Like to Be Schizophrenic](#)
- [Massive Storm Drain Eruption in Middle of Street](#)
- [My 51 Favorite Freeware Apps for Windows](#)

### Read well over 150,000 times:

- [United States Marine Corps Cadence](#)
- [10 Most Dangerous Toys Of All Time](#)
- [Tutorial: How to Upgrade the Creative Zen Vision Hard Drive](#)
- [Smartest Man in the World Espouses Virtues of Eugenics](#)
- [Why Celebrity Photos Look So Great](#)
- [Where's™s OSHA When You Need a™em?](#)

This site powered by [WordPress](#) and the [Rapid Access](#) Theme, and it's hosted on a [Dedicated Server](#) at Layered Tech with full DEFCON 1 management! Yee-haw!

This page generated with 74 queries, in 2.399 seconds.

I use the "No Adverts for Friends" plugin by [Donncha O Caoimh](#)