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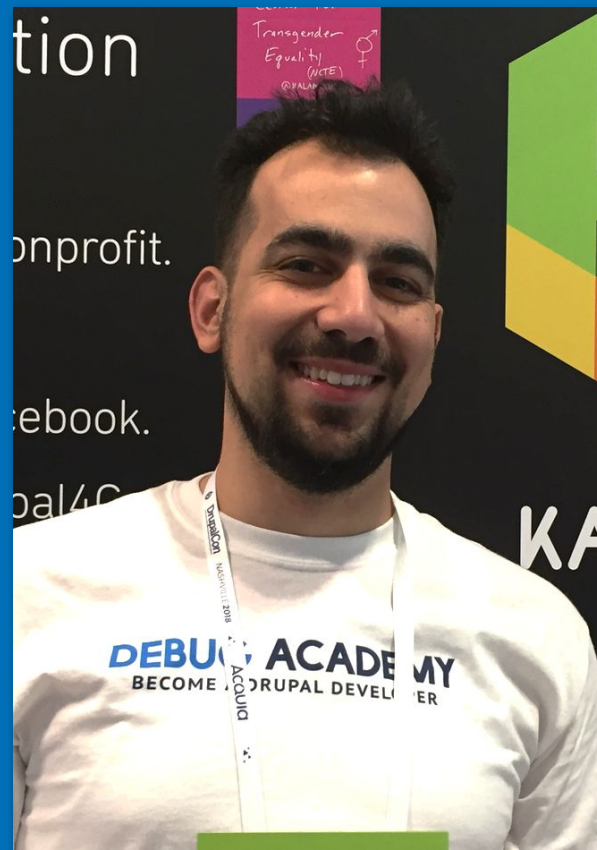## LEARN AND LAUNCH

Building Lower-Budget Drupal Sites Profitably

Ashraf Abed

- Founder of Drupito.com
- Founder at Debug Academy
  - From 2013 to Present
- Technical Architect at Acquia
  - From 2014 to 2017
- Holds many Drupal **Acquia Certifications**:

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Architect & Instructor

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The Challenges

Drupal builds are prohibitively expensive, partly due to:

- Requires expertise (Composer, Git, etc) to start & maintain
  - Difficult for junior developers to start alone
- Well-known "Drupal hosts" are expensive
- Drupal 8+ primarily focused on 'enterprise'
- Regular updates/upgrades require experienced developer(s)
- Pixel-perfect implementations are time consuming & non-trivial

Small Drupal Projects 'Not worth it'

Client perspective:

- Expensive initial build

- Expensive ongoing maintenance

Developers & Agencies perspective:

- Clients are reluctant to invest worthwhile amounts

- 'Stuck' performing maintenance for low/no-budget clients

- Unable to invest enough time to make client happy

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The Opportunity

- Approximately **31.7 million out of 33.2 million** (99.9%) businesses in the US are small businesses (2024)

- Therefore, we can conclude there are significantly more lower-budget website projects than large

- Opportunities include:
  - Small businesses
  - Non-profits
  - Personal websites

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Let's start with defining a few terms/areas for this talk:

- **DX**: <u>D</u>eveloper's (coder) interactions with Drupal

- **LDX**: <u>L</u>ow-coder's DX (i.e. Site Builders)

- **UX**: End-<u>u</u>ser's interactions with Drupal

- **EUX**: Content <u>e</u>ditor's UX

- **(TD) Technical Debt**: The more you have, the more difficult it becomes to maintain and modify Drupal core

Solutions

Don't say "It depends"....

(he's going to say "it depends")

- Architecture
- Design
- Hosting
- Project Management

Actionable Solution

This can only be solved properly with a holistic approach.

Each of these areas significantly impacts the budget:

- Architecture

- Client / project

- Design

- Hosting

- Project Management

Budget-friendly.. Client?

When their budget is quite low..

Ensure your client understands (after you teach them!):

- "Out of the box" = Affordable

- "Customized" = Expensive

- Not every bug is in scope

- 'Out of scope' items will be evaluated post-launch

Budget-friendly Project Management

- Gather requirements

- Determine project's goals

- Divide into prioritized smaller projects:

  - Initial launch (MVP / MLP)

  - Future phase / enhancements

- Divide projects into phases (e.g. backend, design, frontend)

- Agree on scope & aggressively enforce scope

- Very low budget? Consider 'Custom modules' = out of scope

Budget-friendly Design

<u>When</u> you design for Drupal will make or break your budget:

1. Build majority of the site in Drupal (no code) first.

2. Adjust site as needed until the client agrees that the content is segmented appropriately.

3. Afterwards, design the site so little to no HTML changes are needed.

   a. Constrain design to layout builder w/custom CSS & JS

4. Finally, implement the design (theme the site).

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Budget-friendly Hosting

- Consider lower-cost hosting options, such as:
  - Self-hosting
    - Pro: No limitations
    - Pro: Lower hosting cost
    - Con: Requires expertise to optimize hosting
    - Con: Requires manual ongoing maintenance (Drupal & server)
  - Using lower-cost host (see Drupito.com - our product)
    - Pro: Lower hosting cost
    - Pro: Drupal, server upgrades are done for you
    - Con: Limitations on which modules are available
    - Con: Limitations on custom module development
  - Static site (more information on upcoming slides)

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Budget-friendly Architecture

- Architecture impacts budget.

- Start with **DrupalCMS**, apply all appropriate **recipes**

- Declare 'custom modules' out of scope.

- Drupal can be built with any of these in mind:

  - Hosting as a static site

  - Hosting & Maintenance via Drupito

  - Maintenance via Automatic Upgrades module

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Architecting for budget-friendly maintenance

Which architecture is right for your project?

- Static site
- Automatic Upgrades
- Drupito
- Custom hosting
- Traditional hosting

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Considerations: Static site

- PHP will not run on your site
- All forms (comments, webforms, etc) must not submit to PHP or Database
  - Use third-party, client-side integrations for any forms
    - E.g. client-side (HTML) embed codes
- Updating content requires developer intervention
  - Must use Tome to restore site from code-backup
- Over time, codebase may need to be manually updated

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Approach: Static site

1. Build site locally with Drupal

2. Do not allow any forms to submit using PHP

   a. Use third-party client-side embeds for all forms

3. Visitors can't create accounts or log in

4. Use e.g. Tome module to export site as static site

   a. "Static site" = HTML, CSS, and JS. No PHP or Database.

5. Host the static site on a non-Drupal host

   a. Very inexpensive

Considerations: Automatic Upgrades

- A module which applies composer updates via the UI
- **Only** applies "patch" updates (e.g. 10.1.**0** to 10.1.**1**)
- Not currently fully automated, but easy to use
- Incompatible with many traditional Drupal hosts
  - Good for custom hosting
- User will be required to maintain hosting (e.g. server updates)
- Larger updates still performed manually by a developer
  - E.g. 10.**1**.0 to 10.**2**.0, or 10.1.0 to 11.0.0

Approach: Automatic Upgrades

1. Build site locally with Drupal - no restrictions

2. Host the site on a non-traditional Drupal host

   a. Ensure host allows Drupal (PHP) to overwrite itself

   b. Many shared hosts may not allow this

3. When patch updates available:

   a. Back the site up, then apply via the UI

4. When other updates are available:

   a. Perform manually using Composer, Git, etc.

Considerations: Drupito

- Limited to Drupal CMS modules & select others

- No environment setup or local development needed

- Cannot use composer or edit PHP code

- Site is fast & optimized (Memcached, CDN, etc)

- Maintenance & upgrades performed automatically

- Low cost

Approach: Drupito

1. Create site via the UI (via drupito.com)

   a. Apply appropriate recipes to accelerate development

2. Run drush commands via the dashboard

3. Build site in the UI

4. Write CSS & JS in the UI

5. Drupito handles maintenance automatically

   a. Hosting & maintenance charges become your profit

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Real-World Low Budget Case Studies
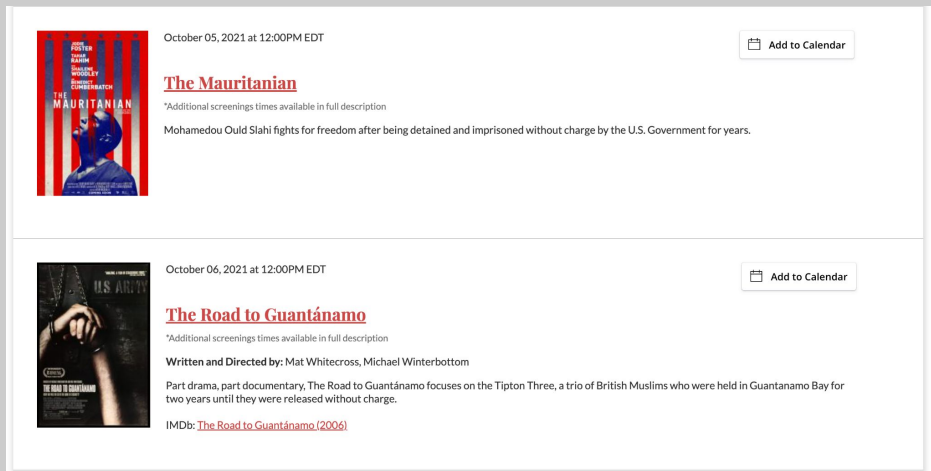
Which projects fit where?

Non-Profit Film Festival Site

- Site was 1-time use (online film-festival)

- Relatively low-budget

- After the film festival, site will <u>never</u> be updated
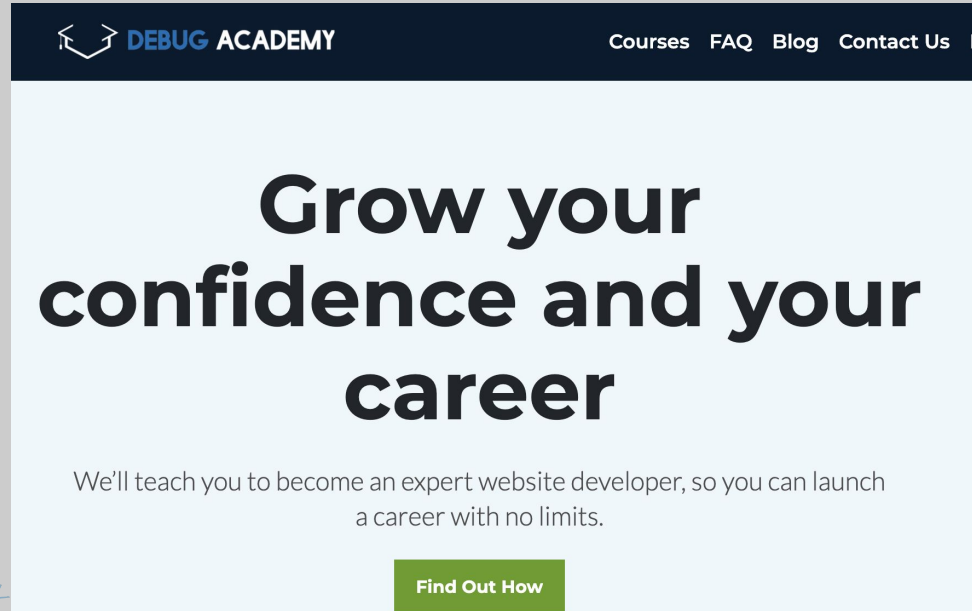
- Best budget-friendly solution?

- **Solution: <u>Static site</u>**
  - Ensured all user-facing actions (forms, buttons) triggered client-side only

- Cheap hosting, no maintenance!

October 05, 2021 at 12:00PM EDT

Add to Calendar

The Mauritanian

*Additional screenings times available in full description

Mohamedou Ould Slahi fights for freedom after being detained and imprisoned without charge by the U.S. Government for years.

October 06, 2021 at 12:00PM EDT

Add to Calendar

The Road to Guantánamo

*Additional screenings times available in full description

Written and Directed by: Mat Whitecross, Michael Winterbottom

Part drama, part documentary, The Road to Guantánamo focuses on the Tipton Three, a trio of British Muslims who were held in Guantanamo Bay for two years until they were released without charge.

IMDb: The Road to Guantánamo (2006)

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Student portal + invoicing (debugacademy.com)

- Site updated regularly
- Users must log in (eliminates "Static")
- Non-trivial custom modules key to site's operation (eliminates "Drupito")
- **Solution: <u>Custom hosting</u>**
  - Automatic Upgrades optional
- Manual maintenance required

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2-person Non-Profit Site

- Site is updated infrequently

- Content editors want to log in without developer help

- Relatively low-budget

- Client is flexible on requirements

- **Solution: <u>Drupito</u>**
  - Build using DrupalCMS & custom CSS
- Low-cost hosting, no maintenance cost!

sion

defend civil liberties and freedoms, promote a fair criminal justice system, and advocate for the nts of political prisoners targeted in the "War on ror."

Our Mission

Research and Resources

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Personal blog by Drupal Developer

- Flexible on design requirements

- Wants ability to quickly log in & write content

- Can use "ECA" module for custom backend logic

- Does not want to spend $$$ for traditional hosting

- Does not want to spend time maintaining server or applying Drupal upgrades

- **Solution: Drupito** ($10/month for server & site maintenance)

  - (Can switch to static site in the future, if blog becomes inactive)

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