

4,000+

A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

How I sold 4,000+ themes

and what I'd do if I started today

I've sold more than four thousand themes on ThemeForest over ten years. Most of what I know, I learned the expensive way. This is the short version of what I would skip if I had to start over.

BEFORE YOU GO FURTHER

Who should close this book right now

This is not for everyone, and I would rather lose you on this page than waste six months of your life. Read both columns honestly before you turn the page.

CLOSE IT IF

You want income that arrives without shipping a finished product.

You expect the marketplace to do your marketing for you.

You have no intention of finishing the boring last twenty percent.

You want to build what you like, regardless of what anyone pays for.

KEEP READING IF

You can design or code, and you will learn or buy the other half.

You will treat this as a product business, not a portfolio piece.

You want to own the customer, not just borrow someone's traffic.

You can give a first theme eight to twelve focused weeks.

Ten years in, the authors who quit were almost never the least talented. They were the ones who belonged in the left column and refused to admit it.

CARDS FACE UP

Why this chapter is free

If the other nine chapters are worth paying for, why is this one free? Fair question, and I am not going to answer it with a story about giving back to the community. I don't know you.

The reason is commercial, so I'd rather say it plainly: **chapter one is free because it is the only honest way to sell chapters two through ten.** Here is exactly how that is supposed to work.

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- 01** This chapter hands you the real landscape and the real numbers, not a teaser that stops right where it gets useful.
 - 02** You go and check one of them yourself. The buyer fee, the category rankings, the Double Shelf arithmetic.
 - 03** It holds up. Now you know I am not guessing, and you know what the other nine chapters are likely worth.
 - 04** If you want them, you buy them from the person who was already right once, for free.
-

WHAT THE REST OF THE BOOK COSTS, IN CONTEXT

\$19

CHAPTERS 2 TO 10

\$23.50

ONE MARKETPLACE
SALE

\$57.23

ONE DIRECT SALE

The book costs less than one sale on the shelf you already have, and a third of one sale on the shelf this book teaches you to build.

That is the entire pitch. No countdown, no fake scarcity, no bonus stack. If this chapter is useful and the rest is not for you, keep it and good luck. I mean that.

THE LONG VERSION

It did not start well

My first submission was rejected. Not with a fixable note, a hard reject. Months of evenings gone in a two-line reply. I took it personally, which was the first mistake of many.

The themes that followed rarely shipped. I would get one to eighty percent, lose faith, and start something newer and shinier. For two years I had a folder full of almost-finished products and nothing actually for sale.

When I did ship, I built what impressed other designers, not what buyers searched for. I confused a beautiful demo with a sellable product. Buyers wanted a site that solved their problem in an afternoon; I kept handing them art.

What finally worked was unglamorous: pick a real audience, study what they already buy, and finish the boring last twenty percent that makes a theme approvable. Sales followed the discipline, not the inspiration.

WHY THIS BOOK EXISTS

Nobody handed me a map. I paid for every lesson in wasted months. This is the guide I wish someone had given me on day one, rewritten for the marketplace that exists after the 2026 reset.

HOW TO SELL WORDPRESS THEMES IN 2026, THE POST-
EXCLUSIVITY PLAYBOOK

01

— CHAPTER ONE

Understanding the ThemeForest Ecosystem

**If I were starting today, this is what I'd
understand first**

The marketplace rules changed completely in July
2026, and every guide written before that date is
now obsolete.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Ten years, and everything I got wrong first

I'm a designer and developer, and I've sold WordPress themes on ThemeForest for ten years. I design them and I code them, start to finish.

The last decade taught me more than any course could, mostly because I got so much wrong first. Here are the three lessons I paid the most for, the ones this whole book is built around.

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- 01 Finish the boring 20%.** Docs, support, and edge cases sell more copies than one more hero section.
 - 02 Build for a buyer with a budget,** not for other designers' applause.
 - 03 Own the customer.** A marketplace lends you traffic; it never lends you the relationship.
-

10 YEARS SELLING	4,067 THEMES SOLD	Solo DESIGNED & CODED
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Every author you admire was rejected first.
The difference is they resubmitted.

— Onur Tavit

LEARN FROM MY INVOICES

Five mistakes that cost me years

None of these felt like mistakes at the time. Each one quietly cost me months. If you skip only these, the book has already paid for itself.

01

Building what I liked

I designed for my portfolio instead of a buyer's problem. Taste is not demand.

02

Chasing crowded categories

Another multipurpose theme meant competing with thousands. Invisible from launch day.

03

Waiting for Envato traffic

I assumed the marketplace would market for me. It rewards items that already have momentum.

04

Ignoring direct sales

For years I handed Envato half of every sale and never captured a single email.

05

Starting without validation

The most expensive one. I built first and asked whether anyone wanted it last, after the work was done.

What ThemeForest actually is

ThemeForest is the flagship theme marketplace of **Envato Market**, alongside CodeCanyon, GraphicRiver, AudioJungle, and VideoHive. Premium WordPress themes sell here as one-time purchases. Since 2024 Envato has been **owned by Shutterstock**.

For most of the 2010s it was the default storefront for premium WordPress themes. But the platform is **mature, not growing**: traffic has slid since roughly 2015, and Shutterstock's interest was Envato Elements, the subscription library, not the per-item marketplace you are about to sell on.

None of that means you can't earn here. It means you walk in with clear eyes: a large, trusted audience and real buyer intent, on a platform past its peak.

WHO IS ACTUALLY BUYING

Agencies & freelancers	Small businesses	Developers
Buy a theme to ship a client site fast instead of building custom. Your best, most demanding customer.	Want a finished-looking site cheaply. Least technical, heaviest on support, demo content sells them.	Buy a head start or one niche feature, then rework it. Few in number, sharpest reviews.

The through-line: almost everyone here is buying a theme *instead of* commissioning a custom build. Design for the agency; sell to the small business.

TRY THIS IN TWENTY MINUTES

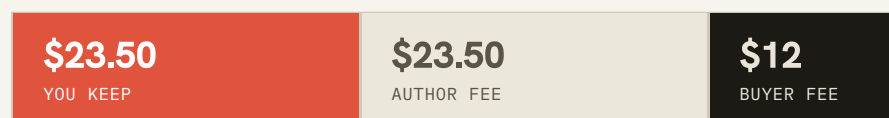
Sort your category by Best Sellers and read the comment threads on the top five. Those repeated questions are your documentation outline and your first three features.

1.2 · THE JULY 2026 RESET

How the money works now

On 1 July 2026, Envato removed author exclusivity entirely and moved everyone to a single **flat 50% author fee**. But that 50% is charged only after a fixed **buyer fee** (about \$12 on a WordPress theme) is skimmed off the top, so your real share of what the buyer pays lands well under half.

ON THEMEFOREST, A \$59 THEME (WHAT THE BUYER PAYS)



You keep \$23.50, about 40% of the \$59 the buyer pays.

ON YOUR OWN STORE, THE SAME \$59 THEME



~3% (\$1.77) payment processing · no buyer fee

Same product. More than double the take-home. That gap is the whole argument of this book: ThemeForest is now a **discovery channel, not your whole business.**

Note: the buyer fee is fixed per item type (roughly \$12 for a WordPress theme in 2026). Envato takes it out of the \$59 list price first, then charges the 50% author fee on the remaining \$47 item price.

DO THIS BEFORE YOU PLAN ANY REVENUE

Subtract the buyer fee from your intended price, then halve it. That number, not your list price, is what one marketplace sale actually pays you.

1.2 · THE MECHANISM

The Double Shelf

Every number on the previous page points at one structural fact. Before July 2026, exclusivity forced you to pick a single shelf. Now the same theme can sit on two at once, and each shelf does a different job. I call this the Double Shelf, and the whole rest of this book is how to run both.

SHELF ONE

The marketplace

Buys you discovery you could never afford. Costs you most of the price and all of the customer.

Job: strangers find you

SHELF TWO

Your own store

Brings no traffic of its own. Keeps almost the entire price and every buyer's email address.

Job: they come back

WHAT ONE SHELF COSTS, OVER 4,000 SALES

\$94k

MARKETPLACE ONLY

\$161k

HALF ON SHELF TWO

\$67k

THE DIFFERENCE

Same themes, same buyers, same decade. The only variable is which shelves they sat on. I spent most of mine in the left column, which is exactly why I am writing this.

THE RULE THIS BOOK RUNS ON

Rent the traffic. Own the customer. Never let one shelf hold both.

TEN YEARS OF HINDSIGHT, IN ONE PAGE

If I started again today

No folder of abandoned themes, no waiting for traffic that never comes. Six moves, in this exact order. The rest of the book is how to run each one.

- 1 Pick one narrow niche.** One audience with a budget and few good options. Not "multipurpose."
- 2 Validate demand first.** Confirm people already pay for this before I open a design tool.
- 3 Design for the buyer.** Solve their problem in an afternoon, not impress other designers.
- 4 Build with AI as leverage.** Ship in weeks what used to take months, and actually finish it.
- 5 Launch everywhere at once.** Marketplace for discovery, my own store for margin, from day one.
- 6 Build my own audience.** Capture every email so the next launch does not start from zero.

The order matters more than the effort. I had the effort for ten years. What I lacked was this sequence.

DO THIS TODAY, BEFORE CHAPTER 2

Write down three audiences you already understand better than most designers do. That list is where your first niche comes from, and step one is the only step you cannot outsource.

1.2 · BEFORE & AFTER

What actually changed

Before the reset, your cut depended on a choice you had to make up front, and, if you chose exclusivity, top sellers kept up to **87.5%** of the item price. That entire system is gone. All figures below are net of the ~\$12 buyer fee on a \$59 sale.

	OLD EXCLUSIVE BEFORE	OLD NON- EXCLUSIVE	NEW, ALL AUTHORS
You keep	62.5% – 87.5%	45%	50%
Depends on lifetime sales?	Yes, tiered	No	No, flat
Sell elsewhere?	No, barred	Yes	Yes, everyone
You keep on a \$59 sale	\$29.38 – \$41.13	\$21.15	\$23.50

IF YOU'RE A NEW AUTHOR, READ THIS TWICE

The veterans who lost the 87.5% deal are furious, and rightly so. But you never had that deal. As a newcomer your realistic old option was **non-exclusive at 45%**. The flat 50% is a small raise *and* it frees you to sell everywhere. Don't mourn a rate that was never yours.

WORK ONE EXAMPLE BY HAND

Work one \$59 sale by hand: what its author nets on ThemeForest, against what the same sale nets on their own store. The gap stops being abstract.

From idea to first payout

- 1 Become an author**

Open a free account and set up payouts. Envato has periodically **paused new author applications**, so approval to sell is neither guaranteed nor instant, confirm the door is open before you plan around it.
- 2 Build to spec**

The theme, plus demo content, documentation, and a support plan. The extras aren't optional, they're half of what's reviewed.
- 3 Submit for review**

A human reviewer checks quality, code, and policy. Acceptance is at Envato's discretion, and the queue can take days to weeks.
- 4 The verdict**

SOFT REJECT

Fixable feedback. Address it and resubmit the same item. Normal, most items get one.

HARD REJECT

This item can't be resubmitted. Learn from it and build the next one better.
- 5 Approval & launch**

Set your price, publish, and start promoting. The marketplace won't do the promoting for you.
- 6 The support cycle**

Six months of support ships included; buyers can extend it. This never ends while the item is live, factor the time in before you price.

1.4 · A REALITY CHECK

Threat vs. opportunity

The marketplace is mature. Since the 2026 changes, traffic and top-author loyalty have both slipped, and some established authors are shifting to direct sales. But that cuts both ways, read each threat with its flip side.

THE THREAT	THE OPPORTUNITY
Traffic is down and big-name authors are leaving for direct sales.	Less entrenched competition at the top than at any point in a decade.
The flat 50% ended the 87.5% dream for veterans.	50% beats the 45% new non-exclusive authors used to get. You start ahead of where newcomers did.
Envato's investment in WordPress is visibly shrinking.	The buyers who remain still trust the platform and arrive ready to purchase.

A shrinking marketplace is a bad place to build your whole business, and a **great place to get discovered** while everyone else is walking out the door.

A TEN-MINUTE CHECK THAT PAYS FOR ITSELF

Count how many of your category's top ten went a year without an update. Each stale best-seller is a buyer already looking for a reason to switch.

Categories, ranked by opportunity

Opportunity = demand from paying buyers ÷ how crowded it already is. Go where budgets are real and competition is thin.

Niche business , medical, legal, construction HIGH, OPEN GAP



WooCommerce niches , single-product, subscription, B2B HIGH



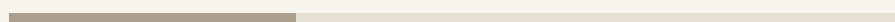
Page-builder-specific , Elementor, Gutenberg blocks GROWING



Agency & portfolio , studios, freelancers, creatives MODERATE, CROWDED



Blog & magazine , commoditized, strong free options LOW



Generic multipurpose , the graveyard for newcomers SATURATED, AVOID



The pattern: the narrower and more "boring" the audience, the better your odds. A dentist searching "dental WordPress theme" has a budget and few good options; a shopper searching "multipurpose theme" has ten thousand.

Signal to read carefully: Envato ended its free WordPress themes program in late 2025, a clear sign of reduced platform investment in WordPress. Treat these rankings as a map of a shrinking-but-real market.

HOW TO READ A CATEGORY IN ONE SITTING

In the two categories you know best, count items with strong ratings but under fifty sales. Good themes nobody found is a problem you can solve.

1.6 · THE MULTI-CHANNEL REALITY

Sell everywhere from day one

Since exclusivity no longer exists, every author can sell everywhere at once. Picture your business as a stack, not a single storefront, each layer does one job the others can't.

ThemeForest DISCOVERY

Built-in traffic and buyer trust. You keep 50%, but strangers find you here. This is top-of-funnel, not the destination.

Your own store PROFIT + OWNERSHIP

~97% margin after payment processing, **and** you capture the customer's email. This is where a business actually compounds.

Other markets EXTRA REACH

Alternative marketplaces add reach for almost no extra effort once the product exists. Pure upside, list and forget.

THE INSIGHT THE MARKETPLACES DON'T ADVERTISE

Envato never shares buyer emails with authors, a **purchase code** is all you get. Direct sales are the only way to own your customer list, which is why your own site must launch *alongside* your marketplace listing, not after it.

DO THIS BEFORE THE THEME IS FINISHED

Put up a one-page store with one checkout link this week, before the theme is done. One evening, and it is the only asset here that compounds.

Five things to carry forward

- ✓ The **July 2026 reset** erased exclusivity. Every author now keeps a flat 50% and can sell anywhere.
- ✓ On a \$59 theme, ThemeForest nets you **\$23.50** after the buyer fee; your own store nets **~\$57.23**. That gap is the strategy.
- ✓ Treat ThemeForest as a **discovery channel**, trusted traffic, but declining and under-invested.
- ✓ Winners are **niche and well-supported**, not generic multipurpose. Boring audiences pay best.
- ✓ Launch your own store **alongside** your listing, day one, Envato never gives you buyer emails.

IF I HAD TO START AGAIN TOMORROW

Open the author account, then start my own store the same week, so I own every buyer's email from the very first sale.

NEXT CHAPTER

02

Now that you know the new terrain, let's find your niche.

END OF THE FREE CHAPTER

That was 1 of 10.

You now know the terrain. The rest of the book is the map, every step from choosing what to build, to the day your first payout lands.

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- 02 **Niche Selection:** Find a profitable niche before you ever open Figma.
-
- 03 **Anatomy of a Theme That Sells:** Pass the six judgments a buyer makes in the first 60 seconds.
-
- 04 **The Design & Development Workflow:** The exact workflow I use to ship themes instead of abandoning them.
-
- 05 **The Final 20%:** The QA pass that turns a likely rejection into an approval.
-
- 06 **Submission, Rejection & the Revision Loop:** Turn a brutal reviewer reply into an accepted item.
-
- 07 **Launch, The First 30 Days:** Use the launch window that decides your theme's whole life.
-
- 08 **Marketing Beyond the Marketplace:** Build an audience no marketplace can ever take from you.
-
- 09 **Support, Updates & Protecting Your Rating:** Turn support tickets into five-star reviews instead of refunds.
-
- 10 **Scaling, From One Theme to a Portfolio:** Turn one theme into a catalog that earns while you sleep.
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Everything you've read so far explains the landscape. The remaining nine chapters explain how to build a business inside it. **If I'd had this book ten years ago, I would have saved years of trial and error.**

Chapter one stays free and yours. The other nine cost **\$19**, which is less than a single \$59 sale nets you on ThemeForest today.

Get the full book

tavonline.gumroad.com/l/sell-digital

\$19

10 CHAPTERS · INSTANT PDF · WRITTEN BY A 10-YEAR THEMEFOREST AUTHOR