

# The Alternatives

What are the alternatives and when should you use them?

## Bundled Themes

Confluence has several bundled themes:

Default Confluence Theme



Left Navigation Theme



Clickr Theme



...compared to Theme Builder:



Screen grabs of our [About](#) page taken using Confluence 2.6.2, February 2008. Click thumbnails to enlarge.

If one of them suits your needs, and you don't require any customisation, you might as well use them.

If you need customisation options, however, the bundled themes are very limited in what they can offer - usually changing colours or maybe adding some basic navigation to the left sidebar, not much else.

It should be noted that a growing number of the bundled themes have now been replicated as Theme Builder layouts which allow you to customise them.

## Customise the Default Theme

The Confluence default theme can be customised by editing the HTML/Velocity templates using the "Layouts" option in Site or Space Administration:

```

<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN" "ht
<html>
<head>
  #if ($sitemeshPage.getProperty("page.spacename"))
    <title>$title - $webwork.htmlEncode($sitemeshPage.getProperty("pa
  #else
    <title>$title - #siteTitle()</title>
  #end

  #if ($webResourceManager)
    <link rel="stylesheet" href="{webResourceManager.getSpaceCssP
type="text/css" />
    <link rel="stylesheet"
href="{webResourceManager.getSpaceCssPrefix($sitemeshPage.getPro
  #end

  #standardHeader()
  $!settingsManager.globalSettings.customHtmlSettings.beforeHeadEnd
</head>
## HTML HEADER ENDS

## HTML BODY BEGINS
#onLoad()
$!settingsManager.globalSettings.customHtmlSettings.afterBodyStart

```

This gives you a fairly high degree of control because you can change the way most things look and work. If you're fairly experienced at using Velocity templates, you can also hard-wire macros in to the theme using this technique.

However, as many of our customers have learnt the hard way, there's a lot of risk involved with customising the default layout...

- If you do something wrong, you can break Confluence - an administrators' worst nightmare!
- Each time you upgrade Confluence, the layouts reset to their defaults - you have to start over again

## Create a Java Theme Plugin

If you've got Java developers on-hand, and they aren't swamped with business-critical tasks and projects for your customers, you can create your own Java theme plugin:

– pics –

If you need absolute control over every last detail, this is the route that gives you that level of control.

However, it's also the most complex and time consuming. It requires the most skilled people - Java, Velocity, XML, XHTML, CSS and JavaScript are just some of the technical skills required.

If you later upgrade Confluence, or want to change the theme design, you'll need to get Java developers in to make any required changes to the theme.

## Open source theme plugins

There's a growing number of free, open source theme plugins available for Confluence. To review them, visit the [Confluence Theme Extensions page](#).

If there's one that suits your needs, you might as well use it. Just bear the following in mind:

- Most of them require a specific version of Confluence - they are rarely kept up-to-date
- They don't get the same level of security checking as normal themes - avoid using outside your firewall

## So when should you use Theme Builder?

There's a reason thousands of customers worldwide have switched to Theme Builder. Ok, there's [lots of reasons](#)! They use Theme Builder because they want to customise Confluence with significantly less pain than the alternatives.

Theme Builder aims to achieve all the benefits of the alternate methods of customisation, and more, whilst avoiding as many of the disadvantages as possible.

In particular:

- It has a proven track record and a [community](#) has developed around it
- It's commercially supported and maintained
- It's easier to customise and packed full of *useful* features
- If you don't want to do the customisation yourself, there's a [Theme Customisation](#) service available
- It has a very high tolerance to issues caused by Confluence upgrades

The one thing to be careful of is over-customisation - don't go overboard with all that flexibility! If you do, you'll probably need to read our tutorial on [Performance Tuning](#) 😊