



HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR WEBSITE'S PERFORMANCE

You don't always need to completely re-design your entire website just to update it or make it look nicer. Many dramatic improvements can be made with simple adjustments and considerations. There's a happy medium between basic maintenance and total re-vamping. Even the casual business website owner has more control over their website's appearance and performance than they typically realize. By following a few basic tips you can make your website look less like a cookie-cutter template and more like a unique snapshot of the internet presence you want your business to present to potential customers.

Assess the overall appearance of your site, consider basic changes you can make to keep your site looking informative, fresh, and user-friendly.

Keep contact information in plain sight

An oversight many business website owners make is forgetting to keep their phone number plastered right on the home page. No matter how pretty or complicated your website is, if a potential customer can't easily contact you, they might as well be considered lost. Users evaluate webpages in a millisecond, so if your webpage doesn't make it glaringly obvious that they can call you with their questions or concerns, they'll be on to the next one. Likewise, all of your basic business information should be readily available. Consider posting your business hours and a tool to find directions to your offices somewhere obvious, such as a "Contact" page or if you're a restaurant on the homepage.

Create an "About Us" page.

An "About Us" page with intriguing information about you and your staff could make all the difference for a customer who is still on the fence. This is a place to not only tell your history but your business philosophy as well. If you have an interesting story about your business post it. People love a good story. When people know who they're doing business with, they feel more comfortable in a multitude of ways. And don't forget those pictures, you know how many words they speak.

Condense your menu

Clean navigation is an important part of keeping a user on your site. If things are confusing or difficult to find, kiss that potential customer goodbye. If your site has cluttered navigation, condense it. Omit sections or combine some.

Use big, bold pictures

A picture truly is worth a 1,000 words. Using lots of beautiful pictures not only attracts users because they are aesthetically appealing, but it also can tell a user more about you, your business, and what you do in less than a second. Accompany text with pictures so that the impatient scroller can get an idea of what you're trying to say without having to sit and read.

Ask customers for testimonials and reviews

You can talk your business up all you want, it isn't going to convince someone to become a customer of yours like another customer will. Customers relate to other customers; if your current clients have positive things to say about you, chances are someone will pay attention and choose you as well. You can even pre-write testi-

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monials for old customers to sign off on. This keeps them from having to take the time to do it and gives you a great new way to sell your business. Testimonials work!

Direct your customers to act.

Users don't want to think. Furthermore, you want to do their thinking for them so that ultimately they do what you want them to do; you want them to buy your products or services. So on every page of your website, direct them to do that. Put some type of call-to-action that entices your potential customer closer toward you on every part of your site, whether you place a "BUY NOW!" button or a link to a video that reminds them why they should. This leads me to my next big tip...

Cut out distractions

Music, splash page, any superfluous, gimmicky widget on your site – remove it completely. If it doesn't help sell you or your business, it isn't doing you any favors. In fact, more often than not it is hurting you by driving away users. If a customer cannot log on to your site and immediately see and locate the information important to them, they certainly aren't going to go wading through the crap (there's only one better word for it) to find it. Keep your site's main goal in mind and cut out everything else.

Get a mobile version

This is something you may need to hire someone to do, but it is worth the money. Likewise, if you have a professional already maintaining your website, fire them if they can't help you do this. The truth is that the majority of Americans have smart phones. Almost half of all searches are now done on smartphones. As phones get faster and screens get bigger, more and more people are using their phones for web browsing. If you don't have a mobile-friendly site, you're missing out on a huge opportunity to tap in to the on-the-go customer. No one wants to pain-stakingly attempt to zoom in and scroll a site that isn't optimized for a tiny screen.

Match your branding

Make sure your brick and mortar experience matches your customer's internet experience – match all branding across the board. Use the same color palate you have online with the one you use in the real world. Customers will appreciate and remember the consistency.

social media isn't just for high school

We all know the popularity of social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Not all industries are optimized for these types of networking, however they are important no matter what type of business you run. Social media expands your potential to find customers as well as your internet presence as a whole. Most importantly, it gives your customer the opportunity to interact with you in a unique way. It allows your customer to feel heard.

Be the expert

Nothing looks better for you than looking like you know exactly what you're talking about. While you may know that you do, your customer won't unless you show it. They depend on you to fulfill their desires. The more industry resources you have throughout your site, the more your customer will feel confident that you are the go-to person for whatever their need is. You'll also look prepared to answer any and all questions they might throw at you. Depending on your business, you might benefit from adding anything from helpful links to surveys and white paper reports. Not to mention the additional professional content will do nothing but boost your search engine optimization via keywords.

Start from scratch, especially if you're stuck.

Sometimes, re-doing your whole site is the best solution. Don't be afraid to start over. Erase everything and gain a new perspective. While doing this can be quite time, labor, and money intensive, sometimes it is best to start fresh rather than endlessly tinkering with an old machine that will never work. Plus, you get the advantage of advertising "Visit Our New Website!"

Hire a professional

All of these tips are swell and dandy, but you may not be able to do them all yourself. You may not have the knowledge on how, or you simply may not have the time. Hiring a trustworthy professional can allow you to rest assured knowing your website is being properly maintained. Investing money in a professional that you know will invoke these

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standard tips and so much more is investing right back into your business. And, with your knowledge of what kinds of upgrades your site might need, you can make an educated choice about a professional that you know won't try to rip you off.

Obviously there are far more than just thirteen tips to having a better website. However if you pick a few of these to focus on, you will undoubtedly see improvements.