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6 Website Fixes to Make Now

These simple measures put your site's focus on the customer.

By Mike Werling | April 28, 2009

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Entrepreneurs shouldn't have to be convinced of the importance of a good business website. Without one, consumers can't find you. That maxim holds especially true for business owners who rely on internet sales for their revenue. You know you need a website because without it you don't exist. But relatively minor issues can drag down your site's effectiveness--issues that could be costing you money.

We're not talking about issues that require a total site rebuild. We're not even talking about remedies that increase the "wow" quotient of a site; that era has passed. "The days of the 'gee whiz' factor are gone," says Ben Rushlo, director of Keynote Consulting for Phoenix-based [Keynote Systems](#), a service provider that improves online business performance. "The user experience has changed. There are increased expectations." But those increased expectations are centered on the experience--not the technical wizardry--of your site.

That should be good news for entrepreneurs who have no desire to become tech geeks. Experts point to six everyday fixes entrepreneurs can make to improve a site's efficiency and build a business's bottom line.

1. Increase the speed. In an era when "Wow" has been replaced by "Wow, this is fast," entrepreneurs need to focus on speed more than ever. Your site should allow users to get in, find what they need, ask for more information or buy an item, and get on with their busy days. If that's not the case, you've got some work to do. Fortunately, increasing a site's loading speed doesn't have to be fraught with techno-gibberish and time-consuming fixes--small things can make a big difference.

Adobe Flash is out--or at least in decreased demand--say some experts. It slows things down. "No one is even asking for Flash," says Jamie Wilke, a designer and the owner of [Mediatrunk.com](#), a web design firm in Colorado Springs, Colo. "People now view it as annoying. They'd rather read information." Quite the departure from just a few years ago when "everybody had to have Flash," Rushlo says.

Most sites need images of some sort, but make sure your image files are as small as they can be. Even large images can get by with small file sizes. Also, have a conversation with your webmaster and make sure anything non-essential is moved to the bottom of the page load, Rushlo says. This will help the important information pop up quickly.

2. Write better product descriptions. Spend some time reading your product descriptions to make sure they're succinct and filler-free. The formula here can be difficult because, as Amy Schade says, you need to "convince [users] the product meets their needs," but the verbiage "has to be short and descriptive." There's no salesperson available on a website, so shoppers "should be able to see a product and know what it does," says Schade, a director at the Nielsen Norman Group in New York City and co-author of the second edition of the "E-Commerce User Experience" report. Writing new and better product descriptions, Schade says, "is time consuming but worth it."

3. Delete tech used for the sake of tech. This harkens back to the need for speed. Implementing the latest technology may lend to the perception that an entrepreneur is hip to the latest software and other gadgets, but does it make the site stronger? If not, it may need to go.

"[Site owners] need to evaluate if things like music, video and 360-degree views are necessary," Rushlo says. A real estate agent is going to want 360-degree views of houses' interiors. A promotional products distributor may just be wasting his time trying to offer full-circle views of logoed pens, flash drives and water bottles.

Schade subscribes to Rushlo's view. She says to beware the trendy and new. Anything business owners jump on because it

is the latest and greatest has the potential to backfire, especially if entrepreneurs don't have the resources to keep up with all of the moving parts of their sites. Things like Facebook pages and video are fun; and social networking is quickly becoming an integral part of many businesses' marketing platforms, but business owners need to weigh a technology's popularity against their ability to utilize it fully.

4. Improve shopping cart and payment options. It can be tempting to think that once customers have made up their minds to buy something, there's nothing to stop them, but a counter-intuitive electronic shopping cart or a third-party payment window can torpedo the sale. "If you have a shopping cart, make it easy to use," Wilke says. "Make sure it's easy to add items and purchase them." She adds that it has to look professional, and one sure-fire way to achieve that is to use third-party vendors who specialize in internet purchases. Even that, however, needs to be handled with care, Schade says, to instill the highest level of trust.

"If you're using a third party for payments," she says, "make it seamless. It has to look like you." Don't have the payment information form open in a different window that takes customers to another website. That plants a seed of doubt in their minds, which can sink the purchase.

5. Use unique page titles on every page. We're talking about those words that appear in the bar across the very top of the browser window. Boring, maybe, but they're important. Even if users don't notice them, search engines do--and they're sticklers. "If you have 10 pages on your site and they all say ABC Business," Wilke says, "search engines are not going to see them as different." That affects your search ranking. And make sure the title at the top matches the content on the page--it matters, even if it doesn't seem like it should. You don't need to hire a great writer to help with this project. The about page title should look something like this: ABC Business - About Us. The media page: ABC Business - Press Room.

6. Shorten forms. If you have a contact form on your site, only ask for the information you really need. "If you are going to call everyone who fills out a form," Wilke says, "don't ask for their physical address." Likewise, if you're planning to send e-mails. And be careful with required registration, Schade warns. "One-time purchasers don't want to have to become members," she says.

Online consumers don't need to see the fanciest websites with all the latest bells and whistles. They're looking for the exact product or service that meets their needs, and they want to find it quickly.

"There is renewed focus on customers," Rushlo says. "They want an online experience with no barriers."

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