

A 5-Minute Guide To Website Speed Optimization

- SPECIAL REPORT -

Fast loading sites are the norm nowadays, not the exception. People expect sites to load instantly. Nobody wants to sit around and wait for a site to load even if it's just 5 or 10 seconds. In today's world wide web, people have a need for speed.

Why Your Website Needs To Be Fast

It doesn't matter if your site is well-designed, or you've got useful and valuable content, or your products can literally change people's lives.

It doesn't matter if you spent thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours building the perfect website. If it's slow, chances are it's not going to be successful in any way, shape, or form.

Here are some of the top benefits of having a fast website:

1. More visitors

If you've got a fast website, then people aren't going to be tempted to click on the back button on their browsers. When your site is lightning fast, you leave them no choice but to be on your site.

If 100% of the people who have typed in your website address or clicked on a link to your site actually lands on your site, then that's great for your website and your business in general!

2. Higher conversion rates

The more visitors you have on your site, the higher the chances that people are actually going to buy your products, subscribe to your services, click on your affiliate links, sign up for your mailing list, or whatever your call to action may be.

Ideally, you want 100% of people to follow your calls to action, but this rarely happens in the real world.

Let's put this into perspective. For instance, if you're selling a \$50 product and you get a 5% conversion rate, then it means that for every 100 people who land on your site, 5 of them buys your products.

However, if you've got more people visiting your site, then you get more people buying your products which translates to more sales for your business! If you have 1000 visitors daily, with a 5% conversion rate, you'll have 50 people buying from you! That's quite a significant difference.

3. Higher rankings on search engines

And by search engines, we mean Google. Sure, there are other search engines out there, but Google is the biggest of them all. And when Google says page speed is a ranking factor, then you better make sure your pages load fast.

Why? Because when you rank high on Google, you're essentially going to get free and highly targeted traffic! You won't have to spend a dime on advertising, and people who find your site through Google are those who are very interested in what you have to offer.

How Fast Is Your Website

Before you can start optimizing your site for speed, you need to check first just how fast your website is. You need a benchmark, sort of like a before-and-after if you will. There are a couple of tools you can use. These are:

1. Google PageSpeed Insights

(<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights>)

This tool will help you determine just how fast – or slow – your website is on both mobile and desktop devices. All you have to do is type in the URL of the page you want to check

– it could be your homepage or any other page you like – and hit the Analyze button.

Wait a few seconds, and you'll have your Page Speed and Optimization scores. Scroll down a bit, and you'll see a section called 'Optimization Suggestions.'

Work on addressing all these suggestions to not only speed up your site but also to, hopefully, see a boost in your Google rankings.

2. Pingdom Website Speed Test

(<https://tools.pingdom.com>)

What's great about Pingdom is you can choose the location you want to test from (currently, you can choose from Melbourne, New York, San Jose, and Stockholm).

It gives you a nifty summary box so you can easily see your performance grade, your page's load time, the page size, the number of HTTP requests, and more. If you want to know the details on how you can improve your page, simply click on the suggested improvements.

Pingdom also makes it easy for you to spot the things you can optimize. For instance, you can go to the section 'Content Size By Content Type' to see which of your content

is consuming lots of bandwidth (hint: it's usually the images).

You can also check out which types of content are making the most number of HTTP requests. The waterfall chart is also extremely useful and provides you with all the details you need to help optimize your site!

How To Optimize Your Site For Speed

The two site speed tools above will give you plenty of actionable tips on how to optimize your site for speed. In this section, I'll walk you through how to fix the most common issues.

1. Optimize your images

There are many ways you can optimize your images. First, you need to make sure your photos are web-ready. This means reducing your image's dimensions to make it web-friendly.

There's no point in uploading a super high-quality image that's 10MB in size if you can upload the same quality photo that's only 300KB! Images optimized for the web fall normally under 2000 pixels, so if your images go beyond that, then you should look into resizing your images.

You can use Photoshop or any other software you like. There are also desktop apps like 'Image Resizer For Windows' (<https://www.bricelam.net/ImageResizer>) which allows you to resize images with just a few mouse clicks.

Once you've reduced your images to web-ready dimensions, it's time to compress it to reduce the file even further. With image compression, you're essentially removing all unnecessary data such as the image's metadata, unused color profiles, etc. The images will look exactly the same, but you'll reduce the file size by a significant percentage.

Alternatively, if you're on WordPress, you can also use an image compression plugin like WP Smush (<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wp-smushit>) which will automatically compress and optimize all images you upload to your site.

2. Use a content delivery network (CDN)

With a CDN, your site visitors will be able to access your website files from a server nearest to them. This helps reduce wait times and latency which frequently happens when the server is on the other side of the world.

For example, if your web server is physically located in New York and your website visitor is in Johannesburg, South Africa, then his browser no longer needs to retrieve data from the New York server. Instead, it will download the files from a server physically closest to Johannesburg.

Some web hosting companies include a free CDN and activating this feature usually involves only one click. If your host doesn't offer a free CDN, you can always sign up for a free account with CloudFlare (<https://www.cloudflare.com>).

3. Leverage browser caching

One of the fastest ways to speed up your site is by leveraging browser caching. What it does is it stores a copy of your website's static file in your visitor's browser. When someone first visits your site, their browser will save a static copy of your site and store it in the browser cache.

When that person visits your site again (or goes to other pages on your site which use the same resources), then his browser will use the cached copies of those files. It won't go running to the server asking it to resend the same files. This essentially speeds up your site since the files are stored locally.

There are two ways you can go about leveraging browser access: you can either edit the .htaccess file, or you can install a plugin if you're on WordPress.

If you're not afraid of touching .htaccess, you can simply add these lines to the file:

```
## EXPIRES CACHING ##  
<IfModule mod_expires.c>  
ExpiresActive On  
ExpiresByType image/jpg "access 1 year"  
ExpiresByType image/jpeg "access 1 year"  
ExpiresByType image/gif "access 1 year"  
ExpiresByType image/png "access 1 year"  
ExpiresByType text/css "access 1 month"  
ExpiresByType text/html "access 1 month"  
ExpiresByType application/pdf "access 1 month"  
ExpiresByType text/x-javascript "access 1 month"  
ExpiresByType application/x-shockwave-flash "access 1 month"  
ExpiresByType image/x-icon "access 1 year"  
ExpiresDefault "access 1 month"  
</IfModule>  
## EXPIRES CACHING ##
```

Save your .htaccess file and refresh your page.

Alternatively, if you're on WordPress, you can simply download a plugin like "Leverage Browser Caching"

(<https://wordpress.org/plugins/leverage-browser-caching>). It basically adds a few lines to your .htaccess file but without you needing to go and access your website files on the server.

4. Gzip compression

With Gzip compression, your server will be sending your website files to browsers in a compressed format. For instance, if your web page has a total file size of 1MB, with Gzip that number can go down to, say, 300KB or 500KB. Now, a 1MB will obviously take longer to transmit than a 300KB or 500KB file. This is basically how Gzip works.

To enable Gzip, you will need to open your .htaccess file and add the following lines:

```
# GZIP - compress text, html, javascript, css, xml:  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE text/plain  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE text/html  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE text/xml  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE text/css  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE application/xml  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE application/xhtml+xml  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE application/rss+xml  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE application/javascript  
AddOutputFilterByType DEFLATE application/x-javascript
```

Or, compress certain file types by extension:

```
<files *.html>  
SetOutputFilter DEFLATE  
</files>
```

If you're on WordPress and you don't want anything to do with .htaccess, simply install a plugin like 'Check and Enable GZIP compression' (<https://wordpress.org/plugins/check-and-enable-gzip-compression>) and enable the Gzip feature.

5. Minify HTML, CSS and JavaScript

HTML, CSS, and JavaScript codes normally have comments, white spaces, formatting, etc. These are all necessary for human readers. For instance, if you're troubleshooting some code, the comments and formatting make it easy for you to spot where the error is.

However, computers don't need all these unnecessary data. They simply require the code in its simplest form – they don't care about how good the code looks. They just want the code, plain and simple.

So, when you minify your website's code, you're removing unnecessary information which leads to smaller file sizes.

As you very well know by now, smaller files lead to faster website loading times, and happier end users!

Minification is best done by software. You can do it by hand, but it's going to take you forever to do so. If you're on WordPress, you can simply download a plugin like Fast Velocity Minify (<https://wordpress.org/plugins/fast-velocity-minify>).

For non-WordPress users, there are plenty of tools online which will help you minify your code in seconds. Here are some of the best ones:

- Minifier.org (<https://www.minifier.org>) – use this site to minify your CSS and JavaScript files
- HTML Minifier (<http://minifycode.com/html-minifier>) – this site will help you minify your HTML code

6. Choose a fast web hosting provider

You can follow methods 1 to 5 to speed up your website, but if you're using a slow web host, then those aren't going to make much of a difference. A slow web host means a slow website.

Now, there are thousands of web hosting providers you can choose from. Check out their reviews and read what people are saying about them. Are they using modern web servers? Or are they still using server technology from 10 years ago? What about support? Are they easy to get in touch with? Or do you have to wait for days to get someone to speak with?

Some web hosts offer very cheap packages to lure new customers in. But don't get hung up on the price – sometimes you do get what you pay for. Look into the company's uptime guarantee or their service level agreements.

The right web host can help your business grow. But pick the wrong one, and your business will suffer a lot.

Final Words

Website speed optimization is not to be taken lightly. In fact, if you're serious about your website and your brand, then you should take action right away.

Go and check your site speed now and then work on optimizing the things that need to be improved. Remember, time is money. The longer you let your slow site live on the world wide web, the more money you lose.