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THE TRUTH ABOUT PAGE SPEED

4 Common Misconceptions About Page Speed

And what improving your page speed can do to drive leads across the conversion finish line

Introduction

As technology advances, so too do user expectations of how that technology should perform. Fair or not, if something doesn't work the way they think it should, people will look for another option in the blink of an eye.

In today's competitive landscape, businesses hoping to attract new customers must be able to make a great first impression, and that starts with their websites. A beautiful, functional, intuitive website is critical, of course, but one element that is often overlooked—and of utmost importance—is page speed.

At a very basic level, page speed is the amount of time it takes for all of the content on a specific page to fully load. We're talking graphics, videos, copy, everything. It seems simple, but many businesses aren't giving page speed any consideration. Those who are, on the other hand, are benefiting from increased conversion rates.

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Common page speed misconceptions

Let's take a look at some common misconceptions and potential pitfalls when it comes to page speed and find out what you can do to give it a boost.

My site loads pretty quickly, and I've got the numbers to prove it.

Remember, we're talking about page speed, which is different from site speed. Page speed deals with a specific individual page on your site. Site speed takes an average loading speed of a handful of pages from your site. Why does this distinction matter? Well, if the home page or landing page you're directing traffic to is packed with elements that can slow loading times down, but the bulk of your pages within are significantly less complex, your site speed numbers may look great. However, people are still bouncing out because that one specific page is loading slower than they'd like.

In fact, in a 2019 page speed study, 70% of consumers said page load speed influences their likelihood to buy.[1] Potential customers leaving before you get a chance to make your pitch is not exactly ideal.

Common page speed misconceptions (cont.)

Page speed is all about a visitor's internet speed.

Yes and no. Sure, someone with hyper-fast fiber optic broadband is going to have a better online experience than a user with a DSL setup, but as mentioned earlier, there are certain page elements (both displayed to the user and on the back end) that can have a negative effect on loading speed. These include—but certainly are not limited to—videos, image files larger than they need to be, animations, too many redirects, and unoptimized code. More on this later.

A couple of extra seconds won't matter much in terms of conversions.

It's true that certain motivated individuals who know exactly what they're after won't have a problem with a slower page speed. But what about that person shopping around and comparing service providers to do business with? If a page they need information from is taking even slightly longer than the competition's, it

will be noticed, it will start to feel like work, and chances are they won't be back. Here's where things get scary: a recent study suggested that as much as 40% of users will leave a site if a page takes longer than three seconds to load.[2] What's more, Walmart reported that with every second of reduced page loading time, it saw a 2% increase in conversions.[3] Other studies have shown that every second of increased page loading time can result in as much as a 7% decrease in conversions.[2] The relationship between page speed and conversions is clear.

Common page speed misconceptions (cont.)

Even if my page speed isn't the best, I'll still maintain my Google ranking.

Not necessarily. Google has been factoring page speed on desktop and laptop computers into their rankings for several years now. In 2018, the company started including measurements on mobile devices as well.[4] That means if your site is not built with a "mobile first" philosophy, or at the very least, responsive to tablets and phones, it can start to have a negative effect on your online visibility. But it goes beyond page speed alone. From a holistic perspective, Google is trying to present the sites that offer the best user experience. Bounce rates, session time, etc., all influence rankings. And, as we've discussed, slower-than-expected page speed can cause many users to bail.
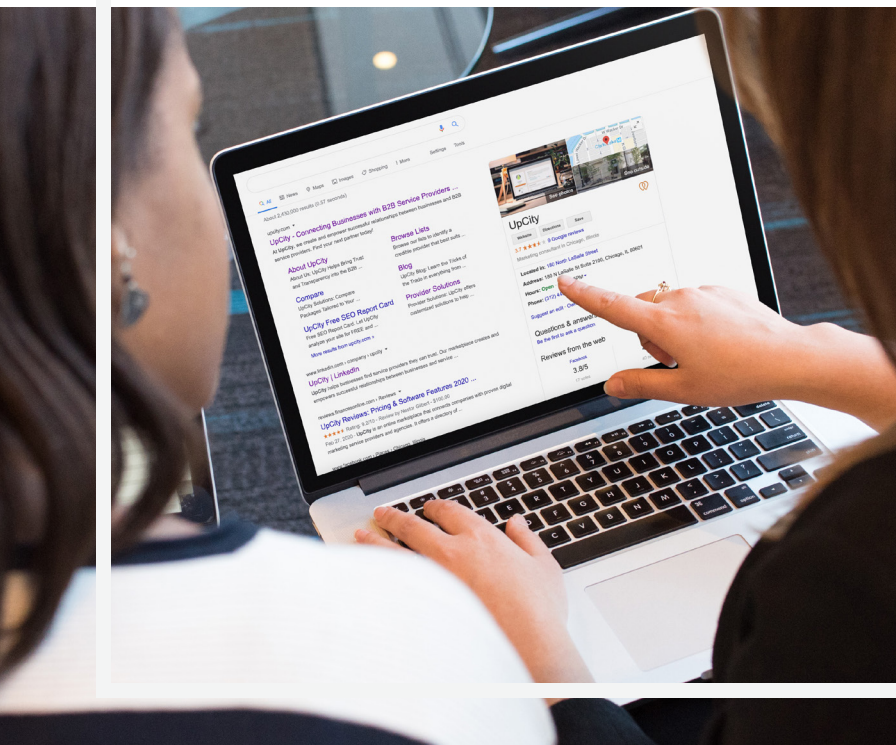
So how do you fix a slow loading page?

This exercise in myth busting isn't intended to be all doom and gloom. The good news for anyone with suboptimal page loading speed is that there are some relatively simple fixes that can make a significant difference in a short amount of time. There are also tools available to help you understand your page performance and get a handle on what you can do to fix it. A quick search will reveal a wealth of information, including ways to measure page speed, optimize your images, and more.

Additionally, check out Google's PageSpeed Insights[5] and Google Lighthouse[6] for recommendations on how to improve your page speed and experience.

In the meantime, here are some key considerations to help you get started.

Sometimes less is more

Videos and fancy animations can absolutely make for a beautiful website, but these kinds of elements might be dragging down your page speed. On top of that, out of more than 500 people surveyed recently, 56.6% said they would give up animations if it meant the page would load faster, and 52.8% said they'd be willing to give up video.[1]

So how do you fix a slow loading page? (cont.)

High-res overkill

Generally speaking, websites don't require the super high-res images you would need to send to a print vendor. Those images look amazing, but they are also extremely large files. You don't want blurry or pixelated images on your site, but at some point, there is no added benefit to dropping in photos with higher and higher resolutions. And remember, file type is important. Use PNGs for graphics and JPEGs for photos.

Clean up your code

Enabling compression and getting rid of some of the junk in your site's code can speed things up a bit. Take the time to dust under the couch, so to speak. That is, get rid of spaces, commas, comments, unused code, and anything else that doesn't belong. Also, consider eliminating multiple redirects that lengthen the loading process.[5]

Be nice to browsers

Browsers are your friend. Help them help you by removing JavaScript they have to push through before being able to display your page. Likewise, take advantage of browser caching that makes it easier to load your pages when a visitor returns.[5]

Every little bit helps

Some of these fixes might only shave a fraction of a second off page loading time, but that minuscule difference may just help you edge out the competition. If it's been a while since you've reviewed your site and page performance, try to carve out some time to do so. It's true that many factors shape buyer behavior, but it's undeniable that page speed is one of considerable magnitude. Check out **UpCity.com/blog** for more tips on page speed and other online visibility best practices.

Endnotes

1. https://unbounce.com/page-speed-report/
2. https://neilpatel.com/blog/loading-time/?wide=1
3. https://www.seoclarity.net/resources/knowledgebase/why-page-speed-matters-16167/
4. https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-speed-update-is-rolling-out-now-for-all-users/260293/#close
5. https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/
6. https://developers.google.com/web/tools/lighthouse
7. https://moz.com/learn/seo/page-speed

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