

A DOZEN THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR WEBSITE TODAY

Nearly all websites can be improved in one way or another. Sometimes it will take months to rethink what you are trying to accomplish and redesign your website from the ground up.

But not everything takes that long and many things can be done very quickly. Here are a dozen things you can do to improve your website today. If you handle the business end of things and someone else does your web work, pass these along to them for quick implementation.

Mostly these are things that will improve your user experience; unfortunately, most websites are built from the designer's or technical architect's perspective and not from the user's point of view.

1. IF YOU HAVE A SIGN-IN, PROVIDE A SIGN-OUT. Many web pages have a sign-in (also known as log-in, logon, etc.) feature, but frequently they don't have a sign-off. It is assumed the user will just move on to something else or close his browser. But this may not end the session and, equally important, it doesn't give the user the confidence that his session is actually ended. Many times this is done to "preserve real estate" on the page; in other words, not using up valuable space. I suggest you "reuse" the area you reserve for logon and password by changing it when the user is signed in to display their User Name and provide a sign-out link. Providing a sign-out improves the user experience by giving them confidence you care enough to handle their interactions with you properly.

2. USE A SITE MAP. If your website is more than a few pages, you should use a site map. Site Map software is inexpensive and easy to use. Site maps come with different names, but they provide an index of your pages. This improves the user experience by caring for them in the event they get lost or don't use the same terminology you use (i.e., you say potato and they say "you know, that brown thing that grows in the ground").

Here is a partial example from my website:



3. USE META TAG "KEYWORDS" TO HELP SEARCH ENGINES FIND YOU. You can use about a dozen words in your Meta tag to help search engines find you (more than that and the search engines will think you are spam, but a dozen is appropriate). There is

even a Meta name tag called "robots" that you can use to help direct the search engine robots along to the content you want found.

4. PROVIDE FULL CONTACT INFORMATION. In the early days of the web, many people were concerned that if you provided your telephone number people would just call rather than using the website or send an email. Therefore, they didn't provide telephone numbers. Actually, the opposite is true. People prefer to use an email, unless there is an urgent need to call. If they send an email, they have a record of what was sent and when. They also have no wait time and most people have a reasonable expectation of when a reply should be expected. But you need to provide your telephone number, mailing address, fax number, etc., in the event there is that urgent or unusual need. Remember, your website is to supplement, not replace, human interactions that are best served other ways. Don't upset your customers by making them look up your phone number.

5. PROVIDE EMAIL LINKS BY JOB FUNCTION. Your website should have plenty of places where users can contact you via email. Don't make them look for it and don't reserve this for a "Contact Us" page. Use it everywhere. In my website, there is an email address the user can hyperlink to from my persistent left navigation area. You can manage the email so that it can go to an individual staff person or group. The "Contact Us" page should include multiple ways the user can get in touch with you...so don't limit it. Also, it is wise to use job function, rather than personal names. Don't you want your customers to contact you?

6. IF IT LOOKS LIKE A LINK, IT SHOULD LINK. For emphasis creators of website will often underline text. From a user's standpoint, this can look like a hyperlink. Go through your pages and remove any underlined text. It often frustrates a user when he thinks you are providing some valuable information to them, only to have it go nowhere. I suggest that people think about this in the reverse; if it is important enough to underline (for emphasis) it is important enough to provide a page and give additional information.

7. NO "CLICK HERE", PLEASE. It is more concise to just provide a hyperlink than to explain "click here" for such and such information. It is especially aggravating and insulting to your user. Often it creates greater confusion. While you think it will be a small annoyance to your user, it is probably great than you think:

Here is an example: which would you click?

Click here for [AntiSpyware](#)

This is a real example that has (finally) been corrected. The left hyperlink took you to one company's AntiSpyware product page; the right link popped up another browser window that gave a definition of AntiSpyware. What they really should have done is used a brief description of AntiSpyware in the text with the exact product name

hyperlinked to another page with a more complete description, marketing content, how to buy information, etc.

8. NO EXTERNAL SEARCH. You should always provide an internal search for your website if you have more than a few pages or if your content is in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF formats. But you should NEVER provide an external search of the World Wide Web-- you will just confuse your users.

Users are fully capable of going to search engines of their choice. It wastes "real estate" (area on your pages) and adds no value. Products for creating searches for your site are inexpensive and easy to use. They crawl through your site at whatever level you wish and can create indexes for all the pages on your site and words in every Microsoft Word document and PDF file.

9. REMOVE YOUR COUNTER. Nobody (but you) really cares how many hits you have had on your home page. There is no relevance for the user and no helpful information. Is that 68,497 times since you put your website up in 1994 or this morning? What does it really mean? Is it accurate? Should your user care? Don't distract your user; remove the counter.

This site has been visited

Fc 68497 times
[FastCounter by bCentral](#)

10. Include your DOCTYPE and Encoding Label. This may be getting too technical for some, but these are two pieces of information that are required by the browser standard to make sure the user's browser interprets information correctly.

In your browser you can typically find this by viewing the page source (VIEW => PAGE SOURCE or something similar to that from your navigation bar). If you don't see something like the two lines listed below, ask your web developer about it.

You would be astonished how often these are missing. That is because one of the most popular web creation tools doesn't force them to be included. When this information is missing, the browser is expected to figure it out....with poor results many times. You experience it as pages poorly rendered.

DOCTYPE declares which World Wide Web standard is used for the page. In this example it is HTML 4.01 Transitional using English:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN">
```

The Encoding Label tells which character set standard should be applied. In this instance ISO 8859 - 1 is used:
`META HTTP-EQUIV="Content-Type" CONTENT="text/html; charset=ISO-8859-1"`

Including these two definitions speeds up processing, improves rendering and provides for a better user experience; isn't that worth doing?

11. VERIFY YOUR HYPERLINKS. This is easy to do manually, but tedious. There are services that do this and report any report broken links to you on a daily basis. Whether manually or automatically, this needs to be done regularly especially if you rely on any external links. You never know when things will change behind the scenes at other sites. It is better to remove a broken link than frustrate your user.

12. USE HEIGHT AND WIDTH WITH IMAGES. If you use photographic or graphic images on your website (and who doesn't), be sure to include HEIGHT and WIDTH settings. And if you really want to be slick, also use ALT.

HEIGHT and WIDTH settings define the space on the page the browser needs to render the image. Without these declared, when the page is rendered if the image isn't fully downloaded yet, text bounces around repeatedly. Even a partially loaded image will change the screen view. Why is this important? The text component is likely to load fastest; it is smaller in size. With the HEIGHT and WIDTH declared, space is reserved for the image, but the text will be in its proper place around the image area and the user can begin reading while the page is still loading. When the images finish downloading, they will fill in their correct places on the page, but the reader will be uninterrupted.

The ALT setting allows you to identify alternate text for the image. Along with the picture from Hawaii, you include alternate text that reads "Vacation Picture from Hawaii." There are three purposes: 1) If the image can't render on the user page (for whatever reason) he still gets some understanding of what should have been there, 2) there are non-visual browsers and devices, and 3) your site is then available to the sight impaired.

We hope you will find these tips of help in improving your website!

If you need more extensive help, we are just a click away. We provide a 240-point evaluation and website business blueprint for small businesses...and consulting, design, project management services for larger businesses.



Duane Cook is the founder of **Strategic eBusiness-Cook Consulting**. He helps businesses of all size (through workshops, executive and managerial coaching, and business evaluations) drive their businesses to eBusiness success.

We can help!

*Give us a call at **585-377-3439** or **585-230-6357**
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