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WAYS

TO IMPROVE YOUR WEBSITE'S

CONVERSION RATE

WSI

INTRODUCTION

These days, everybody and their uncle has a website (which is a good thing, since it took forever for some businesses to come around on the whole digital thing). But the problems with websites are far from over; just because everybody has one, doesn't mean they have a good one. Like the poor content pandemic, bad websites have taken the Internet by storm.

What do we mean by 'bad websites'? Put simply, bad websites are those that don't convince visitors to take an intended action, whether it's to read an article, buy a product or request a service. Since website conversion is focused on improving what you currently have rather than chasing something you don't have (like more traffic), it's often an underrated tactic. Consider that, in most cases, increasing your website's conversion rate by a measly 1% will improve your bottom line more than doubling your website's traffic numbers would. And yes, the one that sounds easier is easier.

Poorly constructed and managed websites are also a problem because they can derail your whole digital marketing strategy. All of your digital marketing efforts are geared toward getting customers to do something and the majority of the time, that something takes place on your website. For example, you might be running an excellent social marketing campaign that drives people to your website in hopes that they'll subscribe to your newsletter. But when they arrive at your website and can't easily find the subscription form (or it's broken) then your website has ruined your great social media work. Your website needs to be a well-oiled machine that can handle and support the full weight of your overall marketing strategy by effectively becoming the central hub of your digital presence.

So, what can you do about it? The fact is that a given website's conversion problems can stem from many different areas: it could be a development issue, a design flaw, poor writing or some combination of all three. To cover all the bases, we're going to outline the full process of brainstorming and building a conversion oriented website from scratch. Some of the tips will be process related (intended for businesses that don't have a website or just want to start over) and others will be actionable tips (for businesses who are looking to improve their existing website).

Here are 15 ways you can increase your website's conversion rate, beginning with some suggestions on how to attack the process of having your website designed and developed from scratch:

1 DON'T PUT IT ON AUTOPILOT!

The design and development of your website is a big project. Think about it: your website is the main digital representation of your brand. It's like an office on the Internet. Do you care how your physical office space looks? Did you put time and energy into the decorative decisions, furniture choices, paint colours and internal layout? Chances are that you did, so why wouldn't you put the same energy into developing your company's digital home?

Design firms are not telepathic, so don't assume they know what you want. This means that you shouldn't just sign a contract and hope for the best - you need to actively participate in the process of designing your website. Sometimes it's easier to put it on autopilot in the early discussion stages of the project because there's nothing real to look at yet. However, if you send the design team off to 'do their best', chances are you'll eventually have criticisms when they do have something tangible to present. That's a recipe for disaster because it's not their fault they couldn't read your mind. And when you ask them to change everything about their design, nobody is going to be happy.

PRO TIP:
REMAIN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN YOUR WEBSITE'S DEVELOPMENT FROM THE VERY FIRST BRAINSTORM SESSION TO THE GO-LIVE LAUNCH.

2 BE READILY AVAILABLE

Part of staying actively involved in your website's development means being prepared to give detailed feedback when the design team presents one of their iterations. The worst thing you can do is wait a day or two before responding to a feedback request - that's just wasting everybody's time and your money. Also ensure that any feedback you do provide is as detailed and thoughtful as possible. If your indifference to the project is obvious, do you really think the design team will be creatively motivated to do their best work? Probably not.

PRO TIP:
DON'T START A WEBSITE PROJECT UNTIL YOU HAVE TIME TO GIVE IT YOUR FULL ATTENTION.

3 TEST IT YOURSELF

Once you sign-off on your website's design and move into the development stage don't assume your work is done. Appearance is to design as functionality is to development, so you need to be as equally involved with determining your website's functionality. The same design can be given an infinite combination of different functionalities so, like the design process, you need to fill the development team in on what you want and give feedback when necessary.

Only when everything is set can you begin testing. And ultimately, it's your site, so make sure you test it yourself to see whether it works properly and functions like you want it to.
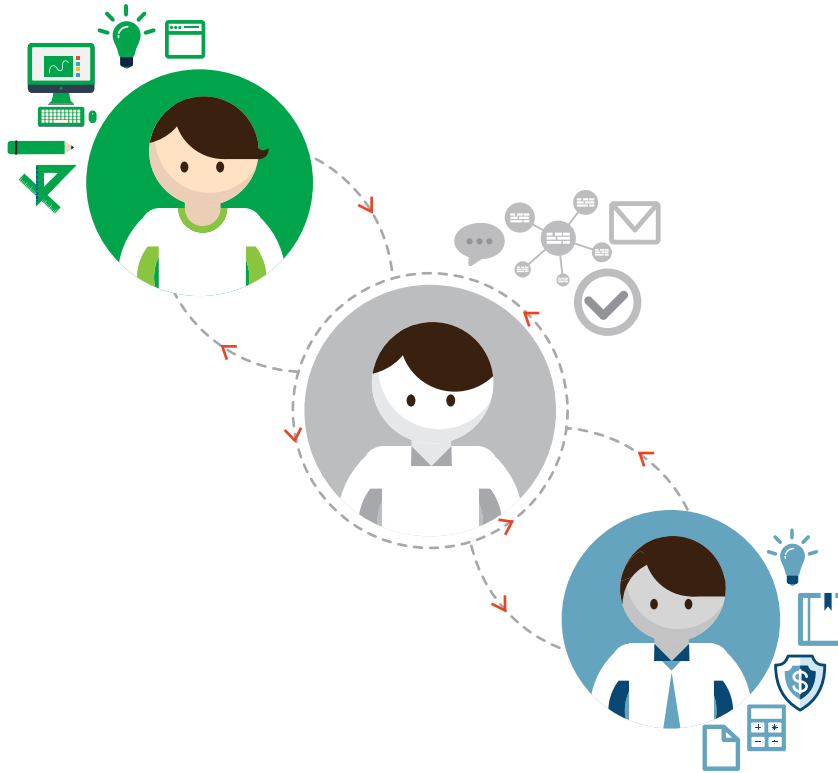
PRO TIP:
IT MIGHT SEEM REPETITIVE, BUT STAY INVOLVED. IF YOU END UP DISPLEASED WITH ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR WEBSITE AND WEREN'T ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS, YOU'LL ONLY HAVE YOURSELF TO BLAME.

4 KEEP IT FOCUSED

You know the phrase 'too many cooks spoil the broth'? Well, too many website creative directors can spoil...the website. It's okay to consult a team for the input on the website during a brainstorm session (because everybody is entitled to their opinion). But instead of having five different people communicate five different things to the design team, make sure there's one moderator with decision-making power. The decision maker should come up with one communal project brief and then help the rest of the team stick with that theme throughout the process. This means that when you give feedback, you can have a brainstorm session amongst the team and then narrow it down and pass it along.

It's a great creative process to write down a bunch of ideas and opinions but in the end, not everybody will get their way.

PRO TIP:
HAVE ONE PERSON ACTING AS THE LEADER AND FINAL DECISION-MAKER FOR THE WHOLE WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.

5 GIVE ALL YOUR FEEDBACK AT THE SAME TIME

Another issue related to feedback is only partially responding. Rather than trickling in your changes, respect the designers' timeline by giving them everything you want them to work on at the same time. If you ask the team to change only one part of the homepage, they'll probably assume the rest of it is good to go. When you then decide to change something else a few days later, it's not really fair to the team, as you should've given feedback on both items in the first place.

Giving your design and development team timely and detailed feedback in bulk allows them to efficiently organize one big project (as opposed to 10 or 20 miniature projects).

PRO TIP:v
REVIEW EVERY AREA OF THE SITE AND EVERY PIECE OF FEEDBACK BEFORE YOU COMMUNICATE ANYTHING TO THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM. THAT WAY, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SECOND-GUESSING YOURSELF.

6 DON'T DO IT YOURSELF

HTML

CSS

CMS

JS

FLASH

WordPress this, Tumblr that - sure, creating a website is technically much easier than it was 10 years ago. But don't be confused; it's still a very technical process, even if you're using a platform like WordPress. Generally, people who own businesses or those with job descriptions that don't include creating websites don't have the time to learn how to build a website...and then build it. It doesn't even sound reasonable, so why would you attempt it?

If somebody manages to convince you that the DIY route is the way to go, be warned that it's going to be messy. So very messy. It'll take you longer than you think and it won't be nearly as good as you want (or need). Given the stress on your time and energy, and the overall importance of having a really good website, building your website yourself is never a good idea unless you have the necessary skills.

7 DON'T SKIMP OR CUT CORNERS

A word to the wise: prepare to spend a decent amount on a website, especially if you're a large company. Just like televisions and barbecues, you get what you pay for when it comes to websites. If you buy a good (but more expensive) website, you'll be able to maintain it for years; if you skimp, you'll likely find yourself with a 'new' website project every few years. One really good website that you can still change and update as necessary is what you're really after and that's likely going to cost a few extra dollars.

Additionally, if you're working with an outside design firm, don't choose the cheapest company (and don't let them pawn off the cheapest technology). While it might seem like most websites are similar (and therefore should cost the same), they don't. There are many different kinds of websites built on various platforms, just like there are different types of cars from various dealers; prices vary from website to website just as they do car to car.
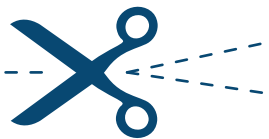
8 DON'T USE A PLACEHOLDER WEBSITE

The exception to this rule is if you set up a placeholder landing page with an information capture (email address or phone number) for people who want to be notified when the real site launches. But otherwise, don't even bother putting up a 'Coming Soon' page because that's likely to send the wrong message. You might intend to launch your website within a month of creating the placeholder page, but three months later when visitors have come back once a week expecting to see a real site, it's doing more harm than good. All a 'Coming Soon' page really says is 'we know we need a website but we haven't gotten around to it yet.' Not exactly a great first impression.

PRO TIP:
WHENEVER YOU DECIDE TO START YOUR WEBSITE PROJECT, BEAR DOWN AND GET IT DONE IN ONE FELL SWOOP.

9 CLEAN IT UP

Now that we've run through a number of process related techniques that can help you help your development team build the best website possible, let's delve into some more actionable tips for improving the conversion rate of existing websites.

People are extremely impatient, especially when it comes to technology and the Internet. An insightful tweet from the twitterverse states: "before you marry a person you should first make them use a computer with slow Internet to see who they really are." It's funny, but also very true. People cannot stand anything broken on the Internet, whether it be a bad link, a 404 page, or worst of all, a form that won't allow you to give your information to the company who wants it.

If you haven't recently updated or tested the content and technology of your website, there could be a disconnect that is costing you conversions. Poorly written headlines, missed calls to action and confusing forms (or ones that don't work) could all be hindering the number of visitors you are converting to customers.
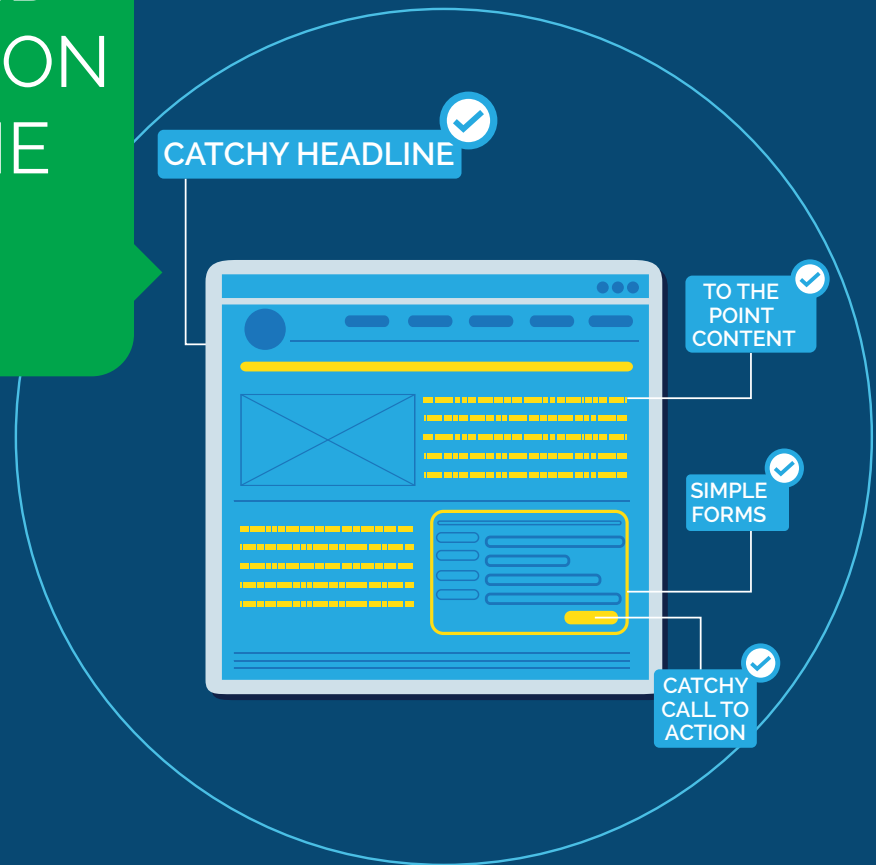
10 USE LANDING PAGES

In keeping with the theme of impatient Internet users, consider that your company's website has between two to eight seconds to convince visitors to stay on your website.

That's not very much time, which is why you should be using specific landing pages instead of sending every potential customer to your homepage.

A landing page is an area where a visitor arrives after clicking a banner, a PPC ad, an email link or a search engine result. Instead of sending every person from the different funnels to the same page, you should develop specific pages for each group based on what you want them to accomplish once they arrive on your site. The messaging of each advertisement should match up with its destination landing page so visitors don't get confused; landing pages should be very simple and leave no doubt in the visitor's mind about what action you want them to take.

LANDING PAGE

PRO TIP:
USE LANDING PAGES - IT'S JUST A SIMPLE PAGE ON YOUR SITE BUT IT WILL GREATLY IMPROVE YOUR CONVERSION RATE.

11 DON'T OVERDO IT

Companies have a tendency to want to cram their websites full of as much visual stimuli as they can fit, but the truth is you should keep it simple. Your website visitors need to be able to find what they're looking for almost as soon as they begin navigating your site (or else they'll leave). Most of the time, your website will have one main conversion goal, but landing pages give you the opportunity to set up multiple conversion goals (buy a product, read a blog post, subscribe to newsletter).

Your website still needs an aesthetically pleasing, user friendly homepage from which visitors can branch off to different areas of your site, but it does not need to tell visitors absolutely everything about your company and its products or services. It just needs to be inviting enough that they'll want to find this information on their own rather than being immediately bombarded with it.

PRO TIP:
PUT YOURSELF IN A VISITOR'S SHOES AND VIEW YOUR WEBSITE FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE - DO THE ITEMS YOU WANT TO JUMP OUT AT PEOPLE ACTUALLY POP OR ARE THEY BURIED BENEATH THE CLUTTER? BE HONEST AND INTROSPECTIVE WHEN ASSESSING YOUR WEBSITE.

12 BE MINDFUL OF BASIC SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

Most people associate SEO with driving traffic, but implementation of solid on-page SEO tactics can also boost conversion. For example, the meta description tags that you control from your website's backend are a vital component of search engine results pages (SERPs). Meta descriptions are under 100 characters and provide the perfect opportunity to sell would-be visitors on why they should visit a given page on your website. While filling out meta descriptions for each page on your website might seem inconsequential when you do it, they are an area that far too many websites completely ignore, so in reality it's a quick and effective win.

The same thing goes for page titles, H1 tags and keyword usage. These are relatively simple tasks to complete but they'll go a long way in helping the right kinds of visitors arrive on your pages (the ones who are specifically looking for you and are thus more likely to convert than a more random visitor).

SEO

PRO TIP: IMMEDIATELY IMPLEMENT BASIC ON-PAGE SEO FOR ALL OF YOUR WEBSITE'S PAGES. EVEN IF IT'S THE ONLY SEO-BASED TACTIC YOU USE, IT'LL BE WELL WORTH THE EFFORT.

13 GO MOBILE

The world is going mobile. Smartphones, tablets, apps, Bluetooth - it's staggering how quickly technology is evolving and making us more mobile every step of the way. Some of you are probably even reading this whitepaper from your smartphone or tablet! The mobile revolution is certainly happening for consumers so businesses need to keep pace or risk getting left behind by their competitors.

One of the biggest ways to ensure your company maintains a consistent presence across all devices is to implement a website using responsive web design. A website built to be responsive will appear and function differently depending on the device a visitor is using to access the Internet. For example,

visitors using a smartphone to access your domain will have an experience that's specifically designed for the device they're using, which means no pinching, zooming or misclicking on the smaller screen!

Studies have shown that conversion can often take place on a series of different devices; a customer might stumble across your website while on their desktop at work but wait to make a purchase while using their tablet at home. If the customer's experience is smooth on both devices, a conversion should be easy. But if the customer has trouble with your website on their tablet because you haven't made the effort to ensure a consistent user experience, you'll lose out on that conversion.

PRO TIP:
BE WHERE YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE AND DO WHAT THEY ARE DOING, WHICH IN THIS CASE MEANS EMBRACING OUR INCREASINGLY MOBILE WORLD.

14 WEBSITE SPEED MATTERS

There's no point in arguing that patience is a virtue because as discussed, Internet users are an impatient bunch and that's not going to change. Studies have shown that **57%** of visitors get fed up and leave a page that takes longer than **3 seconds** to load. Not only is your website's speed absolutely critical to your conversion rate, it also plays a huge part in whether a visitor even engages with your content (if they click in for three seconds and leave, they aren't even a real visitor).

Since website speed is a rather technical matter, you should get your development team to take a look at optimizing your server setup, condensing your content elements and properly organizing your code. You can also consult **Google's resources on website speed.**

SUCCESS...

PRO TIP:
WEBSITE SPEED IS NOT TRIVIAL, SO MAKE SURE YOUR DEVELOPERS ARE AWARE THAT YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR SITE LOAD AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

15 IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Push marketing is a thing of the past. It isn't about you and your company anymore - it's about the customers. More specifically, it's about engaging with customers on equal footing. Yes, you still need information on your website about your company and products or services, but the focus of your content should be more engaging and personal - it should show customers how and why you can bring them value, not just tell them how great you are. Website visitors are much more likely to convert if it's easy for them to see how becoming a customer of yours will bring them value beyond just their purchase.

PRO TIP:
MAKE YOUR CUSTOMERS FEEL IMPORTANT AND LIKE THEY ARE PART OF THE WHOLE PROCESS OF DISCOVERING, LEARNING ABOUT AND PURCHASING YOUR PRODUCTS OR SERVICES.

CONCLUSION: CONVERSION IS KING

Whether you're starting a website project from scratch or just looking to optimize your existing property, website conversion should be at the top of your list of areas to focus on. There are various ways to improve conversion, it's cheaper than some other traffic generating tactics and at the end of the day, a good conversion rate is going to make every other strategy you're using look that much better - without conversion, there isn't a marketing strategy in the world that can make businesses money.

ABOUT WSI

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

Ready to move ahead and discuss a project with a local Digital Marketing Consultant? Get in touch with one of our experts now by visiting **www.wsiworld.com/get-in-touch-with-an-expert.**