

WEBSITE HEALTH CHECK



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WEBSITE MARKETING



Introduction

Your website is a key component in all of your marketing activity. From big-budget campaigns and events to your day to day promotional activity, your website should be at the heart of all you do. You should review your website regularly to ensure it's 'on brand' and communicating your key messages to your visitors.

In this series, we are going to look at the areas you should review to ensure your website is up to speed and serving your business as it should. Regular reviews of your website will also allow you to improve it, and get the most out of your online activity.

A person wearing glasses and a dark shirt is kneeling in a server room, working on a laptop. The room is filled with server racks and cables. The entire image has a blue overlay. A large white number '1' is positioned on the left side of the image.

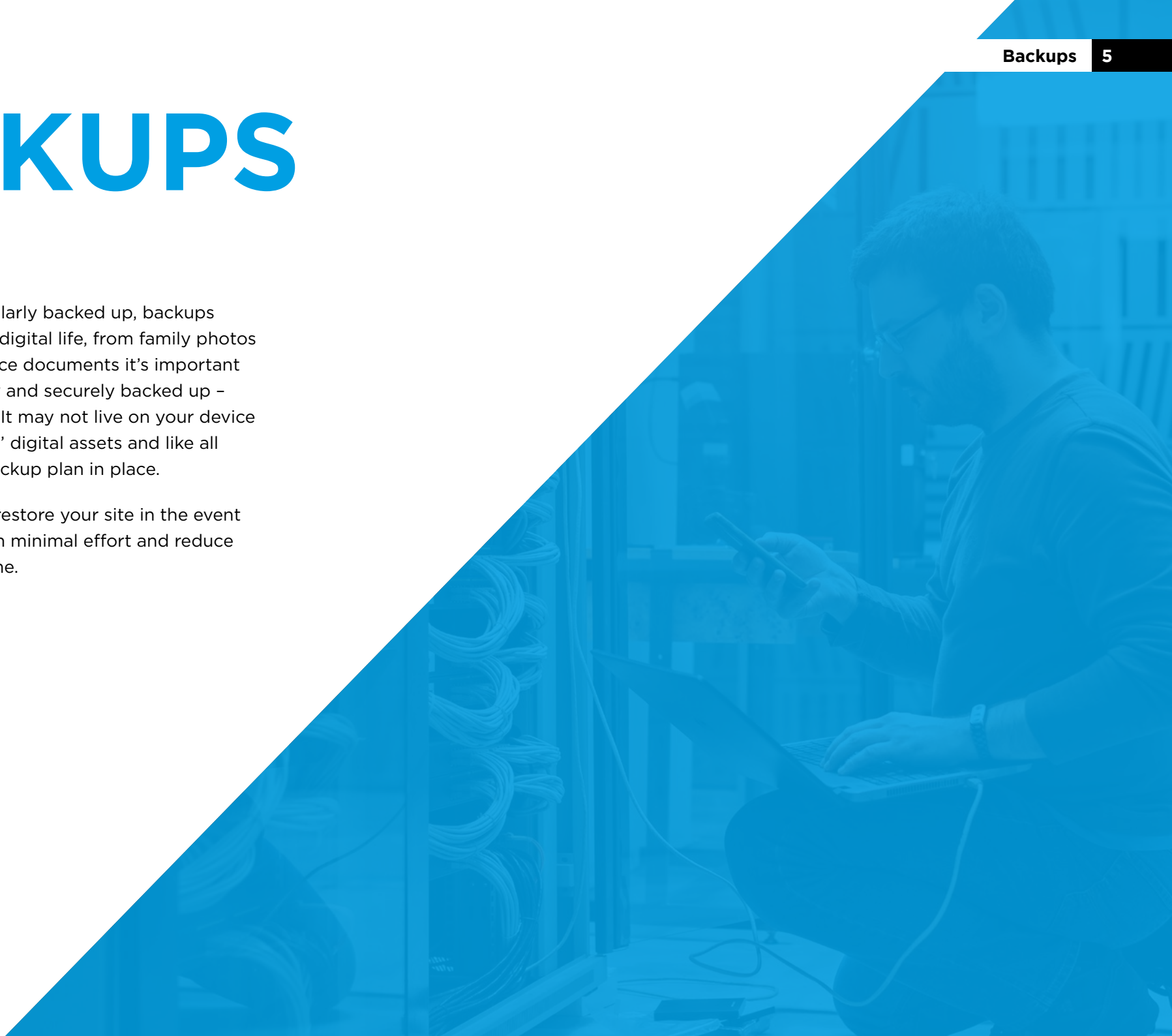
1

BACKUPS

BACKUPS

Your website should be regularly backed up, backups should be part of your daily digital life, from family photos and music to emails and office documents it's important that all digital files are safely and securely backed up - your website is no different! It may not live on your device but it's part of your business' digital assets and like all others is at risk without a backup plan in place.

This plan will enable you to restore your site in the event of failure or other issues with minimal effort and reduce the length of costly downtime.



1.1

WHAT ARE THE THREATS?

Hosting issues



Website hosting consists of a combination of hardware and software, much in the same way as your device; and, as such, has common threats to protect against. This includes physical damage or hardware failure as well as software corruption. Good quality hosts have various systems in place to protect against this.

User error



More common than hosting errors, this could cover mismanagement of the hosting, either by yourself, or by your hosting provider, to mistakes made in editing the content on the website. Having a backup in place will let you roll back the changes and save countless hours of effort.

Supplier issues



Having the only copy of your website on a supplier's service could leave you stuck should something happen with the supplier; this could also be true if the supplier acts to limit access to your website. Suppliers sign users up to attractive new customer deals that end up tying them into ongoing costly contracts after the initial deal ends, locking you in without full access to your site/domain.

Having a backup of your website independent of your supplier means that you will have more control over your site should something go amiss. This is especially true of open source Content Management System (CMS) based websites such as WordPress which give you a wider range of options.

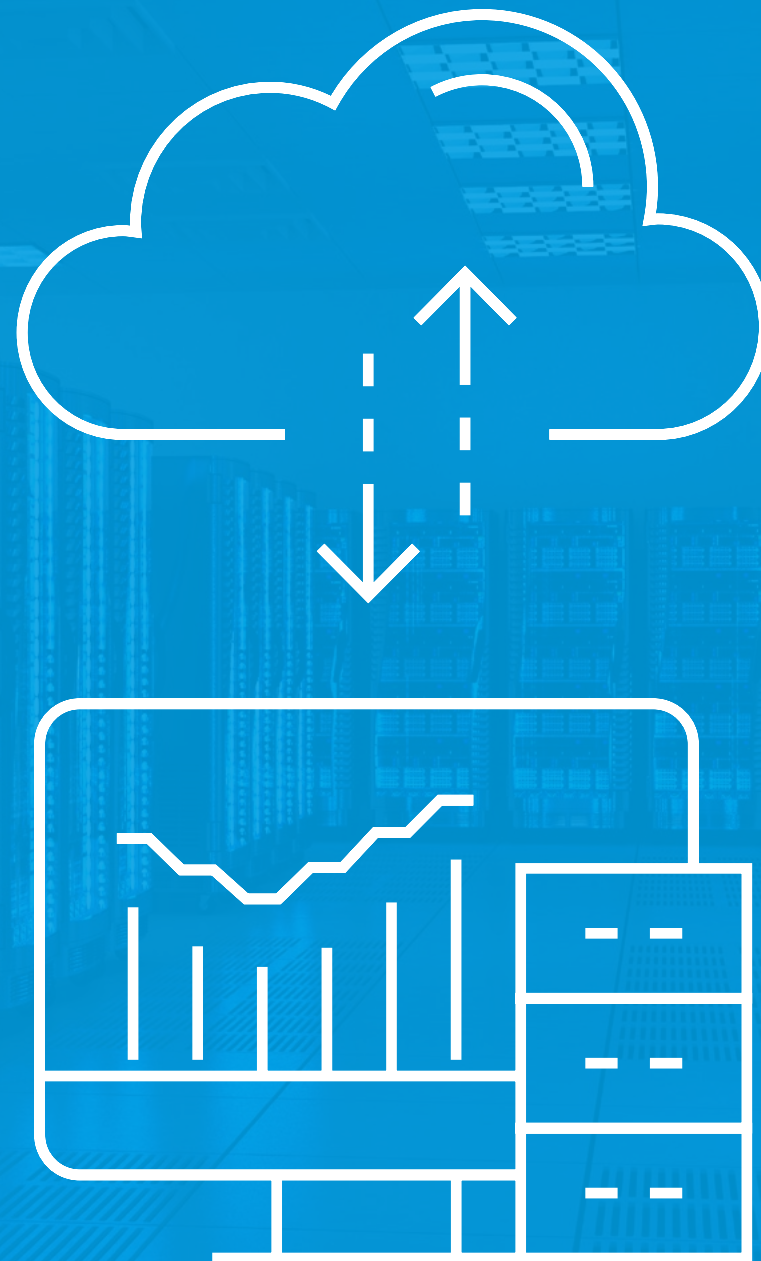
1.2

WHAT TO BACKUP?

When backing up your website you need to make sure that you are covering the whole system. For some simple sites this may just be the files on your hosting, for other more complex sites it will also include the CMS and database.

Making sure you know exactly what makes up your website will ensure you backup everything, so you will be able to restore a complete website should you need to. If you miss elements out, it could leave you with large parts of the site missing, if you can restore anything at all!

Talk to your developer to ensure all areas are covered, no two websites are the same and taking the time to review it now will make all the difference.



1.3

BACKUP SYSTEMS

There are several types of backup systems you could put in place, some of these may already be set up depending on your provider and CMS. With CMS based options the first is 'version history' which lets you roll back copy changes to pages and posts, next we have 'trash' systems that will help to temporarily keep copies of deleted content which lets you recover accidentally removed pages.

Moving on from your CMS, you then have standalone website backup systems, these can range from backing up just the database, which is edited more often, to backing up the whole website: database, uploads and the CMS itself.

Having multiple layers of protection in place will give you options when dealing with issues, the CMS built-in options are brilliant for small quick corrections that happen on a day to day basis. The standalone options come into their own in the event of something more fundamental going wrong enabling the whole website to be reverted to a previous point in time, this can take some time especially for larger websites. By using the two systems together you can use the best tool for the job and limit the disruption that restoring content can have.

WordPress revisions

One of the benefits of using WordPress is the focus on usability and helping customers to update their websites. A key feature to have come out of this is the revisions system. This system keeps copies of pages and posts every time you edit them, this means that if you make a mistake while editing a page and save it to your live site you can edit the page again and select revisions to restore it to its previous state! For more information on using this system see:

wpbeginner.com/beginners-guide/how-to-undo-changes-in-wordpress-with-post-revisions

There are a few important things to note. First is to make sure the system is enabled now before you find you need it and that it's not there; it should be by default but in some cases it may have been disabled. Secondly, it should not be used as any sort of storage. It's a fall back to correct editing errors and not a long-term solution. This feature can generate a lot of data which, in turn, could slow down the site, because of this, many optimisation tools will automatically clear out revisions at set intervals.

If you do have content you want to keep long term look at copying it out into another page or another tool altogether such as Notepad or Word, this will let you file away the content outside of the CMS.

WordPress deleted pages/posts

Similar to the revisions system WP has a trash collection feature when you delete pages/posts, this comes into its own if you accidentally delete a page from your site. The system lets you jump back in and restore pages in minutes getting the page back to its previous state without having to manually rebuild the content.

As with the revisions system, this creates additional content in the database which will get cleared out with optimisation tools so, again, use the same strategies to store content long term and don't rely on it being saved in the trash system.



Database only backups



With many CMS systems, the database gets updated daily; content changes, comments, product orders etc are all stored here – this makes it the beating heart of your site. With a database that's updated so regularly database backup systems should be put in place to regularly back it up. This works well as typically the database is a fraction of the size of the whole website which means it can be quickly backed up and multiple versions saved. Depending on how often your site is edited you may have weekly, daily or even hourly schedules in place. The more often you update content or users generate content (orders etc) the more often the backup should be scheduled.

Snapshot



Taking a complete snapshot of your website, database, upload and the CMS itself will give you standalone copy of your site that you can then use to restore it to the point in time the snapshot was taken. This is used alongside database only backups to give a good balance between speed and total file size of your backups. Snapshots can be very large depending on the size of your website.

Snapshot backups are also key when doing any fundamental work on your site, this could include running updates or large site changes. By backing up before anything might go wrong, you will have a copy of the site to roll back to before you started.

1.4 SUMMARY

Having all areas of your website backed up with a regular schedule in place will safeguard your website against all forms of loss, from simple mistakes when editing content to more fundamental issues. Taking the time to ensure this is set up now could save you a lot of hassle down the line, talk to your developer if you need assistance getting the right systems in place for your website.

Solutions could already be in place, so it's always best to check. We have several systems in place by default for our clients, taking care of what can be a technical process.

The background is a solid blue color with a faint, semi-transparent image of a hand holding a pen over a tablet. The tablet displays several wireframe designs for a mobile application, including various rectangular boxes, lines, and arrows indicating layout and flow.

2

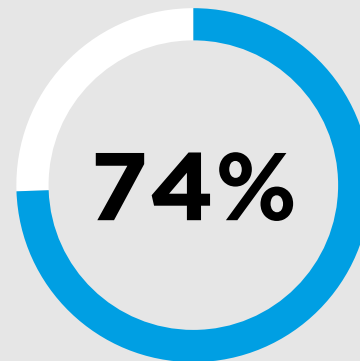
**RESPONSIVE/
MOBILE FRIENDLY**

RESPONSIVE/ MOBILE FRIENDLY

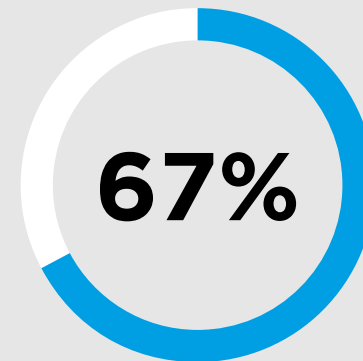
Worldwide mobile users now make up **over 50% of visitors to websites**¹, this varies between different industries, but it shows it's now more important than ever that your website is catering to mobile visitors and not just the traditional desktop users.

The importance of this shift in focus is also highlighted by Google who has implemented a 'Mobile-first Indexing' strategy², this means that Google will view the mobile version of your website to determine what ranking it will have in the search results! This switch has been rolled out gradually, most sites are currently using this now, but by the end of this year, all websites will be indexed in this way.

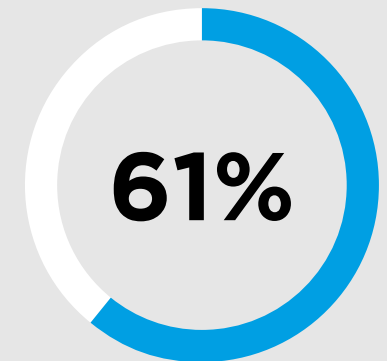
Keeping Google happy is a key part of the success of the performance of your website, but it's also important to keep users happy once they have landed on your site. Once again the importance of a mobile friendly website comes into play as shown by these statistics:³



of users say they are more likely to revisit mobile friendly sites...



...are more likely to buy from a website that is mobile friendly...



...are more likely to leave a non-mobile friendly website in favour of a competitor!

1. [statista.com/statistics/277125/share-of-website-traffic-coming-from-mobile-devices](https://www.statista.com/statistics/277125/share-of-website-traffic-coming-from-mobile-devices)

2. moz.com/blog/mobile-first-indexing-seo

3. searchenginewatch.com/2012/09/26/72-of-consumers-want-mobile-friendly-sites-google-research

So, what is a mobile friendly/responsive website?

Now we have looked at some of the reasons it's important to have a mobile friendly website, we next need to look at what makes a website mobile friendly. Mobile users include visitors on a wide range of devices, from smartphones to tablets the number of different devices is staggering. The important thing they have in common is they are smaller, more 'mobile' devices, which means they have smaller screens than the desktops and laptops we might be used to.

This smaller screen is the key issue with mobile users viewing traditional websites. Essentially the screen is not large enough to view a standard website and leads to poor user experience. Some end up only viewing a small portion of the website at a time, meaning they miss key information, other devices zoom out to show the entire page but makes it difficult to read leading to users having to zoom in and out constantly.

A mobile friendly website identifies when a mobile user is viewing the site and will automatically adapt the content on the screen to fit the device – this means that the users get the best possible viewing experience no matter which device they are using.

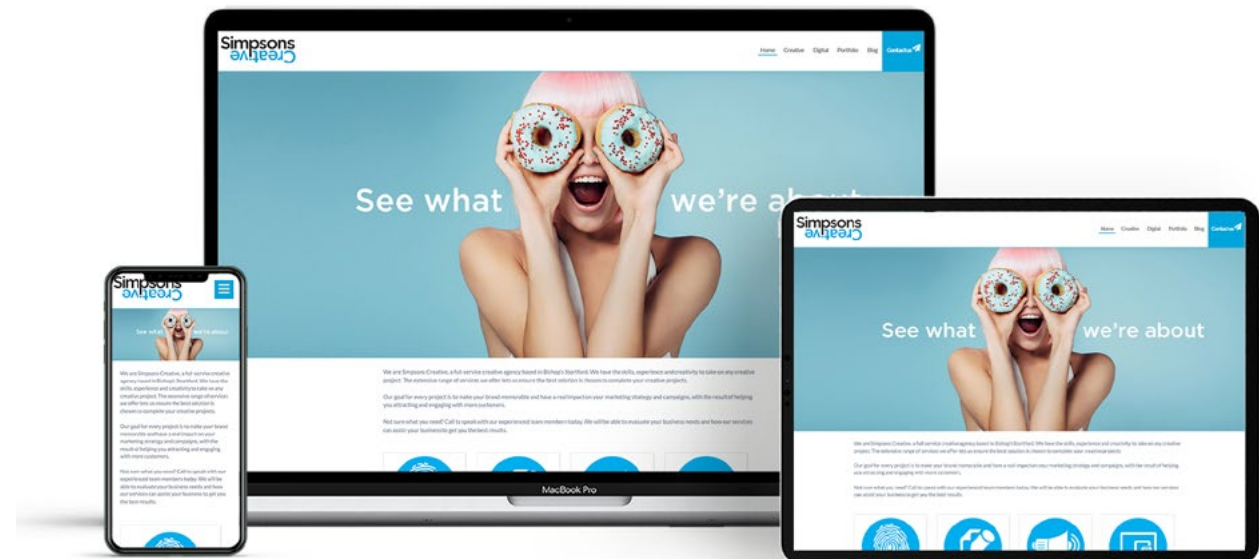
It can be as simple as changing the size of some elements such as images, to a more fundamental reworking of the layout but the result is an experience tailored to the screen size of the end-user.

Responsive websites take this a step further by looking at the resolution of the device and automatically adapt to this. This means they offer the ability to respond to changes in the size of the window and continuously adapt the content, ensuring it is being displayed in its best possible format. The big benefit here is that as new devices with larger or different screen sizes are released, on an almost annual basis^{4 5}, a responsive website will already be optimised for these devices, future-proofing the website from the start.

Another benefit of a responsive website can be lower running costs. This is because one solution meets all of your users' needs – in the past, some websites deployed separate mobile-only websites to improve their

experience, while this worked it also resulted in two separate websites that needed to be maintained and kept updated.

Keeping all of your users on a single responsive website also gives them a seamless user experience, this helps to build user confidence and enables them to view your website across all of their devices. They may start on mobile but take their browsing over to a desktop device for some activities such as contacting you or purchasing.



4. medium.com/@somospostpc/a-comprehensive-look-at-smartphone-screen-size-statistics-and-trends-e61d77001ebe

5. gs.statcounter.com/screen-resolution-stats/mobile/worldwide

What do I need to check on my website?

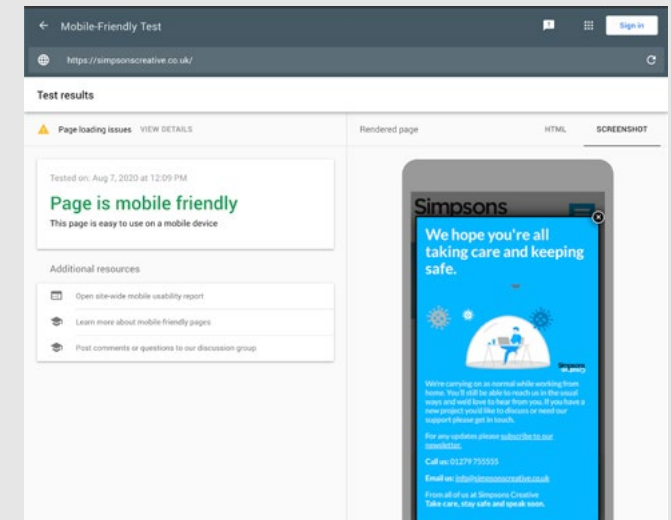
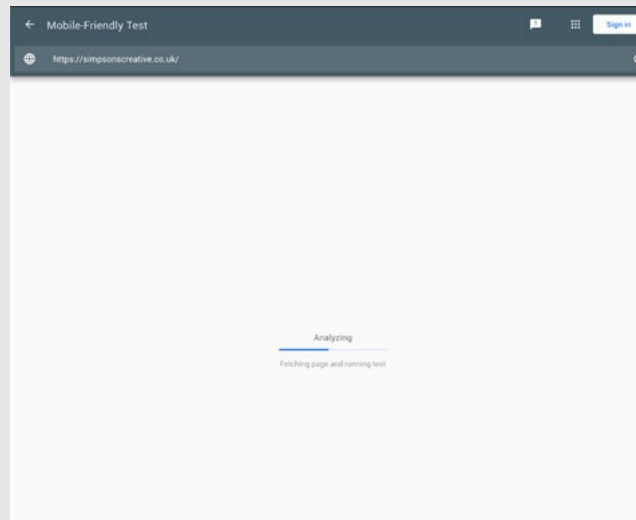
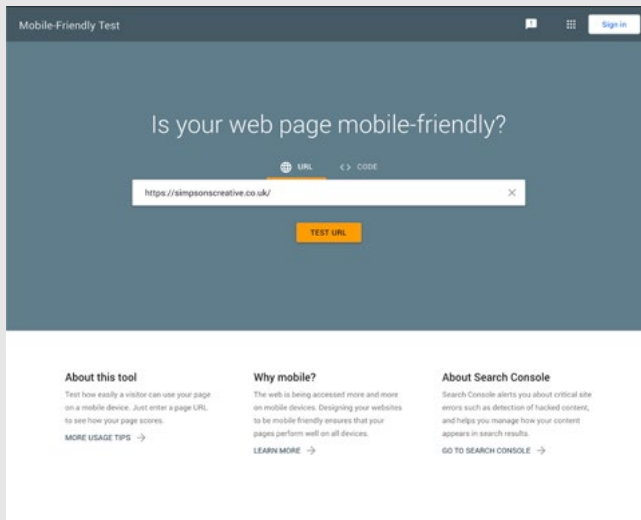
The important bit here is to see if your website is mobile friendly or not, Google has a free tool that you can use to test your website: search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly

This will let you easily check how Google is viewing your website, the next step is to see if your website is fully responsive you can do this by viewing it in your browser and resize the window to see if it adapts in real-time. responsivedesignchecker.com is an online tool that will let you view your site on a range of popular devices to see how it displays.

If you're in any doubt let us know and we can review your website for you.

If your website is not mobile friendly or responsive it's more important than ever to tackle this issue.

SCREENGRABS FROM GOOGLE FREE TEST... WOOO WE PASSED!





3

SPEED

SPEED

With modern fast internet connections letting users browse online in near-instant speeds it is vital your website can keep up; users expect instant access to online information and will quickly get fed up and leave if your site does not deliver this. 53% of users, for example, will abandon a site if it takes over 3 seconds to load⁶, this will then have an impact on your websites SEO as google takes into account the page load speed but also the bounce rate of people leaving your website because of the issue.

This issue is compounded with mobile users who may have slower internet connections than traditional desktop users who can benefit from super-fast connections. Mobile users also tend to have download caps meaning bandwidth is a limited resource for many.

How to test

Now we know speed is important, the next thing to do is test your website to see if speed is an issue or not. It's important here to keep in mind what you're testing the website on, if you have a high-powered device and internet connection your site may load instantly for you but what about users with limited connections? Start by browsing through your site on your usual device but also use a mobile device that's not connected via WiFi, this will also help to give you an idea of the experience some mobile users will have of your website.

Look out for pages or elements that take longer to load then they should, sometimes the issue can be limited to a few pages or a single type of page – examples could be product pages or similar pages that may have large numbers of high-quality images or that have to do some processing before outputting the content. Make a note of any pages that stand out as being problematic as well as any content that may be causing the issue.

A useful tool for testing the speed of your website is tools.pingdom.com this tool will let you scan a webpage by loading it in and monitoring the resources used.

Based on this it will give you a score which can be used to monitor improvements made and see what impact they are having. The test will also let you set a location so that you can test it from different locations around the world, focus on areas that bring in your visitors – for example, if you're a UK business the 'Europe – United Kingdom – London' test location would be the most beneficial to look at as it will give you real-world figures.

The results to focus on are the 'Page size' and 'Load time' figures.

6. marketingdive.com/news/google-53-of-mobile-users-abandon-sites-that-take-over-3-seconds-to-load/426070

How do you compare?

Knowing what your website is doing is one thing, but how does this compare to the rest of the internet? If you have one or two key competitors in your industry or area running these speed tests on their websites as well will help to give you an idea on how you compare.

Looking at the internet as a whole, the average loading times for websites on desktop devices is 4.7s and mobiles 11.4s⁷ however, Google suggested optimal time for loading is 3s. Webpage size also plays a large part, the average desktop webpage size is 1.96MB, for mobiles its 1.77MB but Googles suggested target is 0.5MB!

Aiming to beat out your competitors is a good idea. Getting your site to load in 3 seconds is OK but getting it to load in 1 is even better, the average bounce rate for a page that takes 3 seconds to load is 13%, for a page loading in 2 seconds its 9.6%⁸. Taking it further a website that loads in 2 seconds vs 8 seconds would on average get 5.6 more page views! - it shows that with websites, every second counts.

AVERAGE DEVICE LOAD TIME



the average loading time for websites on desktop devices is **4.7s**



on mobiles it's **11.4s**



however, Google suggested optimal time for loading is **3s!**

AVERAGE WEBPAGE SIZE

Webpage size also plays a large part...



the average desktop webpage size is **1.96MB**



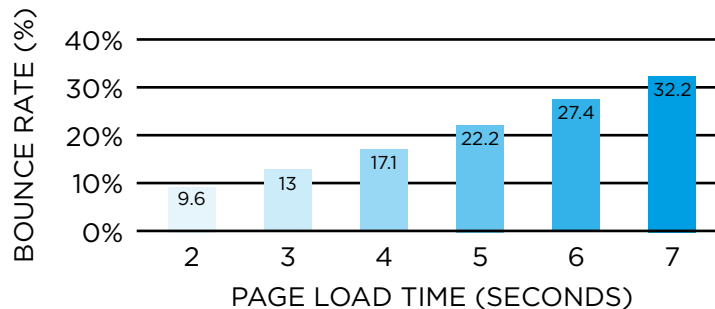
on mobiles it's **1.77MB**



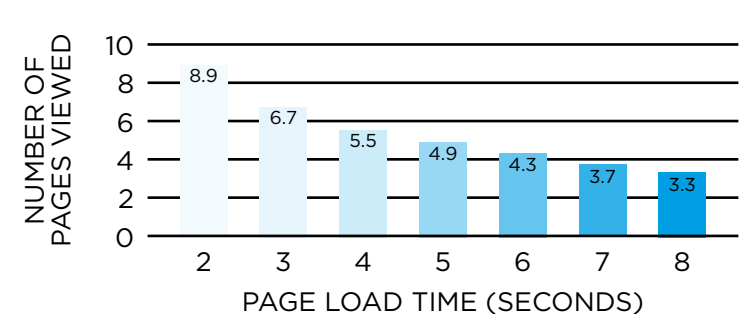
but Googles suggested target is **0.5MB!**

HOW PAGE SPEED AFFECTS USER BEHAVIOUR

BOUNCE RATE BY PAGE SPEED

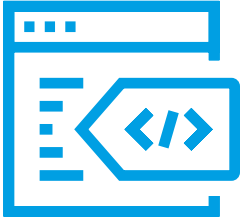


NUMBER OF PAGES VIEWED BY PAGE SPEED



7. machmetrics.com/speed-blog/average-page-load-times-for-2020

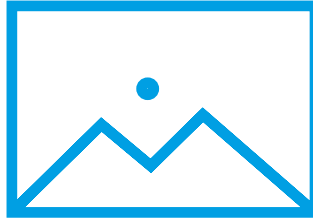
8. section.io/blog/page-load-time-bounce-rate



What impacts website speed

Many factors impact a websites speed, some are down to how the site is built but others are down to how the site is used. It's important to look at all areas when trying to improve speeds, it's also important to find a balance between page loading times and the overall page size. For example, you could remove all of the styles and images from a webpage to drastically reduce the file size, this would have a positive impact on the loading times but would not make for a very appealing website!

This is especially true of visual content, like portfolios on creative websites or product pages on an e-commerce site - like with all things in life a balance between the two is key.



Images

Images have a large impact on the speed of a website, this is because they can make up a large percentage of the total page size for example on our website some pages are made up of 75% images. Finding a balance between the file size and the number of images is important.

For the images, you have to keep looking at optimising them by resizing them, so they are only as big as required and compressing them to get the file size down but keeping an eye on the quality, so they don't become pixilated.

While you're at it there are SEO benefits to be had in preparing images for the web, this article covers both: shopify.co.uk/blog/7412852-10-must-know-image-optimization-tips

The key takeaway here is don't upload full resolution images straight from your camera.

75%
**THIS IS THE
PERCENTAGE
OF IMAGE
USE ON OUR
WEBSITE**



Number of files

The number of files required to load a webpage will directly impact the loading times, this is because the browser needs to download each of them increasing the page size, but another key factor is the actual number of files. This is because each and everyone needs to be 'requested', this process adds a lot of overheads to the process as the server has to read the request, locate the file and send it back to the user.

The result of this is sending a single 1MB file is better than sending 10 X 0.1MB files. Images are one type of file but a webpage is made up of a range of different files, HTML, CSS and JavaScript all come together to make your website work. It means however that adding additional features to a site also comes with additional overheads that will have an impact on the page loading times. Examples of these features could be image sliders, lightboxes, tracking scripts, pop-ups and live chats. It's important to review how necessary each is keeping only the features you need. Talk to your developer about other strategies for limiting the number of files because, in some cases, multiple features can be compressed into single files!

With WordPress websites this is where plugins can have a large impact on a website, especially those that have not kept page loading times in mind – for example, by loading a feature on every page even if it's only used on some! Reviewing your installed plugins and disabling/removing any that are no longer needed is a good habit to get into.



Hosting

Not all website hosting is created equal, it is a case of you get what you pay for! Basic web hosting gets its cheaper price from sharing the server resources between more users, this leaves less of the total available for each website to use. For some websites with low visitor numbers, this may be OK but others will suffer from slow loading times as the server struggles to keep up with all of the requests.

Cheaper hosting solutions also tend to use older equipment as providers are squeezing out every penny from their investment, this equipment is slower than modern standards and closer to the end of its life bringing with it a whole host of other issues.

Ensure your hosting is up to scratch and that it is using modern technology to get the best results, all of our websites, for example, are hosted on modern SSD only hosting with a tried and tested provider.

If your website is getting a large number of visitors, it could be time to look at upgrading your hosting to give your website more resources to ensure swift loading times.

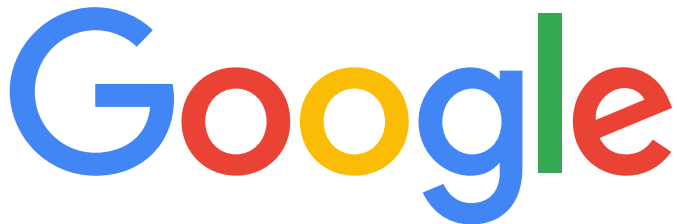
4

SSL/HTTPS

SSL/HTTPS

SSL certificates are what enable a system of encryption between your visitors and your server, this lets them connect securely using the HTTPS version of your website address and helps to protect them from hackers attempting to sit in the middle. Traditionally this was only required for more complex websites such as e-commerce or sensitive login areas, recently however in an attempt to improve overall web security, Google has started to use it as a ranking factor.

Simply put, this means Google is starting to give more weight in the search results to websites that have an SSL certificate in place, it pushed this security measure so that it's now expected all websites, even small simple sites should have it in place.



The other change they introduced in Chrome, with many other browsers following suit, is a warning message to users on non-SSL websites letting them know the website is 'insecure,' not a brilliant message to be showing your visitors.

Your existing website can be upgraded to implement this feature, for most sites it's a fairly straight forward update, some may require additional work but talking to your developer will help put a plan in place to get the update scheduled in.

It's also worth talking to your developer or website host to see about your options for putting an SSL certificate in place, many providers have systems that can be implemented alongside existing hosting but the method changes depending on your hosting and domain set up. Some, for example, will have to use an external SSL certificate service and will need this setup, the certificate installed as well as annual renewal costs set up.

Other services can have this included in their current package so talking it over with your suppliers may help put a plan in place. You should install and have the certificate tested before making changes to your site to ensure its fully operational and minimise any possible downtime.



With the certificate in place and the website set up to use it, you should now see a padlock icon near the address bar in your browser to let you know you are securely connected to the site. Any bookmarks or links should be updated to use the new HTTPS link, you should also put in place redirects for the standard HTTP version of your site so that all users are moved over onto HTTPS.

Making a note for when your certificate renews to ensure a new one is in place before the current one runs out is a good idea. You should also see if your host can include it alongside future hosting invoices to keep it all securely in one place.

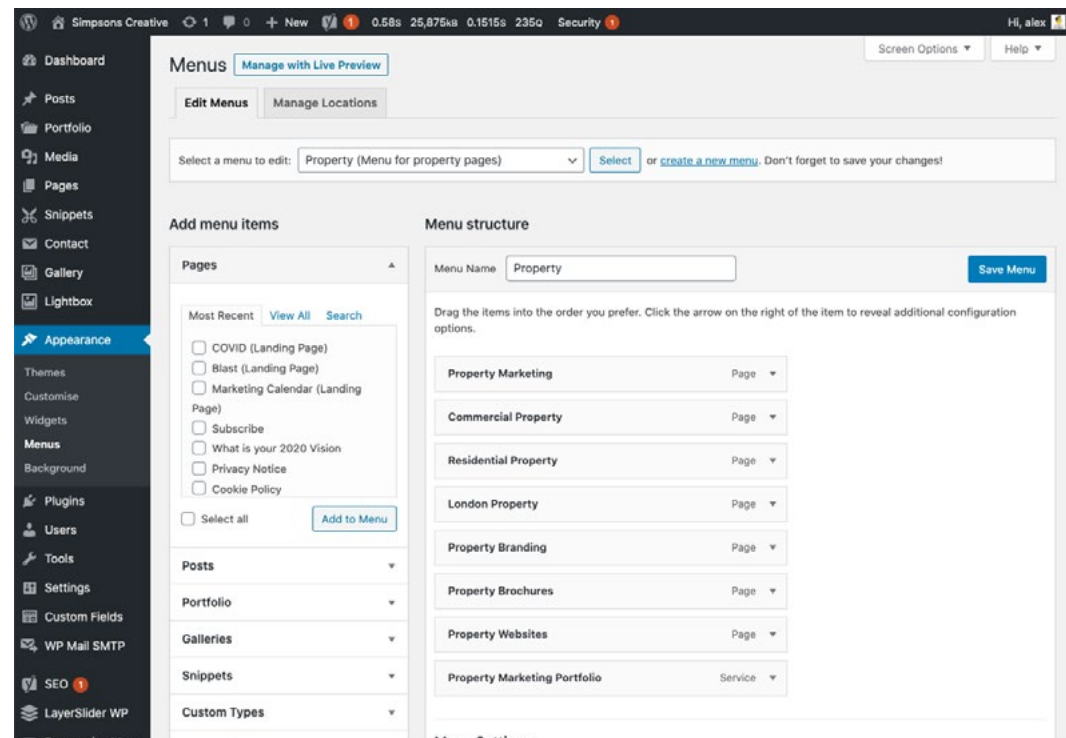
5

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

When looking at your website it's a good idea to look at the process of how you go about adding or editing the content. These days most websites are built around a Content Management System or CMS for short, which let users log in to the website and manage the content themselves. Previously the website would require the developer to come back and update the content as required, this would increase the costs and discourage regular updates to the site.

Modern CMS solutions give website owners incredible control over the website and its content, they allow existing content to be updated, new pages or posts to be added, as well as changing the structure of the menus. All of this can be done by the client without needing the developers time at all, this saves time and money. In reality, we see a middle ground for most clients with them editing content and asking us for support with some of the more complex sections of the CMS, this gives them the support they need but also gives them enough control over the content to freely update the site as needed.



EXAMPLE OF THE CMS WORDPRESS



Do you have one?

The first question then is do you have a CMS? If you do you should have had training on how to use it by your developer, for our clients all new websites include a training session covering how to log in and the basics of editing the content. We want to ensure they know how to work with it to improve the effectiveness of their new website and highlight we are always on hand for support if needed.

If you are unsure contact your developer as they will be able to tell you if you have one, which one it is and how to log in, if you don't now is a good time to talk to them about the possibility of adding one in to give you more control over the site.

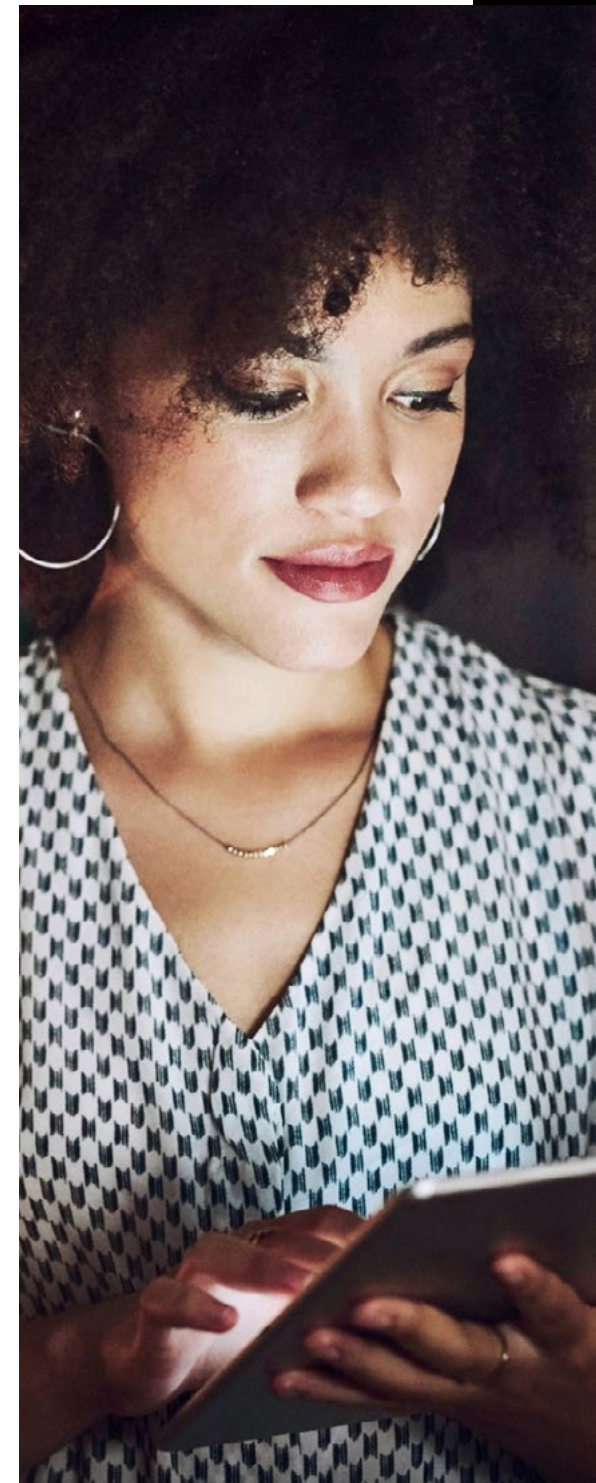


Is it working well?

Just because you have a CMS, does not mean that it's working well for you, when reviewing the system it's important to look at how the CMS works and integrates with your update process. We have seen it all too often, complex CMS processes that hinder rather than help when it comes to updating content on your site. The CMS should be easy to use with clear help guides to get you going, features such as an image library and draft posts can make a huge difference to how you plan in the content on your site and can take a lot of the hassle out of preparing content for blogs and news.

Some CMS setups can become stagnant by not getting updated and falling behind the times. This can make updates more cumbersome than they need to be but, more importantly, may cause your site to fall foul of Google and their SEO guidelines!

If your CMS is not working for you as well as it should talk to your developer and see if there is an update, or look at the possibility of switching to a newer system – this may be a daunting process but the time saved in maintaining the website will definitely pay back any time spent dealing with the switch.





6

CONTENT

CONTENT

The single most important part of your website is the content, this is as true now as it was when Bill Gates said 'Content is King' back in 1996⁹, it always will be no matter what new trends or technology come along at the end of the day it's your content that makes or breaks your site.

Content includes the copy, images, videos and graphics that make up your website, from the standard pages to blog or news posts everything that users can look at and read counts as content. It has a huge effect on how the site is perceived by users but also by search engines such as Google, this means that content will have a large impact on how many people get to your website from Google but also on how the users interact with it when they land on your site and ultimately how likely they are to follow through to purchase or contact you.

Google not only reviews your websites and its content, but it also keeps track of users behaviour such as bounce rate and the time spent on your website to get an impression on how users themselves rate your content. Simply put poor quality content or content that's too heavily optimised for search engines won't read well and users won't spend long on the site. Google includes

this information when determining websites ranking in its search results, so it's important your content is up to scratch and keeps the end-user in mind.

Its importance means you should be regularly reviewing your content, both existing and planned future content, to ensure its working for you in the best possible way. This includes both the overall feel of the content, things like the language used and tone of the copy, who you are targeting, as well as the technical side - ensure that it works and there are no errors.



6.1

TONE OF VOICE/ TARGET AUDIENCE

Your target audience is key to how you write your content, it will influence the tone of voice as well as the keywords you are focusing on, so getting it right is important. Reviewing your target audience regularly will help ensure your content is always appealing to the right people, helping you to attract visitors and convert them into sales.

Keywords are phrases/words that people may use to search in Google for your website, by reviewing these and tailoring your content to include popular versions you can help to increase the ranking of your website. You should review these to ensure that you are using terms that your target audience is using, this means looking at your terminology to make sure you're not using anything too technical or using specialist industry terms your audience may not know.

A good example of this is with commercial property marketing, agents often refer to smaller (relatively speaking!) warehouse units as 'sheds', end-users, however, would not know this and would not use it to search, making it a bad keyword to target. A shed would also bring you into competition for 'garden sheds' which is what most people would expect to find when using that search term making it incredibly difficult to rank for. Instead, targeting keywords like 'warehouse', 'commercial space' or 'business space' would be more beneficial.

Keywords are important and should be considered when writing content, but it's important not to 'keyword stuff' which is when you force keywords into content or add lists into your content trying to tick off as many as you can. This is because Google is constantly improving its search algorithm. It aims to make it as useful for users as possible and, as part of this process, it's constantly improving its method of ranking websites based on user

experience. Simply put your content needs to focus on the end-user, it needs to be readable and appeal to users first. If you try to force keywords into the copy, to the detriment of readability, both users and Google will pick up on this and it will negatively impact your overall ranking. If that's not bad enough stuffing keywords in is known as 'black hat' and these types of techniques for trying to trick Google into ranking your website better can lead to your site being removed from the listings altogether!

The key takeaway here is to write good quality content that benefits your users.

6.2 SPELLING



The quality of your content is something Google uses for ranking factors, this includes the spelling of the copy itself – this is also something that end users will use to judge you and your business even if it's subconscious. This means that regularly checking your copy for spelling is a must, you can use online services that scan your site or simply check it over by copying it into a word processor.

With automated tools remember to check the results it gives you as they are very good at giving you false positives, check over the copy corrections and make any that are suitable.

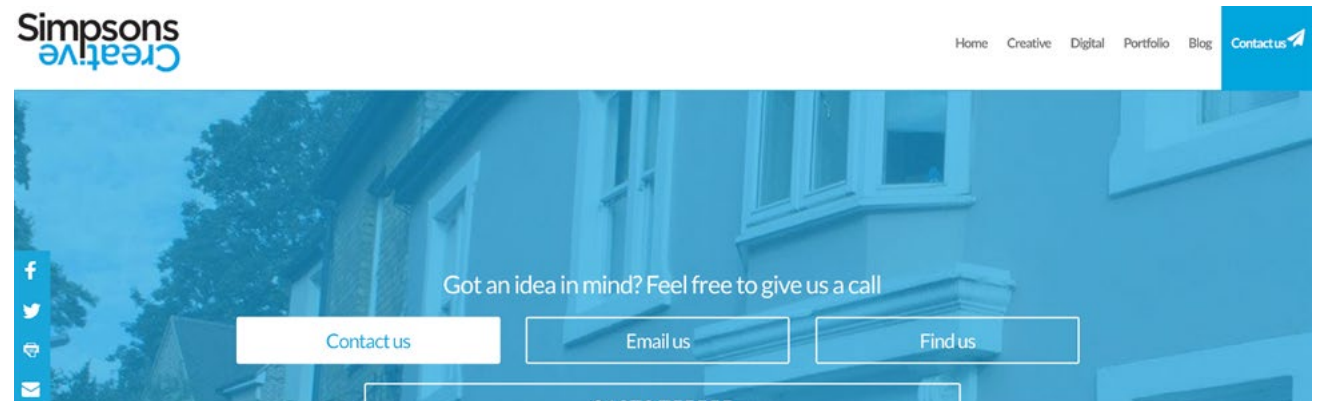


6.3 CONTACT DETAILS



Contact details can be one of the main reasons people are looking on your website, to get an idea on how many are looking for your contact details review your Google Analytics figures for the number of hits your contact page gets. When reviewing your site check to make sure your contact details are clearly displayed, they should be in 'standard' locations that users are used to searching, such as the header or footer.

The types of contact details should also be reviewed, adding in details such as your address and phone number can give your brand more trustworthiness and adding in social media links or even live chat can help appeal to more tech-savvy users. In contrast to this, some details can give a negative out of date impression such as fax numbers, or the now-defunct Google+ social media service.



6.4 BROKEN LINKS

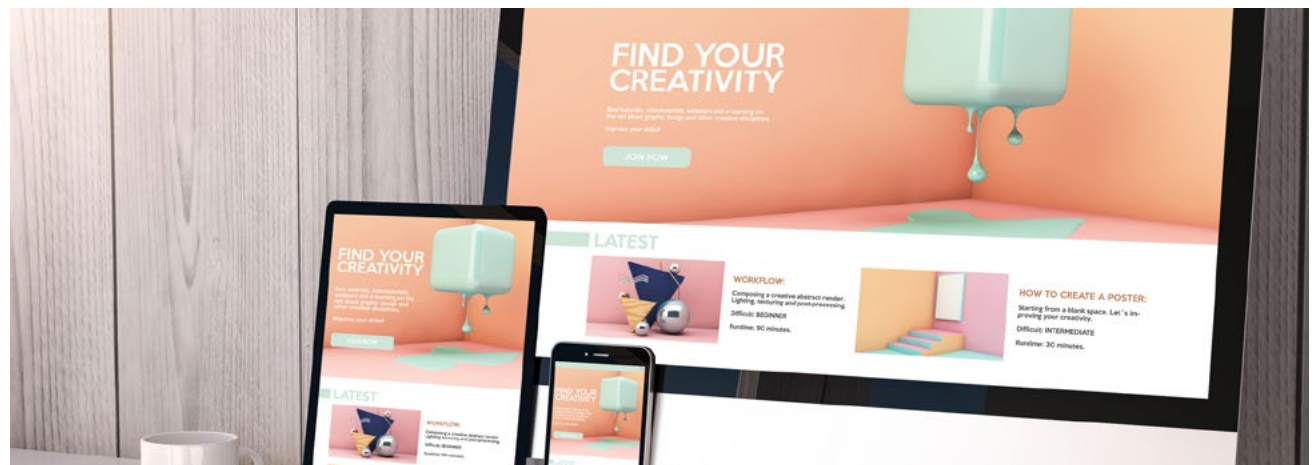
Broken links on your website can come from a variety of sources, not checking initial links when creating content, links to a website which has then since taken the content offline or the website itself is offline; internal links to other resources, or pages that have then since moved are all examples of how links can be broken.

These broken links will negatively affect users experience on your website which in turn will affect Google's view of your site and eventually your ranking. Scanning over your site as part of the review will give you the opportunity to find and fix any broken links, or remove them from your site altogether.

6.5 IMAGE UPDATES/ REFRESH

When reviewing your content don't forget about images, these could be in the content itself or part of the design such as image sliders. Evaluating them as part of the site review will let you locate any that are out of date or look for opportunities for displaying new images to give users a 'fresh' opinion of your website and its content. All too often we see websites that have not been updated since they were built, case studies and slider images are a powerful way to attract users and you should make the most of them.

While reviewing images don't forget to look over your social media and other digital resources to keep them all consistent and maintain a strong brand image.



6.6

CONTENT PLANS

Reviewing your content is a perfect opportunity to create an ongoing content plan, to help you add new content to your website and to give you targets and timelines for content creation. When reviewing your site if you find any holes or areas that could be improved add them into your content plan. This will spread out the job of updating the content so you can do it bit by bit, making it much more achievable.

The other benefit this gives you is as a reminder to regularly add content to your site, this is something that will help with your Google ranking, as part of its score on your website is regular content additions.



UPDATING

99%

7

SYSTEM UPDATES

SYSTEM UPDATES

Your website lives online, this lets users access it whenever they want to from any device connected to the internet, but at the other end there will always be a web server responding to users who request your website. This server could be standalone, part of a large network, in ‘the cloud’ or even virtual, but they will all have software in place to run the servers and handle your website. On top of this, your website may also have its own system that runs on top of this, for example, a content management system (CMS) such as WordPress which powers more than 1/3 of all websites!¹⁰

Both of these should be kept up to date, they will have regular releases that issue new features and improvements but more importantly security patches for issues that have been found since the last update. The process for keeping these systems up to date varies depending on your website and your hosting provider but making sure they are updated is vital. Many CMS have built-in update functionality that makes the process easier. However, both parts need to be kept up to date as they often rely on the other part being the latest version. For example, the latest version of WordPress recommends your host is running PHP 7.3 or greater¹¹,



until as recently as 2019 this was 5.6!¹² users who didn't upgrade to the later versions of PHP were unable to install the latest versions of WordPress.

Before you do anything, make sure you have the latest version of your website backed up! The update process will change the core files of your website and may have unintended results, this is true of plugins your CMS may

have, the CMS itself and even the server software.

You should have a robust backup strategy in place anyway but backing up your site again before you start any sort of update is always a good idea.

¹⁰. kinsta.com/blog/php-benchmarks

¹¹. wordpress.org/about/requirements

¹². wordpress.org/news/2019/04/minimum-php-version-update

7.1

WHY UPDATE?

Security

Starting with the area we have already touched on, updates will provide you with security patches and improvements, these will keep your website secure. Potential exploits get patched and holes in the security plugged before someone can take advantage of them and use them to gain access to your site.

Ensuring you have the latest version will keep you one step ahead of hackers who can scan the internet for websites still using old versions with known exploits looking for easy targets.

New features

New versions of your CMS can have new features to make your life easier or your website more effective, WordPress is continuously adding to its offering with additional features as well as streamlining existing ones. The recent big update to the platform was a whole new editor designed to vastly improve the functionality of the editing system without needing costly (price and performance) 3rd party plugins.¹³

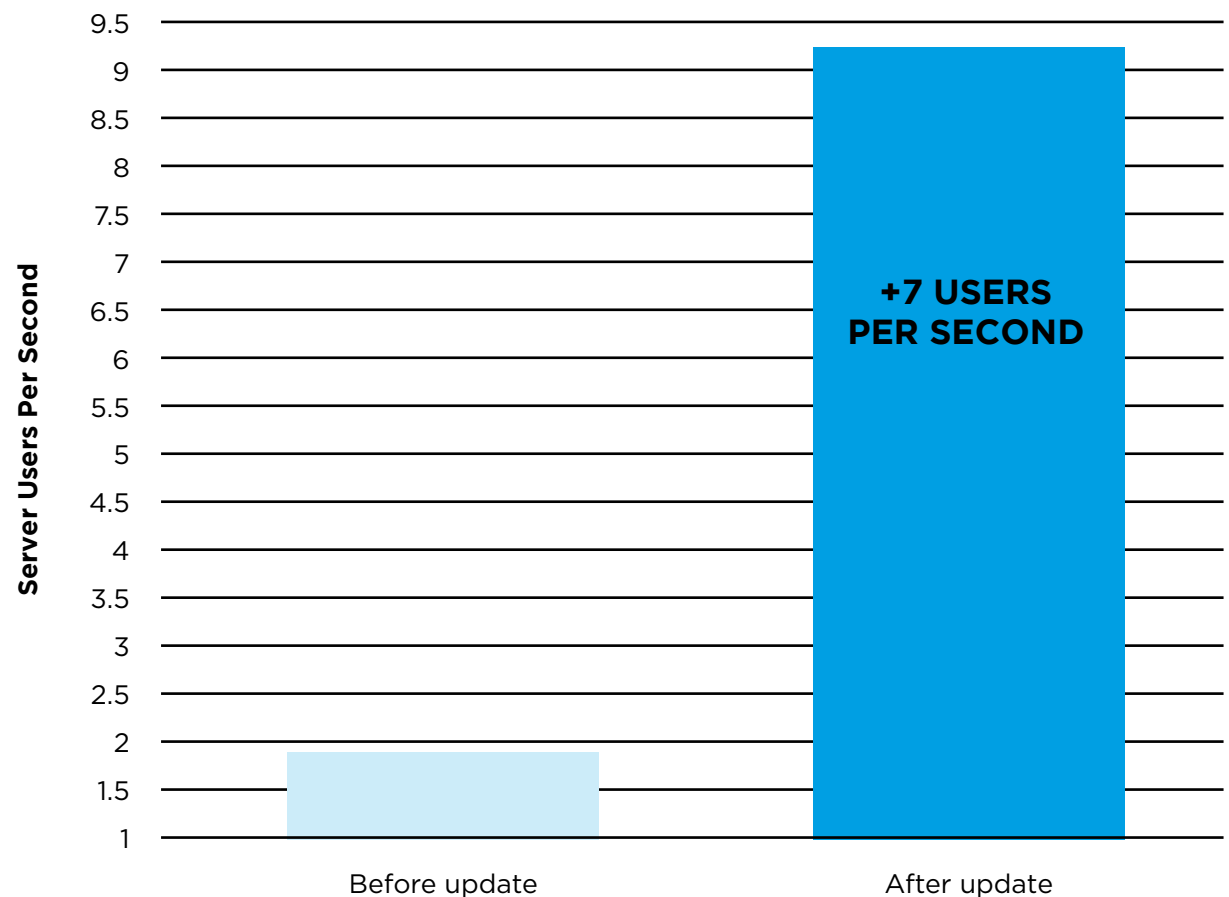




Speed

WordPress developers are constantly looking at ways to improve the system, from refining and improving existing code to integrating new technology, the drive for improved performance benefits everyone if you keep your CMS updated. These improvements can be for your visitors who can navigate the site faster, but also for you using the admin area - being able to jump in and edit the website faster will save you time but also help encourage regular updates.

The same is true of your server software, PHP 7 gave websites an enormous boost in terms of performance, from our experience websites would load in half the time with no other changes! PHP 7 was so much more efficient that it enabled servers to handle many more users than previous versions with the same hardware, one benchmark, for example, showed the server before and after the update, on the old version it could handle 1.99 users per second and after this jumped to 9.24!¹⁴ with the latest version PHP 7.3 pushing this up to 10.31 users a second.

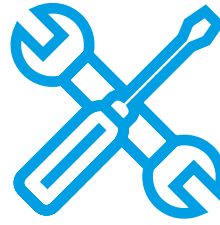




Environmental impact

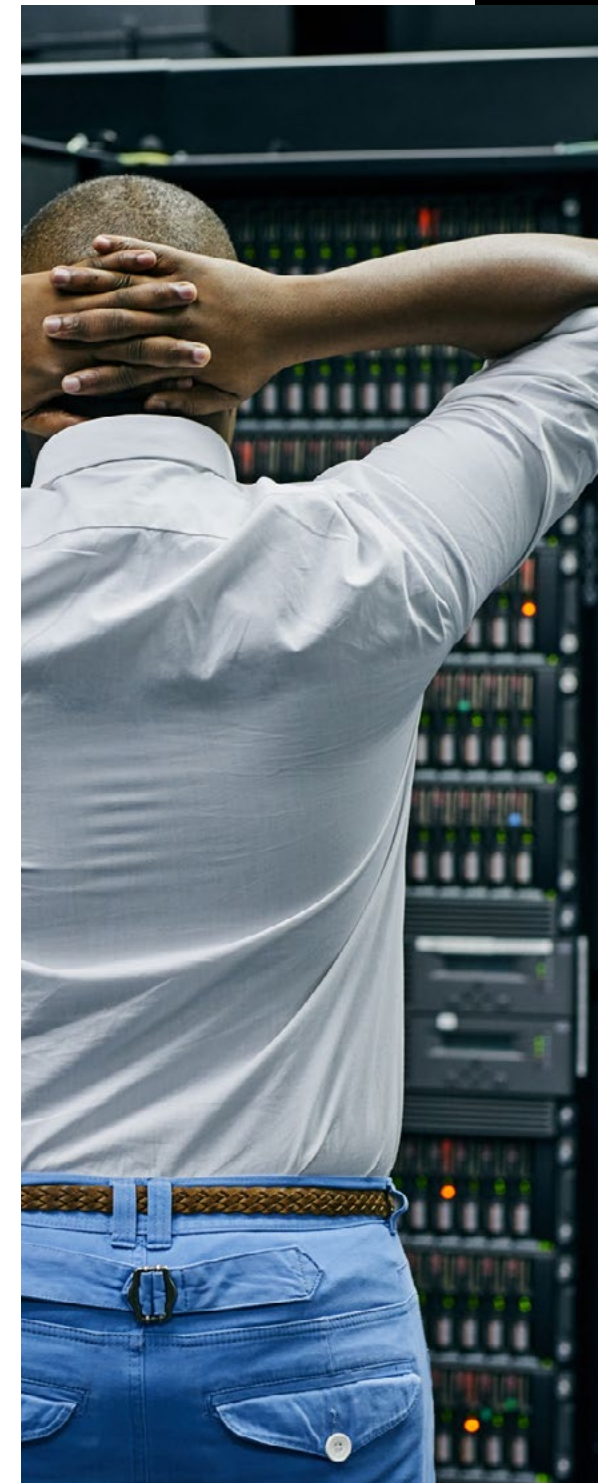
This improvement in performance means your server will be able to deal with more users without having to upgrade your hosting account, it also means that the server will use less processing power to serve your current users which in turn uses less power and is better for the environment.

If just 50% of servers updated to PHP 7 it would save \$2 billion in energy costs and avoid billions of kilograms of CO₂!¹⁵



Bug fixes

All software contains bugs, it's just part of the process, these can vary from simple harmless spelling errors to much more fundamental problems that could put the security of your site at risk or corrupt your data! Updates will include patches for these bugs so that they get taken out of the software many times before they cause any issues. It's such a common part of updates that many help requests for CMS issues will only be looked at if you're running the latest version. This is because your issue is likely to have already been resolved with an update.



7.2

CMS/WORDPRESS

Your CMS deals with the content of your website from the images and copy that make up the pages to the posts and user accounts. CMS come in a wide range of types, from bespoke custom-built systems to open source solutions used all over the world by a vast range of businesses, because of this the way they are kept updated varies considerably. You should consult your developer to get an understanding of your websites update process as well as who is responsible for keeping it updated.

We are focusing in on WordPress for several reasons. It's by far the most popular CMS solution for websites with 67% of the market share¹⁶, it's what we use for 99% of our websites at Simpsons Creative and being open-source it's available for everyone to use. Its popularity also means it's very much a market leader in its features including its update solutions, in the same way Apple helps to drive forward the development of its devices.

WordPress knows how important keeping it updated is, because of this they have built in an update system that lets you easily update the core and plugins all from the admin area of WordPress itself!

WordPress updates can be split into three categories:

Core

This is the WordPress system itself, it contains the core of WordPress and is what is released and maintained by the core development team. These updates will roll out to every single WordPress website.

Plugins

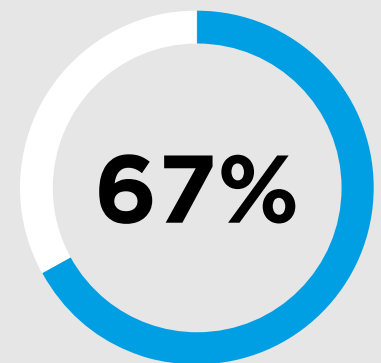
Plugin updates vary from site to site because not all websites use the same plugins, this is how the system is designed, you would not want the overheads of an e-commerce plugin on your simple 5-page information website for example. WordPress keeps track of the plugins you have installed and will periodically check with its directory to see if there is a new version released and if so will alert you to update.

Some premium plugins that are available outside of the WordPress ecosystem will not be set up this way. These will need to be kept updated manually but these are rare, and the developers tend to keep email lists in place to alert you to updates.

Translations

The final type is translations, these are translations for the copy within plugins and the WP core to bring them to more people around the world by translating the copy into new languages.

WordPress most popular CMS solution for websites with 67% of the market share!



7.3 PHP



PHP updates are tied to your hosting supplier, the best idea here is to talk with your developer about the process and see what systems they already have in place to deal with it. Some websites can simply jump across to the new version in moments if the host supports it and the website is compatible.

Others may need code updating on the website to bring it in line with PHP 7 requirements or the host may have to update their systems, in some very extreme cases, it may mean moving hosting suppliers or rebuilding websites. These are very extreme and normally a result of poor hosting or very old out of date websites that can't be easily updated.

7.4 SUMMARY



Talk to your developer to see what's in place already and who is responsible. With our sites, for example, we check and update websites multiple times a week to ensure they are always up to date. This takes the task off of the client's plate and means we are always safe and secure.

Once you know what needs to be done put a regular reminder in place to come back and perform this vital admin work.





8

ANALYTICS

8.1

VISITOR NUMBERS

By looking at the overall number of visitors you can get an idea on how well your website is marketing itself. This can be through traditional print and broadcast media but it's mainly via search engines, your content and your SEO. Looking at this you can determine which activities are helping and which you need to look at in more detail. For example, if you start adding regular blog posts to your website, seeing what impact this has on the number of visitors will help to show its worth. You can take this a step further by filtering the data to show individual page numbers, you can use this information to see what blog posts are performing the best and look at ways of repeating this in future posts – does having longer posts help, adding additional images, video, topics selected etc.?



Individual page stats can also help you identify which products or services are attracting visitors; letting you review your business to see if there is the opportunity to shift focus to give your customers more of what they want. For example, if you find a large number of your visitors are looking at a specific product category in your store it would be worth looking at other additional products you could add to this category to help boost sales.

If you find pages that are important but are not getting the visitor numbers you would expect start to review your site as a whole, do you have clear and obvious links to the page? Is it in your main navigation? Could you add calls to action to help draw their attention to it? Once you find a way to improve the stats come into play again, monitor the numbers over a few weeks/months and see if your changes have had an effect.



8.2

TIME SPENT ON PAGE

The stats can also be used to look at the average time users are spending on your pages, this is a good indication of how engaging users are finding the page and if they are actually reading it. If certain pages are capturing their interest more than others it could be worth reviewing them to see why and if you can use lessons learnt to help improve other pages. The opposite is also true, looking for pages that are performing particularly badly will help to identify those that require overhauling.

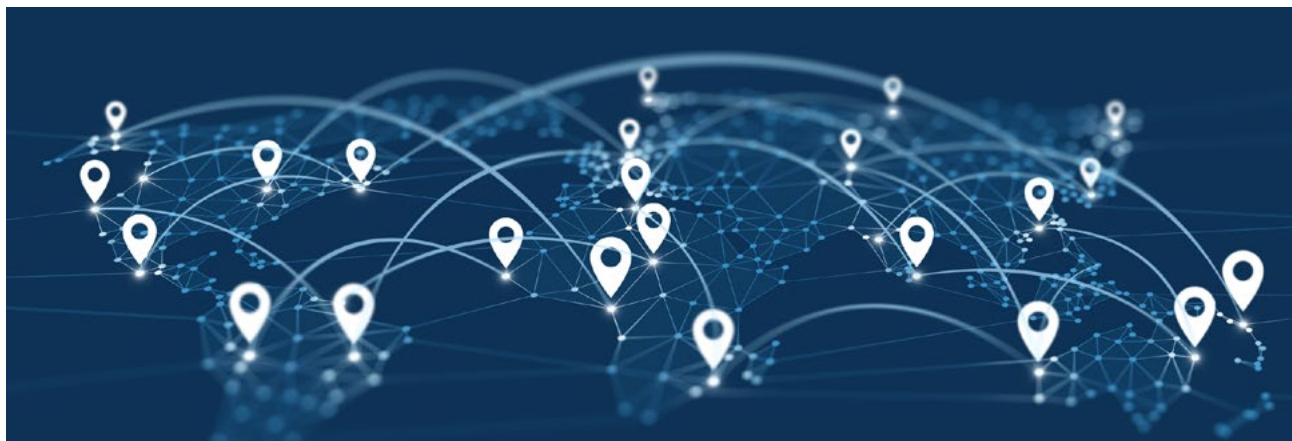
Other stats such as the bounce rate can also be really useful, this shows the number of users that landed on the page and 'bounced' off your site leaving it for something else and is a good indication of if the users found what they wanted or left to look elsewhere. It can also be caused by a lack of calls to action enticing the users to continue into the rest of the website.

8.3

USERS LOCATION AND VISIT TIME

Location stats can show you where in the world your visitors are coming from, most businesses have a fairly good idea of this already but it's always worth reviewing as you may be getting visitors from surprising locations.

The same is true of the time people visit the website, you might assume targeting B2B visitors that they are visiting your site during working hours, but you might find that they are visiting during the commute, or while at home catching up on their to-do list. Knowing when they are visiting your website will help influence when updates should be done, other activity such as social media, emailers and even how you write your copy.



8.4

USERS DEVICE

It's all too easy to take it for granted while working on your website using a lovely big desktop/laptop screen that your visitors will be doing the same, in reality, the average stats show us the mobile visitors make up around 50%. This varies from site to site and between different industries, but your stats will be able to tell you exactly how many of your visitors are on mobile and help you to refocus on mobile experiences for your site as it becomes more important.

You can then cross-reference the type of visitor with the pages they visited on your website to see what areas you should focus on to give all of your visitors the best possible experience.

8.5

SUMMARY

You can see from the examples how powerful your stats can be and how much they could influence your marketing and business strategy. It's important to remember however, until you have it set up and collecting data you won't be able to benefit from it – check now if its set up and if not get in touch with your developer to make sure it's set up as soon as possible.

Reviewing the stats regularly will help you keep on top of your site and give you a good idea on what's going on, it will also help reassure you that your hard work on your website is paying off.

We have just scratched the surface of what's possible with your analytics. Getting to know what details your service records by getting to know your control panel will give you much more control over your website. At the end of the day, the best thing to do is dive in and have a play!



9

WEBSITE OPERATIONAL SECURITY

WEBSITE OPERATIONAL SECURITY

In this section we are going to explore security, why it's important, and look at how to ensure that your business and its website have plans in place to ensure their safety.

We are not going to look at the technical security of the website, making sure it's updated etc, but instead, look at the operational security. What do I mean by this? It covers things like making sure you have control over your domain name, know where all of the services are hosted and have plans in place to fall back on should the worst happen.

All too often we see businesses who don't know where their domain name is registered or who they have their email services with. Most of the time this is not an issue but should anything go wrong it can take a significant amount of time to resolve and potentially put your website at risk!





Where is everything?

The first question to ask yourself is where is everything? In an emergency would you know who looks after your website? It's hosting? Your emails? Very often these can all be different people/services and knowing exactly where each is can dramatically speed up response to any issues.

So, what do we mean by everything? This can depend on your business and how big its online presence is, but at a basic level, we can split it into a few key areas: domain name, hosting and email. You may need to add on other areas such as IT or marketing support depending on your set up, taking a few minutes to consider all areas of your online presence and note down everyone who helps keep it running or services that are vital to its success and add these to the list.

You want to make sure that you know where each of these elements is and how to access it, if possible, with recorded login details or contact details. Keep this information to hand but also secure.



Domain name

Your domain name is a registration to say you have control over it, this registration needs to be renewed on an annual basis – most services that look after these default to 'auto-renew' to make sure they are safe but it's important to make sure you know where it is and check on it regularly.

Your domain name acts as a lookup for any requests to your website, pointing them on to the services the request needs – for example, it will forward website visitors to your hosting and incoming emails to your inbox. If your domain name expires or its configuration gets reset, it could lead to your website going down as well as emails bouncing back. Or worse, getting lost in a black hole with no way for senders to know!

To make sure it's secure: select a well-known trustworthy provider to register your domain name, provide an email address you check regularly to see if there are any notifications from them, keep your payment details updated to ensure auto-renewals process correctly and keep the login details safe and secure.



Hosting

Your hosting is where your website lives on the internet, think of it as a box containing all of your files that make up your website permanently connected to the internet so your visitors can always have access to it.

This is also where users will be directed when they enter your website address into their browser, this is important as it is usually the first impression people have of you and your business so any issues can cause damage to your brand's reputation.

Knowing who to contact in case of emergencies is key, make sure you have these details noted down somewhere safe and if you have your own hosting account that your contact and billing details are kept updated.

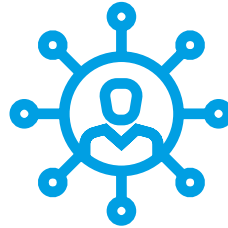


Email service

For many businesses, email services are vital to the day to day running of their operation, from communicating with team members to liaising with clients and potentially new opportunities. Any disruption to this service can have lasting effects, it's important therefore to ensure you know who is responsible for your email system so again if any issues arise you will know who to contact.

Email services can be tied with your hosting but can also be provided by a third party, it's important to know how yours are set up so you don't waste time chasing down the wrong person. Office 365 users, for example, may have their accounts set up internally, via web provider or by their IT support company.

Not all email issues will be linked to your provider, many standard email solutions, such as those provided alongside your website hosting, will not cover issues with backing-up or connecting unsupported email clients for example. In these cases, it's important to have solutions to these issues in house or with an IT support company.



Website support

We have covered the services that keep your website and emails running, but what about the website itself? You may have the same provider for several of these services, but you may also have a third party who is responsible for maintaining and updating your website. This may be someone on your team who knows how to access the website or an agency who does it on your behalf - many clients have a combination of both! With the internal team dealing with day to day content updates and an external developer who assists with more complex work.

The important takeaway here is to know who you need to contact should you find an issue with your website; this may be out of date content that needs removing or something more fundamental that requires specialist help.



10

WEBSITE MARKETING

WEBSITE MARKETING

Regularly reviewing your website to ensure it's updated and the content is still relevant is a good business practice, but if you're not promoting it no one will get to see the result! This is why it's also important to review how you are marketing it. Things move quickly, especially online, so regular reviews will ensure you are keeping your marketing activity up to date.

One key area is to ensure you are using your website address clearly across all of your marketing activities, this is to encourage people who engage with your messages to connect and find out more. The users that do click through are usually the ones who are interested in your message and should be looked after to maximise the number that continue down the 'sales funnel'.

We can do this by making the calls to action clear at all stages of the process and reinforce to users that they are in the right place, this is especially true of larger or complex websites where users can easily feel a little lost. Clear calls to action (CTA) let users know what to do next, these can be in the form of clear buttons with 'click here', 'find out more', 'contact us' and so on, but they can also be links to your website so users know where they are going to land.



Taking Simpsons Creative as an example, if we had an advert selling our email marketing services, we could link users to SimpsonsCreative.co.uk/digital/email-marketing this makes it clear to them that they will end up on the email marketing page if they click on the link.

“People are more willing to click on clear and trustworthy links.”¹⁷

“Custom Domains Drive up to a 34% increase in CTR”¹⁸

Showing a clear CTA is part of the process but clearly reinforcing to users that they are in the right place once they have clicked on the link also plays a large part of building the trust and encouraging engagement. We can do this by ensuring consistent branding over all of your

marketing activities, logos, contact details, headlines and imagery should all play a part.

An example would be using the same 'featured image' in the marketing activity as you have used on the website page you are linking them to. This will visually reassure users they are in the right place, keeping a consistent brand feel to your image across the website will also help as users start to explore your website further.

17. glockeasymail.com/email-marketing/tracking-links-reduce-click-rate

18. bitly.com/pages/resources/casestudies/increasing-engagement-the-power-of-a-branded-short-domain



Social Media

Your website sits at the heart of your online activity and you should use this to encourage users on socials to click through and find out more about your products or services. It's important however, to provide useful content as this is how you will attract people to follow you and reshare. This also includes people who may not be interested in your services right now but, if you can get them to follow you, they will still have a base level of contact with you so when their needs change you will be there to help.

How-to guides, reviews, thought pieces are all useful examples of content you could create, these help to demonstrate your knowledge in your field. This content can then be shared out on your social platforms linking them back to the website to relevant pages, for example, you may have a 'top 10 reasons to X' you could share the first one on social media linking readers back to your website to view the remaining points.

Another example is if someone has a question about a product you offer you could link them to a review or tutorial that answers their question. It is however important not to simply broadcast yourself, a big part of social media is engaging with others and if you are only seen to be self-promoting it will not get you the same connections and results as fully engaging with it.

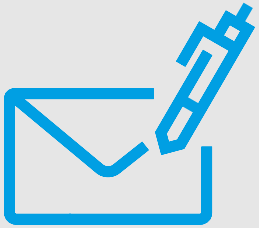


Emailers

It is easy to get distracted by headlines, imagery and copy when creating emailers, these are all vital to the project, but you should not forget your calls to action. Having the best eye-catching design is no good without strong calls to action to encourage users to continue down the sales funnel.

Take a step back and consider what you're trying to achieve with the mailer, do you want them to contact you, to read a blog, to follow you on socials or to find out more about a product or service? The answer to this question will help guide your CTA selection and where on your website it will direct users to, nothing is stopping you from having several but it's a balance as the more you have the less weight/importance each will have for readers.

A newsletter-style emailer with links through to multiple posts can have a CTA for each featured story, this way readers who are interested in a particular story will have a clear way to continue. A product announcement emailer, however, would be better off with a single focused CTA directing users through to the highlighted product.



Email signatures

Your email signature is included in every one of your emails, or should be at least, this means it's constantly being put out in front of your clients and contacts. So it's important your signature looks professional and provides contacts with key information, one of which should be your website address.

Keep your contact details clear and your overall signature simple, it needs to get across your details quickly and unobtrusively – remember it's going to be included on all emails that you send. Contacts won't thank you if your signature takes up half of your email thread, you can draw more attention to it by using different font, capital letters or contrasting colour. When you have checked it is in place send yourself a test email and test that all of the links work as intended and take users through to your website without any issues.



Printed material

It is important not to forget about your printed marketing material, some industries still use this heavily and it can still play a large part of your overall marketing. Reviewing it to ensure it's still relevant and 'on brand' is key. Part of this process should involve reviewing how it interacts with your digital strategy, do they provide users with website links to continue their experience? Have you made this transition as easy as possible? Looking at these questions alongside the rest of your marketing will help improve the performance of your printed material and help to funnel users to additional material, while all along pushing them towards your ultimate goal of getting in touch or purchasing a product/service.

Clear and easy to use links to your website will help users with this transition, links to your home page should be clearly visible on all material. With more complex documents, such as reports or catalogues, you may need to include links to additional information or supporting documents, these links should be kept as clear and possible.

You could tackle this with a link shortener if the link is very long, or you may create a landing page for your document that contains all of the links in one easy to use page, another option would be to look at using QR codes alongside links.

If you're providing the document in digital format as well, a clear link in the printed version can also help users. This is especially true of large reports or catalogues that can be cumbersome to carry around.

All of these options are looking at making it as easy as possible for users to interact with these links and remove frustrations of having to type out URL's.

CREATIVE WEBSITE PROFESSIONALS

Find out how we can breathe new life into your business's most valuable marketing tool

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