COVER

# Five Easy Fixes to Make Your Website More Powerful

ALLIE JEKA

Your website is a powerful tool that sells for you 24/7. Often, it is the first impression your business makes on a potential new customer. According to CXL Institute, it takes only 50 milliseconds for a website visitor to form an opinion about a site that determines whether they will stay or leave. This means that you have just a fraction of a second to capture attention, and failure to do so will result in the loss of a potential customer. Once you do have a website visitor's attention, you'll need to provide that visitor a positive experience, with both your website and your brand.

Here are five things you can do in 15 minutes to harness the power of your website:

**1. Assess Your Images.** Images are one of the most important components of your website. They'll engage visitors and keep them lingering. The brain can process images in 13 milliseconds (according to Massachusetts Institute of Technology), which is key to making that 50-millisecond first impression. Images also help make your brand more memorable, as 80% of people remember what they *see,* compared to what they read (20%) or hear (10%) (Medium.com).

Take a look at all of the images on your website and for each, ask yourself: Does this image serve a specific purpose? Does it help me achieve my goals? Does it tell a story or evoke emotion? Is it on-brand with my business? If you answer "no" to any of these questions, it's time to replace the image. As you comb through your site, make a wishlist of new images that would engage



**Allie Jeka**

more visitors. Be specific: Do you need a young male customer grinning as he tries on a new pair of shoes? A photo of a sales associate helping a mom find her child's shoe size? Keep your list on hand as a checklist so you can get the shots you need, whether they present themselves naturally or you have to stage a shoot. Share the shot list with your staff so they can help take photos if the perfect moment arises.

When selecting images, keep in mind:

> Use pictures of people whenever possible. We are biologically hard-wired to pay attention to faces.

> Choose images that tell a story or evoke emotion, as they will resonate strongly with site visitors.

> Show happy, smiling customers. Smiles increase feelings of trust and confidence. Plus, you'll be showing site visitors that your product makes people happy.

> If you can, work in a photo where a person's eyes are looking in the direction of an important header or call-to-action button on your site. Your visitors' eyes will naturally follow the person's.

> To increase authenticity, replace stock photography with your own when possible.

> Ensure that you're only using high-resolution images that are clear, not grainy or blurry. Low-quality images will reduce your site's credibility.

> Use images that are "on brand." If you're a luxury shoe retailer, the images should reflect it; cheaper images would cheapen your brand. (Bonus points if you can find images that feature your brand colors.)

> Pay special attention to the "hero shot." This is the main photo on your homepage, directly beneath your menu bar or header. It should be one of your best shots, immediately conveying what your site is about.

> If you can, go one step further and add a video to your site. Visitors will spend 88% more time on a website that has video, and a powerful video ad experience can increase the probability that a visitor will make a purchase by 97% (Medium.com).

> Get written permission from people featured in any of your photos, even if they are staff members. Search the Internet for a "Photography Release Form," which makes it easy to document when you received permission and from whom. This is both a courtesy and a protection for your business (and when they give you permission, your staff members

will tell their friends, who will become an immediate audience).

Remember, your website always needs to be capturing visual interest. The longer you engage site visitors, the longer they'll stay on your site. The longer people stay on your site, the more favorably Google will rank you, and the higher you'll begin to appear in Google search results.

**2. Rewrite your headlines.** Powerful images plus strong copy make a dynamic duo. When was the last time you updated your website headlines? Those headlines should specifically tell visitors what your site will do for them and what they will encounter there. Being clear is more important than being clever. When writing your headlines, consider "What problem does my site solve for the reader? What's in it for them?"

Copy and paste every website headline in a Word or Google Doc, and then rewrite each one to make it better. Rewrite each headline three times, each time considering what you can change to make it stronger. Use colorful, descriptive words. Try to say more with less – that is, cut unnecessary words, to prevent your message from being "too wordy."

According to DBS Interactive, simply improving your homepage headline can increase conversion rates by up to 40%. Imagine the impact you'll make when you improve headlines across your site.

**3. Use Strong Calls to Action.** Decide which actions you want website visitors to take, and then make it abundantly clear to them how they take these actions. Calls to Action (CTAs) are often in the form of a button, with the goal of getting website visitors to *your* end goal, such as making a purchase, signing up for your mailing list, or contacting your store. CTAs need to be powerful and specific, and must stand out. Review all of the buttons on your website, considering the following:

> Your CTAs should be more specific than "Click Here." People already know that a button



**Make a good impression on customers with a powerful website.**

means "click here." Instead, tell them specifically what the outcome of clicking will be, like "Shop Footwear," "Download Fall Lookbook," or "Sign Up For Our Mailing List." Your CTA should tell the viewer exactly what benefit they will receive by clicking.

> All your CTAs should suggest action by starting with a verb, as those in the preceding bullet do.

> Create urgency by using words like "Sign up **today,**" or "Buy **now.**"

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> When possible, use the word "Free" – it's one of the most powerful words for driving a conversion.

> Ensure that every page of your website has at least one CTA. When possible, get your CTA "above the fold," meaning that it is visible before the user has to scroll.

> Your CTA buttons should stand out. Use an accent or contrasting color, and make sure they're surrounded by some white space.

**4. Leverage Social Proof.** Social proof is a psychological phenomenon where people look to the behaviors of

others when they are uncertain of what to do. Reviews and testimonials are a powerful example of how social proof works. When website visitors have not experienced a product before, they will turn to ratings that others have given, and research shows that people trust the accuracy of ratings. Think about Amazon – when's the last time you purchased a product for the first time without checking out the reviews? If you were deciding

between two similar products, you'd probably pick one with a 5-star rating over one with a 3-star rating – this is social proof at work.

Social proof can help you sell products on your website, because it shows that others have chosen your products and trust your business. Here are a few ways to weave in social proof:

> Sprinkle customer testimonials throughout your site. Don't make a separate "testimonials page," as it isn't likely to be a high-traffic

performer. If you do have a testimonials page, the good news is that you already have several testimonials gathered. Move them to various pages of your site, placing them near products or services that they reference.

> Share endorsements from social media influencers. If you sell Steve Madden shoes and a celebrity or social media influencer has shared a photo wearing a pair, share it with your customers (on your website and on social media).

> Add any awards or certifications that your business has received to your website. These qualifications will show that you have social proof from an "expert."

> Add the words "best seller" to popular products on your site. Better yet, create a "best seller" or "trending" section featuring favorite products. Simply telling visitors that others like these products will create social proof and increase the chance of a sale.

**5. See Your Site through Your Customers' Eyes.** Finally, do a "walk-through" of your website from a customer's point of view. Start from the very beginning by Googling your business to get an idea of how and where your site comes up in search results. Take notes as you go through your site, considering:

> What is the first impression my site makes?

> Can I immediately tell what problem my site solves for the customer?

> Are my logo and business name easy to spot?

> Does my site look professional and trustworthy?

> Is my website "on brand"?

> Do my images and headlines capture attention?

> Are Calls to Action clear and easy to find?

> Is it easy for me to navigate the site and find what I'm looking for?

> Can I find at least 3 examples of social proof?

> Can I easily find business hours and contact information?

> Does all information appear to be up to date?

Then, ask an honest friend or staff member to walk through your website and give you honest feedback. Your site is something *you* see all of the time, so it's important to get a fresh perspective through clear eyes. Have site viewer write down three defining factors of your brand that your website shows them, and see if those factors line up with what you were trying to portray.

Once you have your own observations plus an outsider's feedback, you'll be well equipped to make a wish-list of future improvements for your site. ∎

*Allie Jeka is a Milwaukee-based social media strategist. She can be reached at alliejeka@gmail.com.*