

Is Your Website Ready for Launch?

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If you've just finished building your new website (or revamping your old one), how can you be sure it's "ready for prime time"? Web technologies, online tools, requirements and standards change so rapidly, any website that was "cutting edge" when it's built can look obsolete a year later. Below we offer 10 aspects of web development you should consider:

1. **Compatibility:** Will your website display correctly for most people regardless of their computer hardware, operating system, browser and monitor resolution? Make sure your site renders properly for as many users as possible. If any features of your website require certain browser plug-ins, provide a download link. Remember that not everyone will have Javascript enabled and that graphics can be turned off by the user; make sure your site will still work without them.
2. **Completeness:** None of your website should be "Under Construction". Websites tend to evolve over time and are never truly "finished", but that's no reason for your website to look like a construction zone.
3. **Content:** Do you need to update the text on your site? Have you added services, expanded your product line, targeted new markets, or changed your business strategy? Is your website's description of your company current and accurate, including your contact information? Could the content be written more clearly, convincingly, or succinctly? Could your website be more informative, helpful, interesting or relevant? Would customer testimonials or an FAQ section strengthen your sales message? Check all of your site content for incorrect grammar, spelling errors and typos.
4. **Graphics:** Do your graphics contribute to or detract from your website? A website with no graphics would be uninteresting, but a site with too many graphics, animations, and different fonts is overwhelming and distracts from your sales message. The trick is to find the right balance.
5. **Interactivity:** You might consider making your site interactive by adding a blog, RSS feeds, mailing list, message board, poll, or guest book. A contest or trivia quiz can attract visitors and bring them back more often.
6. **Links:** Are all the links on your website working? First make sure any links between pages on your site are directing site visitors to the correct page. [Check all of your links](#) that redirect to other Websites, too; the webmaster may have renamed the page or removed it altogether, and those dead links will make your site look unprofessional and frustrate your site visitors.
7. **Speed:** Does your site load quickly enough in the viewer's browser? The "Eight Second Rule" is a good rule of thumb, meaning no site visitor should have to wait longer than eight seconds to view the opening page of your website. After eight seconds have elapsed, chances are good the viewer will give up and go elsewhere. If you have graphics or animations that take awhile to download, provide some engaging content to hold their interest while they wait. Adding graphic elements always comes at a cost in terms of slower loading times, so only include graphics if they really contribute to visual impact of

your Website and strengthen your sales message.

8. Navigation: Is it easy to find information on your site? The opening page should tell visitors, at a glance, who you are, what you do, and how to find what they're looking for. From there your visitors should be able to follow a logical path to learn more about various aspects of your business. If you list products or services on your site, organize them in a logical way. If you decide to use graphic icons instead of text, make sure their meaning is obvious. Make it easy for your site visitors to find what they came for.

9. Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Is your [website optimized](#) to rank for important keywords in the most popular search engines? Double check your page titles and meta tag keywords and descriptions to make sure they are accurate and descriptive. Did you work your keywords into the actual page content as well (including variations)? Is your website focused on a specific theme, and do you have plenty of informative content related to that theme? Is your website spider-friendly (meaning search engine spiders can access every page and read the most important content from the source code)?

10. Usability: Usability refers to how easily site visitors can use your site. The best measure of usability is feedback from users -the people who visit and try to navigate the site. If you received any feedback such as complaints, comments, questions, or suggestions from site visitors, change your site accordingly. Of course, dissatisfied customers won't always let you know. That's why you should also analyze your web stats and traffic reports to see whether visitors quickly abandon certain pages or don't visit some of your pages at all. Think in terms of building pathways through your site that visitors can follow.