# Creating a High Performance Website

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Your website will be the core of your digital marketing program, so it's critical to take the time to do it right. By starting with your brand, designing strong information architecture, and creating an excellent design, you will lay the foundation for a strong program.

**In order to create a high performance website, you need to fully** optimize the experience for your audience so that they take the action you want. Websites often have many audiences, such as existing customers, potential employees, and even investors. In this paper we will focus on potential customers as the key audience for the website.

Most B2B companies want their website to convert visitors to leads, which usually happens when visitors fill out a form and give you their contact information, start a chat session, or call on the phone. For most B2C websites, the goal is to move the visitor quickly through the buying process so that they will make a purchase.

The goal of the website, and the home page in particular, is to present offers that are appropriate to users and encourage them to learn more by clicking to a landing page and then entering their contact information, going to a catalog page to make a purchase, or making a phone call. In order to do this effectively, everything about the site must be fully aligned from the messaging to the design, the content, and especially the offers.

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**The first element to consider about your website is the way it reflects** your brand and messaging. Nothing is more frustrating that going to a website and hunting around for several minutes before you figure out what the company does.

It's critical that your headlines, photos, and copy clearly describe your category as well as the products and services you offer. It's also critical to select a design style and graphics that complement your brand and messaging to help your users quickly understand your company and the product and services you offer.

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We've all visited websites that make it very difficult for their users. I recently visited a company with a large aloe plant on the home page and general statements about their commitment to client satisfaction. It took me several minutes to see that they were in the business of taking over and managing company mailrooms and other facilities.

Another website I visited recently showed a picture of a man with an umbrella under a shower of paper falling all around him. This website was promoting an online translation service, but it was very difficult to make the connection between the photo and the headline and service. A well designed site has clear messaging that anyone can understand within a few seconds. In addition, the layout and graphics support the messaging and make it easy to understand what you do and how you can help the visitor.

**In order to build a high performance website, you need to have an** effective architecture. The information architecture describes the layout of the website including the site structure and how the pages are linked to each other. This will ultimately be turned into the navigation structure, links, and offers on each of the pages. The information architecture is critical since it will determine the size of the site and all of the content that needs to be created for the site. Many firms also build the SEO plan into the information architecture of the site.

Getting the **information architecture** right is critical to making the web design work.

Getting the information architecture right is critical to making the web design work. In the process of creating it, you will make critical decisions about how much content to put on the site and how to organize it. As you organize the content, you should follow basic rules that make it easier for people to find your content. For example, drop down menus with more than 6 or 7 items are very hard to use. If you have a lot of content on one page, it's much easier to use if you break it into more than one page.

As you make decisions about the type of content, the amount of content and its organization, you'll be able to determine how to organize the menus of the website to make it easy to navigate the site. Many sites have three or more levels of menus on each page to make it easy to find content and navigate to the right place.

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### In addition to the site architecture, it's important to carefully think

through the home page and secondary page architecture. By this I mean the layout of the content on the pages and the placement of offers and your call to action.

The home page structure is especially important since most of your users will start there. The home page gives you the opportunity to present key messages, news, product offers, and information offers such as white papers, demos and videos. Since the location, color, size, and presentation of each item on the page will determine how visible it is and how much traffic it gets, it is very important to think about what's most important to you.

Do you want people to learn about the product, or select an offer? Do you want people to read the CEO's letter to shareholders, or read your press releases? If you want leads, you'll need to make your best offers very prominent and make it easy for users to get them. If you want sales, you'll need to make it easy to buy.

For example, if the primary goal of the home page is to drive users to see a demo and download a trial of your product, you should present your offer in the most visible place with the boldest color possible. If you want people to sign up to get a discount coupon, make that offer the most prominent.

This thinking should also apply to the secondary pages on the website in addition to the home page. If you do your SEO job well, you'll be generating more and more traffic directly to interior pages of the site since the users will be bypassing the home page when they come from a search link. It's very important to think about how users will experience your site if they go directly to these secondary pages. Will they understand your business and where they are on the site? Will they be able to navigate easily to other parts of the site? Will they find an offer that engages them and makes it easy for them to buy something or give you their contact information? Those are the challenges you'll need to overcome as you create your secondary page designs.

**As you create your architecture, it's important to think deliberately** about which offers to place on each page of your website. By placing relevant offers on each page, you'll increase the click through rate and conversion rate, and improve the overall effectiveness of your website. As tempting as it can be to offer many things on each page, you can actually confuse your website users with too many offers. It's best to select the most appropriate offer for each page on the site and then test other relevant offers over time to see if you can improve your conversion rates.

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In addition to content about your company, your products, and your services, you should also include other content to make your website valuable to people and position you as a thought leader. This content might include:

1. Blog
2. Directory
3. Glossary
4. White papers
5. Articles
6. Video
7. Info Graphics

Your website is the natural place to place the thought leadership content you create, so plan for a resources section of your website that is alive with new content which you create and post frequently. The easiest place to start is with a blog where you write articles at least weekly. The resources section of your website will allow you to engage your users, build your brand, and get more SEO visibility since search engines love fresh content.

**Once you launch your new website, you'll need to make frequent** changes as your business changes and evolves. A content management system (CMS) is software that enables you to easily manage and maintain a website once it has been created. It works by presenting your content through a series of templates for the website design. All of the content for each page is in a database and only displayed to the user through the template when they visit the site. This means that you can easily make changes to the content and certain other site elements quickly and easily without redesigning the page. You can also entrust site editing to people with little HTML experience, since it is difficult to break the templates.

A content management system (CMS) is software that enables you to **easily manage and maintain** a website once it has been created.

Popular content management systems like WordPress and Square Space make it easy and less expensive to create beautiful and effective website that can be easily managed. When you work with a product like WordPress, you can either create a custom design or work with an existing template. If you chose a template approach, your design will be limited, but you will get many features at no additional cost. Choose your template carefully, because once you build your website in a template, you will be committed to it for a long time because it will take time or money to make changes.

Before you select a CMS, however, makes sure it meets all of your requirements. If you are building a complex e-commerce website or have thousands of pages of content, then WordPress may not be best for you. There are many packaged CMS products that have robust features and may be a better long term alternative.

**Since many people today browse the web from smartphones and** tablets, you should design your website to be as easy to use on mobile devices as on a PC or Mac.  In the past, companies would build two different websites, one for mobile and one for desktop users.  Today, CMS systems allow you to build using "Responsive Design" so that the website automatically reformats based on the size of the user's browser.  To do this, you will need to build templates for each size of browsers you expect to visit your site.

By doing this you can deliver an excellent user experience for mobile users, while not taking the time and expense to build and maintain two completely separate websites.  Managing content is easier with this approach too, since if you make a change in your content, it will instantly appear in both the mobile and PC version.  Search engines reward you for showing mobile content correctly, so you building a responsive website should also increase your SEO visibility.

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**Today's website analytics tools can provide you with a huge amount of** data on what's happening on the website.  You can get very detailed data on visits, page views, clicks, conversions.  You can also see where the traffic is coming from by referring website and often by keyword.

This data can tell you very important things about the effectiveness of your marketing programs and help you answer key questions such as:

- How effective is your home page and your landing pages?
- How effective is your website information architecture?
- How effective is your search engine optimization program?
- How effective is your social media marketing program?
- How effective is your email campaign?
- How effective is your paid search or online advertising programs?
- What is not working well on the website?

Understanding your website analytics data is critical to helping you measure the ROI of your marketing programs and building a high performance website.

When you start to use a tool like Google Analytics, it's easy to get lost in the overwhelming amount of data instead of focusing on what matters.  While it might be interesting to know what percentage of your users is still using Internet Explorer 6.0, it's more important to know which websites are referring traffic and driving conversions.

Once you determine the metrics that are most important, you can build a dashboard that summarizes those metrics and helps you quickly find the data you need.

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## Website Analytics tools are limited by the type of data they can get.

There is a lot of data available, but the most important data I like to see includes:

- **Traffic Sources** – Where did the traffic come from and which traffic converted best?
- **Clicks on pages** – The HTML links on your site and the pages that people clicked from and to.
- **Goal Conversions** – You can tag certain pages as "goals" which helps you see if people are doing what you want them to do.
- **Referring sites** - Where did users come from?
- **Geography** – What countries, states, and cities did they come from?

You generally cannot see who came to your site unless the user provides their contact information. You also cannot see where the go after they leave your site.

Rather than focus on what each metric means on the reports, I'd recommend that you focus on the decisions you want to make about your website each month, and then look at the data that can help you make those decisions. When you are building a high performance website, you need to focus on:

- Home Page Performance
- Landing Page Performance
- Search Engine Optimization
- Social Media
- Email
- Paid Search or Digital Advertising

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### About the Author:

David Reske founded Nowspeed, Inc. in 2003, and is focused on delivering world-class Internet marketing services to clients across the US. David has over 16 years of Internet marketing experience in areas such as search (SEO and PPC), social media, email, and web-site marketing. He has personally worked with over 100 clients to optimize their marketing programs.

Before founding Nowspeed Marketing, David was also founder and CEO of Onward Technologies, a web marketing and systems integration firm, where he led the company to significant growth. In 1998, Onward Technologies was purchased by CSC Consulting Group, a division of CSC Corporation that provides information technology services to commercial and government markets.

David is a graduate of Ohio State University and completed graduate work at Boston University.

### About NOWSPEED:

Nowspeed is an online marketing agency providing innovative and custom-tailored PPC (Pay-per-click), SEO (Search Engine Optimization), Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing and Web Design solutions. From our offices in Greater Boston, we work closely with our clients to provide solutions specially designed for their unique online marketing objectives.

Nowspeed's click-to-customer™ marketing solution drives, converts and nurtures leads—generating more high-value sales faster for our clients. We provide expert marketing strategy, award-winning creative and flawless campaign execution across all of our services.

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