

TEN SECONDS ARE ALL YOU HAVE

INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER MAY BE THE HOT AREAS FOR ENGAGEMENT, BUT DON'T NEGLECT YOUR WEBSITE. BRIAN STEEL HAS DIRE WARNINGS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE TO MAKE YOUR WEB PAGE WORK.

THERE are multiple academic studies on tolerable web wait times. They use terms like 'Useability Engineering' and 'Human Computer Interaction', and the measurements used are in decimals of a second. Most focus on the fact that 99 per cent of web pages have what's called a negative ageing effect (leave quick or stay long). In short, the first 10 seconds are crucial, but the longer you hold attention, the longer the likely visit duration.

In simple terms, these studies offer the following conclusions: from the moment a customer lands on your website, you have less than 10 seconds to get them the information they seek. If the page load time is more than two seconds, it's a very bad start. The average web page visit is less than a minute, but if you do make it past 30 seconds, the visit may even last two minutes – in web terms, this is an eternity.



Jakob's Law of Web User Experience states that users spend most of their time on other websites. In other words, their expectation of yours is based on all the others. It's vital to focus on those 10 seconds and think about what people are looking for when they visit your website. Let's effectively skip to the punch line - if you remember nothing else about this article, remember this: every page on your website should contain your address, your opening hours, and your phone number. Every page. If this is not the case, change it now.

When designing your web page, it's very tempting to be seduced by flashy graphics and animations. However, this could be driving people away through frustration and wait times. Do you have a flamboyant front page with music and animation that takes five seconds for the 'Skip Intro' button to appear? Does your page have similarly showy graphics and photos where there is a stand-alone button with "enter website" on it? If the answer is

yes, then I'm willing to bet that you have a very high bounce rate (this is not a good thing). Bounce rate means people move off your site after visiting one page, and it happens all the time.

The solutions are relatively straight forward: focus on simple, easy to navigate pages with meaningful and concise information. Don't have anything that results in a new window opening – it breaks the flow. Text needs to be scannable, so use sub headings, bullets and short paragraphs. Trust me, less really is more. Don't violate design conventions by using what may seem like a clever euphemism for menu or wine list but actually comes with a higher risk than potential reward.

There is a corollary to this, relating to congruency of content against actual product. If you hire the city's best food photographer and stylist to shoot your food for the website, you better be sure your product looks like that on the plate when it goes in front of the customer. People make their first assumptions on you from your website – the language, the pictures and the menu. These can shape the customer experience before they even arrive at your venue.

Authenticity is a debate for another time, but think about your online presence and make sure it aligns with the experience. In terms of expectation management, you are taking a huge risk if it's not well constructed.

I don't like nagging, but once more: address, hours, number...every page. ■■■

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