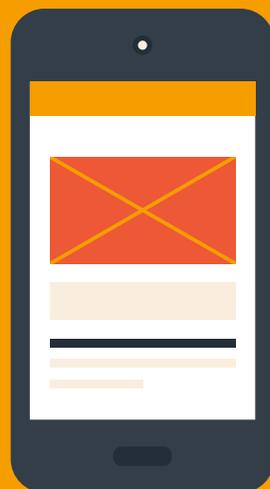
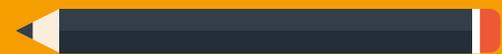
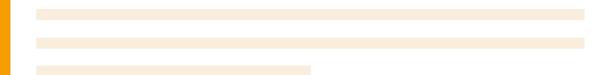
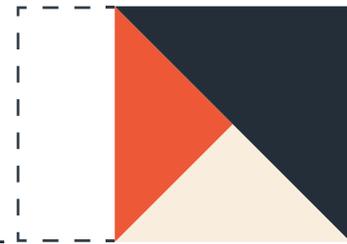
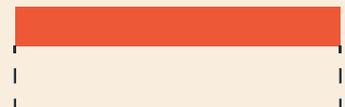


WEBSITE

ASSESSMENT

GUIDE

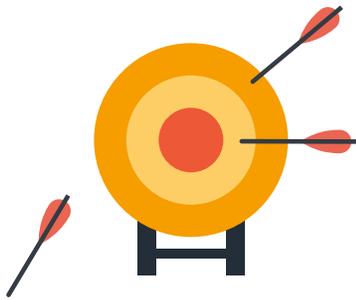
The Five Critical Components
of a Successful Website



controlyours®



Let me guess, your website isn't giving your business results. You've gone through the motions, you feel like you've done a fair job representing what your company is all about, you've listed out your services...



But a website is no longer just a website. In the good ol' days, a website was just basically an online brochure, with some pictures and information about your business. Now, your website is the heartbeat of all of your marketing efforts online. It's where your largest, most engaged customer base lives, and it's up to you to find them.

For us business owners, this task can feel overwhelming, complicated, and like it takes too much time. And, while it is a big task, it's not impossible. After 10 years building 100's of websites for businesses, I've been able to condense the essentials of a good website into **five critical components**. This website assessment guide outlines those components and provides you with evaluation points and detailed action items so that your website will finally be your business's most valuable digital asset.

Two Key Elements

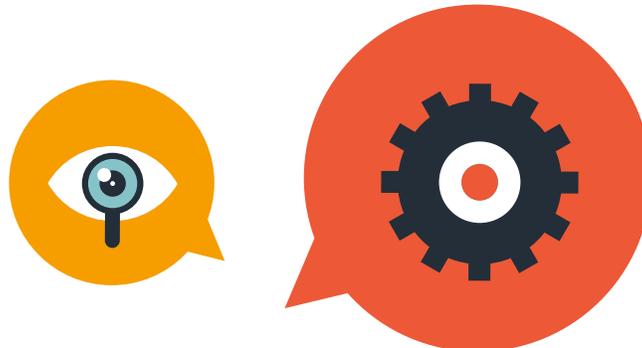
Before we get into the nitty gritty of the five components and your website, I'd like to make sure you have a good understanding of the two, very basic, elements of any website -- **visitor experience** and **technical structure**.

Visitor experience is your website's top level. This is the part your visitors interact with. It's the colors you use, the way you arrange your content, and the information you include. Consider it in terms of a brick and mortar store - it's what your customers see and experience when they walk through your front door.

Technical structure is the foundation of your website. It's the way your website operates across platforms, how it communicates with search engines, and whether or not it functions correctly and consistently. If this was your physical store, it would be compared to your point of sale, inventory, and customer service systems.

Get these two elements right and you'll hit your online sweet spot - a website that attracts and keeps customers and also plays well with the search engines and technical platforms.

Now, let's dive into the five critical components of a high quality website. If you pay close attention to these five components, I guarantee that both your visitor experience and your technical structure will exceed expectations.



Critical Component

AESTHETICS

**How does your website look?
How does it make you feel?**



As much as we hate to admit it, we all judge the book by its cover. It's the first impression. We're visual, and we make value judgements based on what we see. That's why aesthetics is absolutely essential when considering your website design. Within seconds of landing on your page, a potential customer is making conscious and subconscious image-based decisions about whether or not you're a good fit for their needs. Often, they have your competitor pulled up side-by-side and are trying to choose who and what is best for them. If your competitor has a more aesthetically pleasing design, there's a good chance that your customer will choose your competitor. Strong aesthetics indicates attention to detail, reliability, trustworthiness, and in short, that you're on your game and you'll deliver.

Consider your aesthetics like your storefront salesperson. Who would you put at the front of your shop selling your product or service? Would you put a person who doesn't take care of themselves? Would you want them to smile and greet a customer? Would they create a feeling of hospitality or hostility? A good salesperson will make your customer feel at ease, welcome, and want to stay awhile. Good aesthetics does the same thing.

Critical Component

AESTHETICS

Evaluating your aesthetics can be tricky. I can hear some of you say, “But isn’t beauty in the eye of the beholder?” To some extent, yes (a pink, bubbly site may be ideal for a website selling confectioneries, but not for a plumbing service). But to an even larger extent, there are many elements that are essential to get right. For example, there’s a lot of research about color theory and how different colors affect mood and motivation. Other immutable elements of design are scale and proportion, positive and negative space, texture and balance.

Don’t be intimidated by this. You don’t have to be a graphic designer to know if you need to make a change, and then find a way to get it done. Take a look through the self-evaluation items to determine if you do need a design update. Then, I’ll walk you through some action items to get you to an aesthetically pleasing place.



Self-Evaluation

I know it’s hard to be objective about your own website, but do your best to look at your aesthetics from a clear place. Pretend you’re a first time visitor and then answer the following questions.

1. Are you able to tell where to start reading, where to click, and how to find your information? Or is your design too cluttered and unclear?

Pages feel organized/neat

Slightly cluttered

Very cluttered and confusing

2. Are your images crisp, well-done, and modern?

Crisp and modern

Outdated

Blurry/Pixelated

Critical Component

AESTHETICS

3. Does your design support your product or service, or are you too distracted by the words and images to really know what the business is all about?
- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Complements content | Neither | Detracts from content |
-

4. Does the style match your brand? Do the colors speak to your clients? Are you using pink and purple when you should be using gun-metal gray?
- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Consistent with brand | Needs small improvements | Inconsistent with brand |
-

5. Is there a good balance between words and imagery?
- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pages feel balanced | Too much imagery | Too much text |
-

6. When you see it, does it make you want to see more? Or does it make you want to get the job done and get out?
- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The design is intriguing | Gets the job done | The design is repelling |
-

7. Do you find it nice to look at? Does your significant other, your mother, your cousin, and your neighbor find it nice to look at?
- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Universal appeal | Mixed responses | Generally disliked |
-

Critical Component

AESTHETICS



Action Items

I've given three action items based on three different time and budget scales.

1. Minimize (~5 hours)

If you are familiar with your website's backend, take a couple of afternoons and critically assess what is essential on your site. When it comes to good design, you can live by the "less is more" mantra.

Remove photos in areas where your design feels cluttered.

Shorten text if your site feels overwhelmed by words.

Pick three corresponding colors and stick to those. Check out this website for a refresher on color theory to help you decide what works best for you and your industry.

colormatters.com/color-and-design/basic-color-theory

Gauge how your site utilizes white space. Don't be afraid to leave breathing room between content.

If you don't have any professional-looking photography, invest in some stock photos that will resonate with your customer. Take a look through **resourcecards.com** to see if you can find imagery that will work for you.

Make sure that your layout is logical. Is your customer able to go from one step to the next without feeling confused? If not, make sure to put similar things and information together on your website.

Critical Component

AESTHETICS

2. **Template Upgrade (~20 hours | ~\$50)**

If you already have a content management system (CMS) like WordPress, you can purchase a gorgeous theme that is already built, works with your CMS, and gives you the ability to customize with the colors, images, and content of your choice.

To pick a theme, find one that fits your needs and your customers' needs, but also make sure that the template creator is reputable and reliable. Usually a template that has multiple purchases and positive reviews is a good choice, and choosing a creator that has built a lot of previous templates, can be trustworthy as well. My favorite place to purchase premium templates is **themeforest.net**.

3. **Complete Redesign (~5 hours | \$3k - \$8k)**

For this option, approach your favorite web developer and graphic designer for help. If you have the budget, I would highly recommend this route. A good graphic designer knows what questions to ask, will plan your site and aesthetics from a holistic perspective, and is familiar with prevailing design trends. If the designer works closely with a web developer, he or she will also know what works or doesn't work online. And, while you'll have to answer some questions and make a few decisions, you can be freed up to work on keeping your everyday business going while your website is being transformed behind the scenes.

**If you don't have a go-to web designer and/or developer, let us know.
We'd be happy to discuss this further with you!**

Get in touch with us at:
controlyours.com/contact

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY

2

**Now that you have the world's best web design,
can your customers find you?**

Unfortunately, when it comes to websites, a “build it and they will come” strategy isn’t very realistic. The web is a competitive marketplace, and search engines like Google won’t include new websites at the top of search result pages just because they exist. Just as it took time to slowly build up the reputation of your company, establishing a website’s credibility online is also a process.



Action Items

I’ve outlined some of the most powerful ways to start expanding your website’s presence. But, before you begin, you must absolutely do this one action item first:



Determine your ideal customer. Before you can enact any of these visibility tactics, you would be lost if you didn’t have a good grasp on who your ideal customer is. Start with demographics like age, gender, location, income level. Then expand to some essential questions: What problem or pain point does my customer have? How do I solve it? Why are they searching me out? What is the unique value proposition I can give them? What sort of language are they using to ask these questions? Where have they searched before for solutions?

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY



My Ideal Customer Is:

Age

M F

Gender

Income Level

Location

If you already have a customer base, the best way to find out this information is simply to ask them. **Typeform** is an excellent way to build easy to use surveys and track the responses you receive. If a survey isn't your style, interview some of your most accessible customers and listen to what sort of words they use and how they talk about their needs. Not only will you get excellent insight into who you serve, but you may find out ways to grow your business. Some of my most profound business moments have come from asking and listening to my customer base.

Now that you know your ideal customer, we can get to work.

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY

SEO

If you've already downloaded our free Get SEO Fit guide, some of this may be a refresher. If you haven't downloaded the guide yet, you can do that here: controlyours.com/lp/gsf

SEO Practices

SEO refers to the ranking you have in the search engine results. 60% of business goes to the top three results in the search engine rankings, so SEO is a pretty important thing to consider.

To really understand SEO, it's helpful to grasp how search engines work. The internet is basically operated by search engines. They crawl the web, compile the websites they find, and then do their best to answer your questions and needs with the best possible match. By spending time on your website perfecting your SEO, you're making it as easy as possible for the search engines to match you with your ideal customer.

So how do you make it easy on the search engines? In a nutshell, by being customer oriented, clear in who you are and what you do, and fill up your content with strong keywords. Search engines trust popular websites. They assume that if people come back time and time again, the website must have strong, quality content. To do this, you'll have to spend some time getting back into your customer's shoes and think about how they are searching you, what words they're using, and what needs they're trying to fill. Then, once you've established those things, you can put those keywords into your content, and provide useful, high-value, fresh material to keep them coming back.



An absolutely unparalleled free guide to beginning SEO can be found at:

moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY

Social Media

While Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc., are essential, you have to remember that it's actually your website that is your business headquarters online. Your content starts there, your branding starts there, and your product is there. It's your goal for social media to support that, not the other way around. So, of course, make your social media strategies and plan how to reach your market base on the perfect hashtags, but also make absolutely sure that you are aiming to get loyal customers who will get back to your website and interact with and purchase your product or service. If you think about it, your website is the only place on the internet that is all about you and your business. Instagram and Facebook is the platform for Instagram and Facebook to make money. Your website is your only place to make money. So, everything you post outside of your website, should point back to your website. This is not only good for your bottom dollar, but it also continues to build credibility with your SEO.

Also, consistency is key with social media. The best way to do this is to do some batch planning once a month. Take a few hours and plan out what you'd like to say in your social media outlets. This is a great way to craft your message and be on top of your game when posting time rolls around. There are some very helpful programs that can make this easy for you, which are outlined in the Action Items.

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY

Google and Facebook Ads

Google and Facebook advertising have never been easier or more powerful. The key, however, to successful advertising in Google and Facebook is to create a strategy. Both Google and Facebook are great places to advertise, but there are some industries where one would probably be better than the other. For example, service-based industries like plumbing or car repair, may have better results with Google since often people are searching from Google when they have a problem. They're less likely to click on a Facebook ad for plumbing when they're scrolling through their Facebook feed over their lunch break.

Also in your strategy, think through the specific action you're hoping people will take when they interact with your ad and how that interaction will impact your business. You may run a campaign and get tons of new likes on your Facebook page, but if you were hoping to have conversions on your website, it technically wasn't a successful campaign. So before you begin crafting your strategy, start with your results. If you want conversions, choose your advertising platform and craft your message and call to action accordingly.

Once you know what you want out of your campaign, you can pinpoint your audience. In Facebook, you can target your audience down to a single city, a single gender, making a certain dollar amount, in a certain profession. Just think how effective your advertising dollars could be! To get to this point, you need to come back to your ideal customer and consider the best ways to find them and speak to them. For example, if you're a donut shop in Kearney, NE, who has just learned that teachers love to buy donuts for their students during test times, you can make an audience that only shows ads to elementary teachers in Kearney, NE. For effective ads, use strong, action words that get to the point, and always accent with beautiful, vibrant imagery.

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY

Google ads are just as targeted, but use a slightly different approach. Google ads are aimed at people who are searching for specific things and target their ads towards those searches. You still define the demographic, but you also define the words and phrases that people are using to search. For example, with the donut shop, you should consider the phrases that your customer base is entering into the google search box. Naturally, start with “donuts”, but also add phrases like “donuts in Kearney”, “donuts in Kearney NE”, and other ways to spell the words and common misspellings, “doughnuts” “doughnuts in Kearny NE”. This way, when someone uses those words or phrases, your ad is very likely to come up and direct them to your shop. Google also will recommend extra keywords to add in once you get started.

Once you have a good list of keywords, Google also takes it one step further in customizing your search phrases by offering several keyword matching options. For example, if you only want your ad to show when someone types in this exact phrase: “I want a donut right now”, you would surround the phrase with brackets-- [I want a donut right now]. However, if you’re hoping to capture people that use that exact search query but also people who are using similar search phrases, you enter it with the ‘plus’ sign between each word -- i +want a +donut right +now. Anything with a “+” at the front (“want”, “donut”, and, “now”) means it will be a required word as part of the search query for your ad to show. The other words included in your phrase (“I”, “a”, and, “right”) help Google to know what other terms you’d like, but they’re not required. Google provides a fantastic, free guide on this here: support.google.com/adwords/answer/2497836?hl=en.

Working on your online visibility is a long term commitment. However, if you focus on a couple of these at a time, you will most definitely see results.

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY



Self-Evaluation

So, how easily can you find your website online right now?

1. How does your website rank in the search engines right now? Google your name and your business' name, and see where you end up in the results.

2. Now, try googling some keywords related to your business. For example, if you sell donuts, try googling “donuts” and see where you rank. Then try something a little more detailed like “donuts in Kearney” to find out if that changes anything.

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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3. When you google your business, does a Google Business Listing show up? If it does, is your information clear and accurate?

4. Do you have a Facebook or Instagram page for your business? Is the content fresh and interesting?

Critical Component

ONLINE VISIBILITY



Action Items

If you haven't claimed your Google Listing yet, visit google.com/MyBusiness to take control of how your business shows up in local search results.

If you don't have a Facebook page set up for your business yet, visit facebook.com/business/learn/set-up-facebook-page to get started.

Make a list of the essential keywords that your ideal customer uses to find or talk about you. Pin these up somewhere and incorporate them into your content.

Come up with a social media calendar. Plan out your posts for the month and make sure that they always have a call to action and support content and branding of your business. Hootsuite and Buffer are two popular social media management programs that can help you do this.

Create your online advertising strategy. Think about what specific action you're hoping people will take when they interact with your ad, and build your campaign from there. This is also a good place to sketch out your ideal Facebook or Google audience with a starting list of keywords to get you going.

Start experimenting with Google and Facebook ads. Dedicate a small amount of money (even as low as \$50) and run some trial ads on some test groups. If you find success, bump up the amounts you're using until you find the sweet spot.

Critical Component

ENGAGEMENT

Are people taking action on your website?



A truly successful website is one that compels people to take action. This is *really* what it's all about, after all. Take a step back and think about your business. What does the prospect-to-customer journey look like for your customer base? Keep this in mind as you're thinking about your website and making decisions for what pages to include, how content is structured, and where you're trying to focus your customer's attention. Every single page on your website should have a call to action and direct your customers toward the next step you want them to take.

Engagement may look different for each business, depending on industry and type of website. For example, if you're a restaurant, you may want people to reserve a table, submit an order online, or give you a call. Perhaps you have your menu and nutritional information on your website so your customers know what they can expect ahead of time. Maybe you sell insurance. Are people calling your agents after reading their bios, asking for quotes, and reading your articles? Are you giving them value through your website before they ever decide to make contact? So, the obvious question: are people taking action? Are they reaching out to you? Are they taking the next step?

With some brainstorming and careful planning of your prospect-to-customer journey, your website can turn a passer-by into an actual customer. That's where the real magic happens.

Critical Component

ENGAGEMENT



Self-Evaluation

1. How have people taken action on your website in the past 6 months?

(see next page for a few examples)

Type of action	# of actions
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____

2. If you can, write down four pages on your website with the intended action for each.

(eg. Contact Page | Send a Message)

Website page	Type of action
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____

Critical Component

ENGAGEMENT



Action Items

Determine what forms of action are critical to the health of your business, and consider different ways you can encourage engagement on your own website. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Call

Send a Message

Leave a Comment

Request a Quote

Schedule an Appointment

Upload a Document or File

Make a Reservation

Make a Purchase

Download a Resource

Print an Article/Document

Leave a Review

Create an Account

Register

Watch a Video

Listen to Audio

Share (social/email)

Sign Up

Subscribe

Take a Quiz/Poll

Refer a Friend

On each page of your website, include ways that your customers can get ahold of you. Whether it's a contact form, a button, or a quiz, make sure to insert it in a logical and visually pleasing location, and ensure that it's mobile friendly.

Critical Component

CONTENT

The phrase “Content is King” isn’t an exaggeration.



Creating original and compelling content for your website is a lot of work. When I’m talking about content, I’m talking about both the words and imagery on your website. You might think having a few images from your phone camera and a list of services with an “About” page is enough. You certainly could settle for that—and many businesses do. But you’d be selling yourself short. Not only is your content important in establishing online credibility, but it’s also your opportunity to hook and grab your customer. It’s where you can get to the heart of what they want and turn them into a customer for life.

Of course you need to consider your content in light of search engines, but it’s the quality of your content that matters for your customer base. Getting visitors to your site is one thing, but they’ll be quick to leave if your website isn’t helpful or engaging. So, a place to start when considering your content is, why is your customer coming to you? What is it that they’re needing, and how are you solving their problem? With a donut shop, for example, your clientele needs a tasty treat for breakfast. First, draw them in with gorgeous photos of your product. Again, people are visual - if they can see how great your donuts are, they’ll be more inclined to take the next step and read your verbiage. So, hire that food photographer and let them do their magic. We know it’s expensive, but the return will be well worth it.

Critical Component

CONTENT

Once you have them hooked with your imagery, use your verbiage to make an emotional connection with them. Dig deep here. Perhaps you're in the donut business because you absolutely love making people happy, and you've worked hard to build a community of fellow donut lovers who come in every morning. Tell that story. We all love stories, and once you've connected on that emotional level with your customer, they will come back time and time again. A blog is incredibly useful here, but make sure that if you have one, you're committed to it. I totally agree that a blog is a big commitment, but in terms of engaging with your customer, a blog can be a winning tool.

With your clientele as your focus, you will naturally have compelling and trustworthy content. This will position you as an authority in your industry, both with your customer base and with the Google search index.



Critical Component

CONTENT



Self-Evaluation

1. Read through your current content. Is it interesting? Does it use engaging words and clear calls to action? Does it tell any stories of problems solved or lives made better?

2. How is your imagery? Is it all stock photos, or do you have some nice, professional images of you and your product?

3. Is your content accurate? Or has your phone number or address changed and you've never gotten around to correcting it?

4. Does your website offer content that isn't helpful or necessary?

5. If you have a blog, have you updated it recently? Are you using compelling headlines and telling great stories?

Critical Component

CONTENT



Action Items

1. Take one page of your website a week and re-write it so that it speaks directly to your customer. If your verbiage is already engaging, think of ways that you can keep it fresh.

Jot down pages to edit here:

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

2. Take a look at your images. If you can't afford a great photographer, do your best to find stock photography that fits your business.

3. Commit to writing one blog post a week. Include a story, or an interesting bit of information to draw your reader in and then accent with colorful visuals.

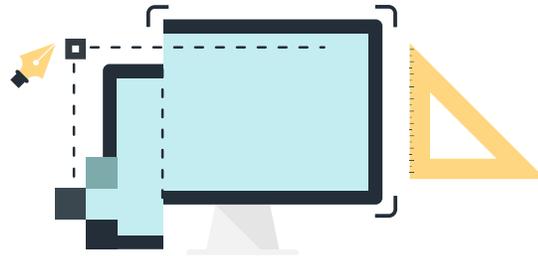
Jot down blog ideas here:

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

Critical Component

ACCESSIBILITY

A successful website needs to be adaptable and optimized for all sorts of devices and screen sizes.



According to [smartinsights.com](https://www.smartinsights.com), in 2017 **Americans spent 71% of total minutes online on their mobile devices**. It's absolutely critical for your website to be mobile friendly. Not only is this important for usability, but search engines use this as a determining factor in your rankings. In other words, if your website isn't optimized for phones and tablets, search engines will be less inclined to give your website favor. Assuming all else is equal, and Google is trying to calculate whether to show your website or your competitors first, it might all come down to mobile accessibility.

In addition to being mobile friendly, you also need to be sure the design, structure, and content of your website takes into consideration "best practices" for browser standards. Most content management systems like Wordpress already do a pretty good job of adhering to these guidelines. But if your website is several years old, was custom built, or uses an antiquated platform, you may want to do some research into best practices for browser standards and see how your website measures up.

Last, but not least, a website that takes a long time to load severely hinders its accessibility. Both visitors and search engines are completely turned off by slow load times and will pass you over for your competitor. Large images, videos formatted incorrectly, outdated scripting, cheap hosting, and other technical problems are usually the culprits to slow loading times.

Critical Component

ACCESSIBILITY



Self-Evaluation

1. Pull up your website on a phone or tablet. Do you have to zoom in to see text and images clearly? If so, those are indications that your website isn't optimized for mobile devices. Even if you don't have to zoom, is the layout and content organized in an intuitive fashion for a mobile device?
-

2. Does it take more than a few seconds for your website to load?
-



Action Items

Test your website's loading speed at developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/ to find out how you measure up. If you have a slow loading site and can't find the source of the problem, contact your favorite web developer to find a solution.

In terms of overall accessibility, visit achecker.ca/checker/index.php to see if your website conforms to accessibility standards.

If you discover your website isn't mobile-friendly, contact your developer to find a solution.

See how your browser standards are doing at validator.w3.org. If you find that your website isn't up to par, contact your web developer to discover how to bring it up to standard.



I understand you're busy. And I realize it will take time to work through these 5 components. But this investment will enable your business to flourish online!

Once you've gone through all of the action items and your website is closer to where it needs to be, set your sights on some long term goals. As a final exercise, spend some time writing down at least **3 goals for your website in the next 12 months**. Make them significant, but also achievable. For example, you might write something like "capture 50 leads" or "book 100 table reservations." Once you have some goals set, communicate these goals with your web team or the company that helps you manage your website so they can help you reverse engineer strategies to accomplish these objectives.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Good websites aren't just sedentary objects in cyberspace. They grow and change alongside the business they represent, and they're always being improved. Standing out on the web isn't easy, but it isn't impossible. If you take the time to objectively analyze how your website is doing in regard to these five components (aesthetics, online visibility, accessibility, content and engagement), and if you consider the state of your visitor experience and technical structure overall, then you'll be that much closer to a website that will blow away your competition.



controlyours®

David Lano is the owner of **Control Yours**, a web design company. He and his team of experts have been developing beautiful, professional websites for their clients for over ten years. They were founded on a simple idea: that having a website should be easy. With their ongoing support and unrivaled personal attention, the Control Yours team enables clients to take full control of their websites and create the perfect online representation of their business. Control Yours is located in Kearney, Nebraska, where they work tirelessly to ensure that their clients never have to face the challenges of owning a website alone.