

YOUR WEBSITE HAS JUST 8 SECONDS

Article by Neil Holley Williams (c) 2011

Researchers have found that when people arrive at a website, on average 50% of them will leave that website within 8 seconds.

In other words, if your website doesn't do something WITHIN 8 SECONDS to keep them there, at least 50% of them will leave - it could even be 60% or 80%.

There was an old metaphor doing the rounds when the web first started, and unfortunately, it's how a lot of businesses still view their websites. "The internet is like a huge gigantic shopping centre and your website is a shop. Everybody gets to come and browse your shop". It's more accurate if we imagine that the people in this mall are walking at 60mph and they are looking for something very specific, and they only have 15 minutes to find it. They are only ever going to go into the places that obviously provide those services or goods, and if the shop looks as though it doesn't, or they wouldn't feel comfortable in that shop, they aren't stopping, let alone coming inside...

It's useful to think about how you use the web, yourself. Think about the phrase 'surf the web'. It means you go from one site to the next, to the next, to the next. You do it because you can, and you don't stop until something interests you or catches your eye. You now know that even when you do stop, there is a 50% chance you will probably leave in 8 seconds if it doesn't quickly become apparent that it has what you're looking for.

That's the challenge we face as website owners: we have to get visitors to stop surfing and interact with us. How do we do this? Here are three ways which will help:

1. Use Headlines

Look at your own website. If you don't have a headline in the form of words, then your 'headline' is whatever your visitor first sees when they arrive at your page. It might be a logo, a graphic, a picture or a piece of blank screen, or worse a weak piece of text like 'Welcome', or 'We have been in existence since 1982'. Be honest with yourself and ask - would this stop ME surfing? If you have nothing compelling to grab the visitor's attention, then he's gone.

Remember that the headline is the first thing that's going to grab me, and interest me; and it needs to be compelling enough to stop me surfing on...

Just making this one small change will make a big difference for you. If you are using a headline on your brochures or any other advertising and it works, then use it on your website.

2. Use 'The Fold'

Make sure that your compelling headline and content appears above 'the fold' of your website. 'The Fold' is a newspaper phrase. Imagine you are reading a large newspaper, and you have to fold it in half to read the top half before turning over to read underneath. The equivalent on your website is what people see before they have to scroll down the page to read the rest.

So, going back to your website - what do you see before you have to scroll down? This plays directly into the 8 second rule. If you haven't given the visitor a compelling reason to stop surfing, he/she probably won't even scroll down.

If you are announcing your new CEO, the fact that you just won an industry award, or providing a long winded introduction or history of your company above the fold, your visitor is not going to be staying.

3. Walk in Your Visitor's Shoes

Put yourself in the shoes of your potential clients. They have found you on the web because they have specifically looked for you, and Google has considered your site relevant to what they are looking for. What are they interested in? What concerns them? What problem do they have that they want someone to solve?

As a business owner, you are, of course, close to your business. You know it inside out. The temptation then is to write about your business on your homepage and that can be a big mistake.

The truth is people don't CARE about your business.

Don't take it personally. I'm sure they are all very nice people, and so are you; but that's not what they are there for.

They are there because it's likely that you have something they need. In short, they have a selfish self-interest and it needs meeting.

If you can meet that self-interest by talking directly to them about how to solve their problem and challenges, you will have a chance of stopping them surfing.

Go to your website as if you were a first-time visitor. Be tough on yourself and ask yourself if you are really captivating your visitors in those first 8 seconds in a way that stops them surfing.

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