10 Things to Check Before Launching a Website

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Successfully launching a website is no easy feat. Almost inevitably, just when it looks as though yours is ready to go live, it turns out that eagerness got the better of you and you almost published something incomplete. Even a small mistake can alter the way people view a website and the products associated with it. And sure, you can correct it later if the site is for yourself, but if you're producing one for a client, you need to make sure *everything* runs smoothly from day one – that even the smallest mistakes are addressed before they become major problems.

Here are handy ways I've found to ensure just that.

1. Check on various browsers

This one can't be stressed enough. Always check if things are looking and working as they're supposed to on numerous browsers, with Chrome, Opera, Microsoft Edge and Firefox just a few you should test. Because, even if a site looks perfect when using Chrome, it might look like complete gibberish elsewhere, so never assume anything in this respect.

2. Don't forget titles and metadata

Your page title is not only important for SEO reasons, but also because it offers future visitors the first glimpse of what they can actually find, so set a meta title for each page before you launch, and make sure it relates to the page's

content. Try to also include metadata, such as descriptions or tags. While they aren’t as important as the meta titles when it comes to SEO, a decent meta description will invite more users to check out a given page, and by tagging it properly, you are making it easier to find.

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3. Check links

Never take it for granted that links will work. Perhaps you made a spelling mistake, or when inserting a link into text, instead of pasting the URL, you accidentally deleted it and as a result, your link is nothing more than randomly underlined text? Believe it or not, even advanced webmasters make these seemingly rookie mistakes, so double-check. And both internal and external links are vital, because successfully linking your page to a trusted partner domain may help you get thousands of customers.

4. Test functionality

The ease with which a user can navigate a site is pivotal. If you are going to offer customers the ability to submit complaints via a contact form, for example, test it out for yourself, see if it works and then test again. If you are going to invite them to shop, check if the sales system is properly integrated with the rest of the site. We suggest you do all of this on your own; after all, likely no one knows more about your goals and desired customer experiences better than you. Also consider supporting these findings with user testing: You will find various platforms offering testing services on the Internet, and receiving positive or negative feedback from an independent user(s) can be crucial.

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5. Validation

Before you launch, get a site’s code HTML validated, according to standards set by the Wide Web Consortium. If yours does not pass muster, this could mean that there are some serious issues, and so it’s up to you to search and fix them. Keep in mind that not getting validated doesn’t mean you won’t be able to launch, but it may indicate there are various problems that can potentially drag the user experience down.

6. Analytics

Installing a decent analytics tool is a great idea. These help measure important stats like unique visitors, conversion and page views, and notify when the numbers start going down. Google Analytics is the most popular tool, and is also available for free, but paid apps like Clicky or Statcounter can offer more in-depth data. Regardless of how they are aggregated, the resulting stats could be the key to launching a successful marketing campaign.

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7. Include a sitemap

Always remember to add a sitemap.xml file to your root directory, which will help search engines index your site in a faster and more proficient way. You don’t even have to do anything on your own, because tools such as XML-Sitemaps can create a full sitemap without your intervention. Alternatively, on WordPress, you can install the Google XML Sitemap plugin. Creating one is fast and simple enough, and in today’s world, it’s pretty much a requirement if you want the result to be successful.

8. Feature a creative “error 404” screen

Error 404, or the “page doesn’t exist” response, is one of the most typical errors found while browsing. Whenever a user is trying to access a non-existing page, it’ll be displayed. Don’t just settle for the bland and basic message, though, because you can customize how an “error 404” will look on your website. Try to get users right back on track by offering suggestions they might have intended to search for, or simply allow them to return to the homepage.

9. Configure for optimal performance

Optimization is crucial, and will allow a site to place higher on search engine results, attract a new audience and simply work properly. One good way of doing this is reducing the HTML requests, or use CSS sprites wherever possible. Also, make sure that each page loads smoothly and fully, that there aren’t any missing elements or annoying (and un-skippable) ad banners covering up important content. And keep in mind that optimizing a site just once won’t do the trick: you need to repeat the process multiple times after launch.

10. Proofreading

Assuring high-quality text content is exactly as important for user satisfaction as making certain all technical aspects are working properly. That’s why, whenever writing an article, blog post or anything else, spend time going through it, including establishing whether it’s easily readable. Ask a friend or family member to do the same, then have them share their thoughts. You can make the process easier by avoiding long sentences and paragraphs, by adding headings and

emphasizing language that’s easy to understand.

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