

KILLER WORDPRESS SPEED GUIDE AND CHEAT SHEET 2.0 FOR NON-TECHIES

By WP Speed Guru

Hey there and welcome!

Do you like slow sites? No? Good, I didn't think so. Sitting and waiting for a slow site to load is like watching grass grow. Our site visitors feel the same way and more often than not just ... leave.

I'm sure that you already know how important site speed is for SEO and conversions. If you don't - I included some eye-opening research towards the end of this Guide.

And yet, what almost nobody ever talks about is extremely high bounce rates slow sites get. And if that's the case with your site or mine ... then what conversions, what SEO? There won't be much of either if people just leave. Attention is scarce online. Our visitors get easily distracted - FB and Skype messages, Twitter ... you name it. Text messages, kids crying, the list goes on and on. If we fail to grab their attention immediately ... all is lost.

And that's why Yoast says "Being slow is no longer an option".

I created this Guide to help you get your WordPress site real fast. It was designed for non-techies. I won't tell you to spend days or weeks studying mind numbing technologies or buy expensive fancy tools. Or switch your hosting.

What I will do is give you a simple way to quickly find out what may be holding your site back and how to fix it using only free tools. So without a further ado, let's get started!

HOW TO FIND OUT WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MAKE YOUR SITE BLAZING FAST

There are a number of online tools for this purpose. My three favorite ones are GTMetrix (<http://gtmetrix.com>), Pingdom (<http://tools.pingdom.com>) and Web Page Test (<http://webpagetest.org>).

I use all three and suggest that you do the same. Here's why. Although all three will measure your site's speed, you'll see that numbers will differ. And the speed is of our least concern when we test. What we're looking for are the "bottlenecks" - things that slow your site down. Once you've taken care of them, your site will automatically get fast, that's all there is to it. The three sites will help you see what needs fixing.

These tools may appear a bit intimidating if you've never used them before. Don't let that concern you. You don't need to know every little thing they show you. In fact, all you need is to see what they recommend you do on your site and do it. These recommendations are the same for 95% of WordPress sites. And in this guide I show you how to take care of them.

So go ahead and run some tests and see what applies to your site.

SET EXPIRES HEADERS (LEVERAGE BROWSER CACHING)

Expires Headers tell your visitor's browser to "make a copy" of your pages and keep it in its cache.

Next time the visitor comes to your site, the content (or at least some of it) will be served from the browser and that will speed up site loading. On the surface it may appear that your site will only load faster for repeat visitors. Not so. If someone arrives on your home or landing page, goes to

another page and then returns, the first visited page will be served from the browser and load much faster.

Expires Headers specify what types of files and for how long should be kept in the browser cache. This number can be set in seconds, minutes, hours, days, etc. Testing tools are looking for “far in the future expirations”. Usually 14 days makes them happy.

Here’s what generic Expires Headers code looks like:

```
# Expires Headers
<IfModule mod_expires.c>
# Enable expirations
ExpiresActive On
# Default directive
ExpiresDefault "access plus 1 month"
# My favicon
ExpiresByType image/x-icon "access plus 1 year"
# Images
ExpiresByType image/gif "access plus 1 year"
ExpiresByType image/png "access plus 1 year"
ExpiresByType image/jpg "access plus 1 year"
ExpiresByType image/jpeg "access plus 1 year"
# CSS
ExpiresByType text/css "access plus 1 month"
# Javascript
ExpiresByType application/javascript "access plus 1 year"
</IfModule>
```

Expires Headers are added in your .htaccess file and this can be done manually. Some caching plugins will do this for you if you choose that option while setting up the plugin.

REMOVE QUERY STRINGS FROM STATIC RESOURCES

Without getting too technical, let me just say that query strings are those HTTP requests that have a question mark in them. These are not cached by most proxy servers and should be removed for faster site loading. This can be achieved on the vast majority of WordPress sites by installing a free plugin and there is a number of them in the WordPress Repository. Simply look up Remove Query Strings From Static Resources.

OPTIMIZE IMAGES

The lighter your pages the faster they will load. And often images add a significant portion of “weight”. You want your images to be as small as possible (file size wise) without loss of quality.

There’s a number of plugins that will optimize your images and using a plugin for this purpose is fine. However, if you don’t have a large number of images, you’re better off optimizing them manually because having fewer plugins helps both your site’s speed and security.

Most Adobe apps like Photoshop, Illustrator, etc. and also some other graphics editors have a “Save For Web” option which allows you to manipulate size, resolution and quality. The standard resolution for the web is 72px, you need to size your images to be no larger than needed (keeping in mind responsiveness) and you can change quality settings for jpegs using percentages, and for pngs using PNG-8 number of colors.

If you’re using the latest Adobe products, look for the Legacy Save For Web because it allows for actual browser preview after you’ve adjusted image settings. Once you’re satisfied with your image file size and quality,

compress it. A great free online tool is tinypng.com (<http://tinypng.com>). It will take care of both png and jpeg files.

USE A CDN

A CDN (Content Delivery Network) stores your site's static resources - Javascript, CSS and images. CDNs use super fast servers usually located all over the world. They are especially useful if your traffic comes from various geographic locations. If that's the case, your CDN will serve files from the closest to your visitor server and your site will load much faster.

There is a number of CDNs you can use. My favorite is CloudFlare. CloudFlare offers free accounts good enough for most sites. CloudFlare is also a great security tool, although the set of security features you get with a free account is limited.

When using a CDN you need to make sure that it is set up properly for SEO so that your images (especially if you're relying on image search traffic) are attributed to your site. It often does not happen automatically. If you're using CloudFlare, there is nothing to set up because it's essentially a reverse proxy and your images are seen by search engines as belonging to your site without any extra effort.

USE A CACHING PLUGIN

There is a vast number of caching plugins today. Some are very simple to setup and use, some require complicated configuration and have a number of extra functions like JS and CSS optimizations, setting Expires Headers, compression, etc., etc. After working on hundreds of clients' sites, I have to say that there is no right or wrong. All caching plugins work

- free and paid ones. Some hosting companies have “built-in” caching and that’s fine too. Every site is different and needs different things.

Somehow caching plugins get more attention than they deserve. Here’s what I mean. You can have the fanciest and most expensive plugin but ... unless you’ve done ALL other optimizations that I’m showing you here and took care of all bottlenecks keeping your site from loading fast - a caching plugin is no remedy, no matter how fancy or well regarded.

So whatever you have now is fine, take care of the rest of optimizations first and then consider other options if you feel it’s needed.

MAKE FEWER HTTP REQUESTS BY COMBINING JS AND CSS

The name of the game in optimizing your site for speed is having as few HTTP requests as possible. Often this is easier said than done when it comes to combining (it’s also called concatenating) JS and CSS files without breaking your site. Well worth attempting though. You can use Rocket Loader on CloudFlare to reduce the number of JS requests. You can also use Autooptimize plugin (it’s free) to combine JS as well as CSS. This can be a tedious trial and error process or it can be a snap! Like I said - every site is different.

MINIFY HTML, JS AND CSS

Minifying means taking out the white space from the code. You can minify HTML, JS and CSS using your caching plugin (if it has that function), Autooptimize or CloudFlare if you’re using either. Minifying JS can at times break your site, if that’s the case, simply undo it.

OUTSIDE RESOURCES

Most sites today use many outside resources - fonts, maps, social media, embedded videos, various analytics tools, etc. These should be used in moderation so you keep the number of HTTP requests to a necessary minimum. You also need to remember that requests to the outside resources are not cacheable. In other words - they have to be loaded from their source every time. So let's see how they should be handled.

Social media

Using social media is very important as the likes, shares and comments you get is one of the signals taken in consideration by search engines for your site's rankings. However, it pays to be smart when using it. Many social media plugins drag your site down speed wise considerably by making a high number of requests. So you want to try different plugins and choose the ones that have that affect speed the least. Your home page being the most important. So maybe you'll want to limit social elements that require requests on the home page and also use sharing tools that are a part of your site versus outside ones.

Embedded videos

When using embedded videos, we add extra HTTP requests. With YouTube, for example, it's a minimum of 5. And if there are ads running in the video, the number is doubled. 3-4 videos on a page and the site will surely get a lot slower.

The way to handle this is by placing your videos in a lightbox. Your WordPress theme may provide a lightbox, otherwise you can use a lightbox plugin. This way requests are only made when a video is played and your pages load faster.

Google maps

Google maps also add a number of HTTP requests to your pages. A workaround would be placing a clickable image of your map which when clicked will open up a Google map in another tab. Like I always say - every site is different. Maybe yours won't get affected much by having a map on the home page. If you have several though, it probably will.

Web fonts

Web fonts do not affect loading speed much as long as they're used in moderation. If you're using a plethora of fonts (and by that I mean not only font families but also different weights and styles), then maybe it's time to consider hosting some of them on your server and using @font-face CSS. There's plenty of good information on how it's done on the web.

HOW TO GET YOUR SITE BLAZING FAST IN UNDER 2 HOURS

If you're busy and would like to get your site super fast with step by step guidance, then my WordPress Speed Secrets video tutorial may be right for you.

In the tutorial (which consists of 14 short videos) I walk you through my process and you can take care of your site as you're watching.

No need to dedicate the whole 2 hours to it either. You can do one thing at a time and your site will get faster right before your eyes at every step.

This tutorial has already been used by close to a thousand WordPress site owners and designers all across the globe and you can read their reviews before making your decision!

Go to <https://wpspeedguru.com> to get all the details.

WHY SPEED IS MONEY IN THE BANK

To make money online you need higher than competitors' rankings and higher conversions. And you probably already know that ...

Fast sites rank much higher than slow ones

Yes, it's 100% true and here's what Google has to say about that:

"You may have heard that here at Google we're obsessed with speed, in our products and on the web. As part of that effort, today we're including a new signal in our search ranking algorithms: site speed."

This was said way back in 2011. And today high speed is absolutely crucial because of the mobile web. Today Google rewards fast sites by ranking them high like never before. And punishes slow ones.

Fast sites enjoy high conversions. Slow sites don't

I have no doubt you've heard this before. Let's see what a real authority on the subject, Web Performance Today, is telling us:

"Firefox reduced average load time by 2.2 seconds and increased downloads by 15.4%. AutoAnything.com cut load times in half, which resulted in a 9% conversion rate increase, 11% cart size increase and 13% overall sales increase."

Nuff said. We've all been to slow sites. You and I know how they make us feel and that's why ...

Slow sites get bad word-of-mouth

Negative advertising can do a tremendous amount of harm. An unhappy customer will tell everyone about their bad experience. And the latest research by KISSmetrics proves it beyond any doubt:

"According to surveys done by Akamai and Gomez.com, nearly half of web users expect a site to load in 2 seconds or less, and they tend to abandon a site that isn't loaded within 3 seconds. 79% of web shoppers who have trouble with website performance say they won't return to the site to buy again and around 44% of them would tell a friend if they had a poor experience shopping online."

Now we know for certain why Yoast says "Being slow is no longer an option". And now there is an easy way to speed up your WordPress site without spending hundreds of hours doing research online, without endless trial and error and without spending an arm and a leg on "bells and whistles" that may or may not help your site.

Use this Guide and go to <https://wpspeedguru.com> to get details on my WP Speed Secrets video tutorial.

WORDPRESS SPEED CHEAT SHEET

1. Leverage browser caching by setting expires headers (manually or using a caching plugin)
2. Remove query strings from static resources
3. Use a CDN
4. Use a caching plugin
5. Use GZip compression
6. Optimize images (if you have many use a lazy load plugin)
7. Make fewer HTTP requests (this is the most important recommendation and can be achieved in a variety of ways as described in the Guide)
8. Avoid unnecessary URL redirects (see if it applies to your site using one of the testing tools)
9. Minify HTML, JS and CSS
10. Remove above the fold render blocking resources (when applicable and can be achieved without breaking site)
11. Defer parsing of JS (when applicable)

And that's it! It was my great pleasure to write this Guide 2.0 for my fellow WordPress community members. I wish you the best of luck with your site and your business! Please let me know if I could be of help. Cheers!

Alexei

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