

# Stop Driving Your Visitors Away!

By Bill Daugherty

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Your web site may contain flaws or glitches that are driving your visitors away! Such a thought is enough to give the most laid back webmaster a migraine. How can you uncover and fix any problem areas that may be lurking in the dark recesses of your site? Relax gentle readers, there is a simple answer.

All you have to do is follow a few basic guidelines that all web sites should adhere to and you can be assured that your site is in tip-top shape. It's not unlike giving your automobile a little tuneup.

## 1 - Slow Loading Pages

Nothing drives a visitor away faster than having to wait around for a web page to load. Most experts will tell you that 8 seconds is the maximum load time for your pages, and anything slower needs some attention. But, this doesn't take into account the visitor's modem speed. Here are the results from a load time check I had conducted recently on the first page of one of my sites.

This diagnostic checks how fast your page loads up under 6 common modem speeds.

Connect Rate	Connect Time
14.4K	10.12 seconds
28.8K	6.05 seconds
33.6K	5.34 seconds

56K	4.41 seconds
ISDN 128K	2.04 seconds
T1 1.44Mbps	1.00 seconds

LOAD TIME CHECK.....EXCELLENT

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I have included these results so you can see the difference in load times for various modem speeds and use it as a guide instead of the 8 second benchmark you are often given. Please note that the page tested has very few graphics. A page with more graphics will load slower, but may still load in an acceptable time.

Slow load time is usually caused by either too many graphics or by graphics that are too "fat." You can have those "fat" graphics optimized by an experienced HTML programmer. If your problem is too many graphics, you need to eliminate a few.

## 2 - Typos and Spelling

Typos and misspelled words can severely undermine an otherwise great site. Check and recheck every page for these errors.

## 3 - Navigation

Broken or missing links are all too common on many sites I visit. So, double-check all your links and make sure they are functioning properly. Those 404 messages are a big-time turnoff, plus it means part of your site is inaccessible.

If you have a lot of links on a page, arrange them in neat rows with uniform spacing between each.

It is critical to have all links clearly identified.

## 4 - Design

Your color choices are a matter of personal taste. But try to avoid using too many colors. This can give your site a carnival-like effect that leaves your visitors tired and dizzy. As a general rule you shouldn't use more than

four colors.

Too many different fonts on a page can also have a negative effect on your design. When I look at a page that somehow just doesn't look quite right, but I can't put my finger on the problem, it usually turns out to be the font(s).

Animation is great, but too much movement is distracting.

Don't load your pages with too many banners. One or two at the top or bottom should be the limit.

This concludes your web site's tune up. These guidelines are by no means an exhaustive list of all the problems and errors that can plague a website. But, it is an effective checklist of the more common flaws, and it will serve to greatly improve the performance of any web site.

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