

How I Slashed The Load Time For My Website By 200-300%...And So

Can You, For Yours!

By Roger Burke

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How often have you waited, impatiently, for your browser to pull in the next website? Too many times, probably.

Many of these slow-poke sites may be worth seeing, but how long are you prepared to wait? Probably no more than 7 to 10 seconds, which is what most say.

Now, you've maybe seen or read a lot about improving the loading time for your website. And, you may even be saying to yourself now, "Oh, no...not another guru trying to tell me what to do!" Well, in the first place, I'm no guru (very few can legitimately claim that accolade) and secondly, I cannot tell you what to do.

I can only relate what I did, and the improvement I achieved. It's up to you to do something, if you want to...that's your choice! ;-)

Firstly, the website in question - <http://submissionjunction.com> - used to load, at off-peak times, on my computer (an ageing 133 mHz, P1, 32MEG RAM, 56k modem) in around 15-20 seconds.

To make things crystal clear, I'll define load time thus:

Being the elapsed time from the moment that the ENTER key is depressed to the moment that the first information appears on the screen (purists would argue that load time is actually more precise, and I agree. For surfers on the web, however, this definition will suffice).

Note that I'm not counting the appearance of BACKGROUND information within that elapsed time, e.g a tiled .gif, although some may; BACKGROUND, after all, is not strictly information, although it does indicate activity.

Now, a load time of 15-20 seconds is way too slow, and with peak hours and heavy traffic, I ran increased risk that people clicked away.

I wanted a load time of 4-6 seconds in off-peak and no more than 10 seconds during the very heaviest traffic times.

This is how I did it:

1. The banner and headlines, that I want to appear on the screen first, are placed immediately after the BODY statement, and before anything else. This is the information I want prospects to see quickly, so that I can pique their curiosity and perhaps retain their interest.
2. Formatting, at this stage, is confined to one small TABLE and centering the information: one banner, one small animation and three headlines. This is important; there is no fancy or additional coding at this point.
3. No Flash, JAVA, Javascript, SSI, CGI, Style Sheets, XML or DHTML is used. They all have their place, on the web, but I don't need or want them at loading time.
4. All other TABLE formatting and all other .gif or .jpg files are placed after the information in Step 1.

All timings were done using IE5.5. As IE is the predominant browser (like it or not), and looks like remaining so, I'm not too concerned about Netscape (in addition, there is an ongoing problem with Netscape and the Moreover.com newsfeed that I have yet to fix).

If you click on this link: <http://submissionjunction.com/olddefault.htm> you'll experience the load time of my previous homepage. If it loads in less than 8 seconds on your screen, then your lines and connections are very good and your traffic is light. Usually, it has taken as many as 15+ seconds to load, as I said.

Now, click on <http://submissionjunction.com> . It should load in 6 seconds or less, in off-peak times. And, at normal peak times, the loading should not exceed 10 seconds (bearing in mind however, that in severe traffic snarls, all bets are off).

Of course, with much faster CPU speed, the browser would be able to format and present the information more quickly. On the internet, however, one must always cater for the lowest common denominator.

There are, no doubt, more sophisticated ways of achieving reductions in load time. If simple measures however, such as above, achieve the desired result, why bother with more complex methods?

Your objective should be to get your message in front of your prospects' eyes, as quickly and as easily as possible!

Visiting a web site is much like knocking on somebody's door. After you knock, you expect the occupier to open it quickly. If it's a store, and nobody answers or they're too slow, we'll walk away,

right...and go down the road to the competition, right?

So, the quicker I get my message across to you, the quicker we both win. And, isn't that what we all want?

P.S. If you don't do anything else, even placing a comment like "Page Loading...Please Wait" is better than just a blank screen, while the browser formats your page. But, don't take toooo long...!

Roger Burke has been involved with computers since 1967, and has managed to break quite a few, over the years. He, and his wife Sherry, are now actively engaged in online self-publishing and promoting specific affiliate programs at <http://online-wealth.com> . If you have any comments or questions about this article, please send emails to <mailto:webmaster@online-wealth.com> .

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