



How to Optimize Your Sitecore Website for Speed

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We live in a world where everyone wants things to go faster. The same principle applies to your Sitecore website.

Your site visitors want your site to load fast. Your leadership team expects it to load fast. And for those of you concerned about SEO, Google expects it to load fast, too.

Google is so keenly aware of how important page speed is to users, that they made it a [ranking factor](#) nearly a decade ago.

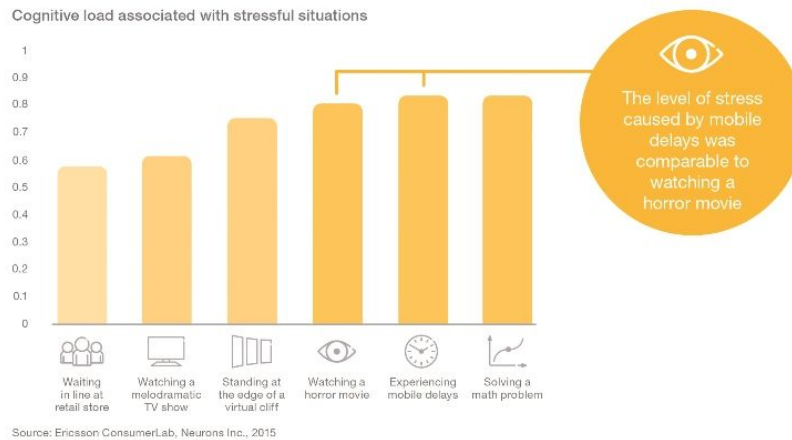
If you've been wondering why your SEO has been tanking and haven't a clue why, it might be because you haven't prioritized site speed. It's time to change that.

Why You Should Care About Site Speed

With a faster site, you can enjoy:

- **Better SEO rankings.** Google includes site speed in their ranking algorithm. Plus, with a faster site, you make your website easier for search engines to crawl.
- **Lower bounce rates.** Users won't get sick and tired of waiting for your site to load, so they'll be less likely to leave and bounce back to the search results.
- **Higher conversion rates.** More users will stick around, since it will be easier, faster, and more enjoyable for them to engage with your site. As a result, more of them will convert into customers.

That last point isn't just conjecture. According to [research](#), a slow-loading mobile web page can cause a visitor to feel the same amount of stress that they have while watching a horror film:



How do you want your users to feel when visiting your site? Happy, supported, and able to digest your marketing message? Or stressed out of their minds?

We thought so.

Follow these tips to speed up your Sitecore website—for happier users, better SEO, and more sales.

1. Optimize your images

Images are one of the easiest ways to improve your site speed. Sadly, they're also one of the most ignored.

There are a variety of ways you can optimize images for faster load times:

- Use the right file type for your images (e.g. PNGs for graphics vs. JPEGs for photos).
- Compress your images before uploading them. We recommend [Dianoga](#). This automatic image optimizer for Sitecore automatically reduces your images between 8% and 70%!
- Adjust your Media settings in Sitecore to ensure you've set optimal limits for file size, quality, and resizing.
- Consider lazy-loading your images. This technique only loads images once they become visible to the user in their browser.
- Only make your images as large as they need to be.

That last point is a big one. Here's how it works in practice:

Your landing pages may only be set to 850 pixels wide, yet you're uploading images that are 1,000 pixels wide—even though they'll never load to their full size. As a result, each time your visitors load the page, their browser has to load the image in its full 1,000-pixel size, and then do the work of resizing it to fit within the 850-pixel range. Every one of those steps eats up unnecessary time.

We recently went through the image-resizing process with one of our [Managed Services](#) clients. We realized that one of their Content Editors had accidentally loaded a large image to their home page. By replacing that image with a smaller, compressed version, we were able to improve their load time by an entire second!

2. Use a DAM

Visual media, especially video, can work wonders for your user engagement. Having videos on your landing page can [lift conversion rates by 80%](#), and people retain [900% more](#) of a marketing message when it's in video vs. text-based form.

But, like images, video can be a major drag on your load time. Our recommendation for optimizing video content is to get a DAM (Digital Asset Management) system in place that automatically outputs video for different devices in the appropriate resolution and file size.

3. Javascript, CSS, HTML: Optimize, minify, and compress

Each of these elements can be sneaky culprits behind [Sitecore performance issues](#).

Make sure that your Javascript is as lean as possible and optimized for fast-loading. Likewise, make sure that your CSS is optimized. For example, each element should only be addressed once; otherwise, the browser has to make a calculated decision over which CSS to pay attention to and which to load.

Extra characters (like spaces and commas), empty attributes, and code comments can all contribute to code bloat and slow down the load time for your page. Don't even get us started on broken CSS files, Javascript, and unused code. Have your Sitecore partner review your code with a fine-tooth comb to remove anything unnecessary.

Ask your developers if there are any CSS, HTML, and JavaScript files larger than 150 bytes? If there are, use Gzip compression to reduce their size.

When optimizing, ask yourself this question: “What are the essential MVP elements that need to load for the site to be usable, especially for anything above-the-fold?” Being judicious here can seriously improve your time-to-first-byte.

4. Purge your plugins

If you are using any third-party plugins on your site, as most organizations are, double-check that you actually need all of them. There are some that you can't live without, like CRM, social advertising, and analytics.

Chances are, though, that there are some you're no longer using, like a forgotten plugin for an email marketing provider you've replaced. Or, there may be some that can be replaced by something more efficient. Talk with your Sitecore partner to evaluate your options here.

5. Leverage browser caching

In order to make internet browsing a speedier, more enjoyable experience, browsers will store—or cache—certain bits of information on your site that typically stay the same.

There's a lot more of this information than you might realize. It includes Javascript files, logos, images, stylesheets, and more.

To prevent your visitors from having to reload all of that information each time they visit your site, you'll want to have your developers set your Expires HTTP header for as long as possible. Since most of this information rarely changes (with the exception of a major site redesign), we recommend setting the expiry to a year.

6. Use a CDN

The closer your servers are to your users, the faster your site can load for them. However, it's not practical (and impossible) for every website to use servers in every city where some of their visitors may live.

Enter CDNs, or Content Delivery Networks. A CDN is a network of servers spread over data centers in different locations. When you use a CDN, copies of your site content exist at all of these different server locations, enabling more users over a geographically diverse area to enjoy faster access to your site.

Your Sitecore partner can help with setting up a CDN for your [implementation](#).

7. Improve server response time

The server response time describes how long it takes for your web server to respond to a request from a browser. In other words, it's a proxy for how long it takes your site to load when a person clicks to visit your site from the Google search results, or types your URL directly into their browser.

For Sitecore websites, server response time can be affected by a number of things, like inadequate memory settings. Sometimes the site wasn't set up to use search indexes, which enable Sitecore to retrieve content in the quickest way possible.

It could also be that your hosting solution wasn't configured properly. For example, if you're using Microsoft Azure, your app services may not be configured to use the appropriate tier based on your traffic needs. If you're [hosting Sitecore on physical servers](#), you may not have sufficient instances deployed—or sufficient CPUs—to handle your traffic.

8. Eliminate configuration issues

More often than not, configuration issues are at fault for a [slow-loading Sitecore website](#).

In our experience of speeding up slow websites for our Sitecore clients, we've identified the following configuration issues to be the most common:

- No limits have been set for MSSQL memory usage
- Static content like CSS and JavaScript hasn't been compressed
- Indexes are set to index all fields vs. what is necessary
- Media is being fetched using `/~/media` vs. `/-/media`
- Sitecore databases haven't been maintained

If any of these apply to your site, get them fixed now.

9. Review your URL redirects

Depending on the tenure of your site, you likely have some URL redirects in place. You may have redirected an old mobile site to your domain once you implemented responsive design, or you may have deleted some old blog posts but wanted to retain their SEO juice.

Review all of your redirect chains and shorten or remove them where you can. Take a look at your traffic in Google Analytics, and check your backlinks in Google Search Console or a SEO tool of your choice. If there's no incoming traffic or backlinks to these old URLs—and there hasn't been for a while—you're probably safe to remove the redirect entirely.

Each redirect you have in place forces your site visitors to wait for the HTTP request-response cycle to complete. Redirects can have a necessary and very valuable purpose when it comes to UX and SEO, but they can also wear out their welcome. Regularly review your redirects to make sure none of yours fall in that category.

Do you need to speed up your Sitecore website?

We've talked a lot about how to speed up your website for SEO, but you might be wondering where you currently stand. While [average load times](#) vary by industry, the current recommendation is to get your load time below 3 seconds, and 1 second if you can manage it.

However, the honest truth is that **your site can always be faster**. There will always be competitors of yours who are prioritizing site speed, and you don't want them to outrank you in Google.

Get started by discovering how fast your site loads today. Copy and paste your domain into the following free tools:

- [Google PageSpeed Insights](#)
- [Pingdom Website Speed Test](#)
- [GTmetrix](#)

If you were shocked by your score, don't fear. Engagency is here to speed up your Sitecore website for stronger SEO and a better user experience.

Contact us today to learn about our [Managed Services for Sitecore](#). Our team of Sitecore Certified Developers, Architects, and Support Engineers have over a decade of Sitecore experience, and we can't wait to help you with your site.

[Set up a time to talk now.](#)