Is your website working for you?

How to grow your business by making the most of your website

Keeping Tabs on your Site

Your website should not be a "one and done" project; a website is a living, ever-improving project.

Your website is your company's only 24/7 sales person. Keeping it well maintained should be a priority.

Your site is connected to many other technologies including web browsers and mobile phone browsers. Over time, updates to these browsers may affect how your website performs and displays, which is why website maintenance is so vital.

Ideally, you will constantly tweak and adjust your website in small ways as you figure out what works and what doesn't to grow your business or organization.

A website isn't a printed brochure you can't change until you use up all 10,000 you had printed. Someone should promptly address website issues to keep them working for you.

I not only build websites for clients, but I also manage websites too.

When I mention website management, I surprise entrepreneurs because they don't realize how much work goes into a website beyond designing it.

I've worked as the go-to WordPress expert and developer for small businesses and marketing agencies who manage websites for small businesses.

Keeping track of whether your website is moving your business in the right direction will help you grow.

You've invested time and money in a website.
Make your investment worthwhile by making sure your site is working for you.

This doesn't just mean hiring the task out, even if I'm partial to getting hired.

Website management can be part of your marketing team's job or even your job personally.

So, how do you know if your website is working for you?

Look at the following areas >>

Are you monitoring your website activity?

Use Google Analytics to look at your website objectively.

For a brand new website, it may take some time for your site to be found by your target audience, but once you start to get the word out, keep an eye on what your visitors are doing with your website.

First things first. You need to have some cold, hard facts to look at. Data can show you where you're growing. It also can identify potential problem areas. Thankfully, there are free services for just this issue.

Developers and site owners connect their websites to a free service from Google called Google Analytics (and Google Search Console too). Google Analytics shows your number of visitors, what they do on your site, and how they found you.

You (or a professional experienced in Google Analytics configuration) can set up Analytics to track whatever you need it to track, including conversions (such as sales, sign-ups, and other actions), bounce rate (how many people leave after only viewing one page on your site), and so forth.

Another free service, Google Search Console will help identify any errors on your website that are keeping search engines like Google from "crawling" over your website. In order to know what information is on your website so they can show it to those searching, Google has to crawl and index websites regularly, so you want nothing to prevent that. You want your site to show up on search engines, right?

By regularly looking at your analytics and addressing search console errors as soon as possible, you'll have a better idea of how well your website is working for you.

If you don't have Google Analytics installed or Google Search Console connected to your website, this involves adding a snippet of code to the head of your website. It's invisible to visitors, but allows Google to know what kind of activity happens on your website.

What do the numbers say?

Your analytics will start to show you who is finding your website, what they are doing once they get there, and how they find you in the first place.

It's easier to market when you can monitor what is working and what isn't working, as opposed to just buying ads, making social media posts, and hoping something works. On a new site, it will take time for your site to be found by enough people to help you make informed decisions, but over time your analytics will show you what works for you and what doesn't.

Let me give you an example. I had a different website 15 years ago, when I was first starting out. I knew nothing about analytics. When I finally installed Analytics and paid attention to those numbers, I realized the bulk of my traffic was coming from… *Pinterest?!?*

These customers coming from Pinterest were engaged. They purchased from me, and they accounted for most of my return visitors too. Using this information, I eliminated marketing that wasn't doing anything for me, and doubled down on Pinterest.

What numbers should you look at?

BOUNCE RATE

This tells you how many people left without exploring the rest of your site. Depending on the time they spent on that page (which you can also find in analytics), either they found what they were looking for or they had some issue which made them leave. If this kind of thing happens on the same page for many visitors, make sure the page is functioning well, there are no technical errors, no videos are auto-playing, and you eliminate anything that could make large numbers of your visitors run for the hills.

UNIQUE VISITORS

This shows how many first-time visitors you are attracting. You can drill down on this number by also finding out some demographic information about them, including where they are located and what kind of device they are using (Mobile? Computer?).

BEHAVIOR

This shows what your visitors do once they find you. Look at any page that has a huge number of drop-offs. Something might be wrong to chase them off. Also consider what kind of path your visitors follow on the site? Is this what you want for them to do? If not, do you need to make the course of action you want them to take clearer?

CONVERSIONS AND GOALS

These refer to specific behavior you want a visitor to take on your website and whether they take that action. For example, subscribing to a newsletter, requesting a quote, or purchasing something in your online store. You'll need to set up specific goals within analytics to keep track of this, but it will help you monitor any issues with the actions you want your visitors to take.

Do you regularly make backups of your website?
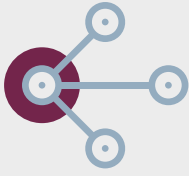
Your website is too valuable not to backup regularly.

I've had clients (myself included) lose their entire site because of some misfortune or mistake. Because of the possibility of losing your site in a technical glitch or other issue, I strongly recommend regular backups of your website.

There are plugins for WordPress (and other website content management systems) that allow you to schedule automatic backups.

A backup is a copy of your website's setup that is stored away from your website hosting.

This way, if there is a problem with the server where your website is hosted, you have a backup somewhere other than the web hosting server.

I use WP Vivid to make scheduled backups of my website. Backup Buddy or UpdraftPlus are other great plugins for WordPress that I've used on client sites.

Is your site easy to use?

When in doubt, err on the side of simplicity for a better user experience.

You don't want your visitors to think too hard to figure out how to find something on your website. As your site grows, regularly look over the front end of the site to make sure everything still looks good and performs as intended.

Everything about your website's design and message should guide your visitor along, rather than throwing up roadblocks in their way.

Is your website navigation clear?

Your navigation, or menus, help your visitors find their way around your website. It's important to keep your navigation simple.

Too many complicated and illogical drop-down menus can overwhelm visitors.

Make sure the most important parts of your site are in the menu, and you linked the rest of the pages from other pages, rather than the menu.

Are your links working correctly?

Because of the ever-changing nature of the Internet, websites change and web pages will sometimes disappear.

Part of managing your website and ensuring a positive user experience includes double checking your links work correctly.
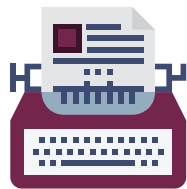
Is your website easy to use on mobile devices?

At least half of all website visitors will find your website on a mobile device. Yet, when you look at many websites on a smartphone, they are difficult to use.

Don't forget mobile users when creating and managing your website
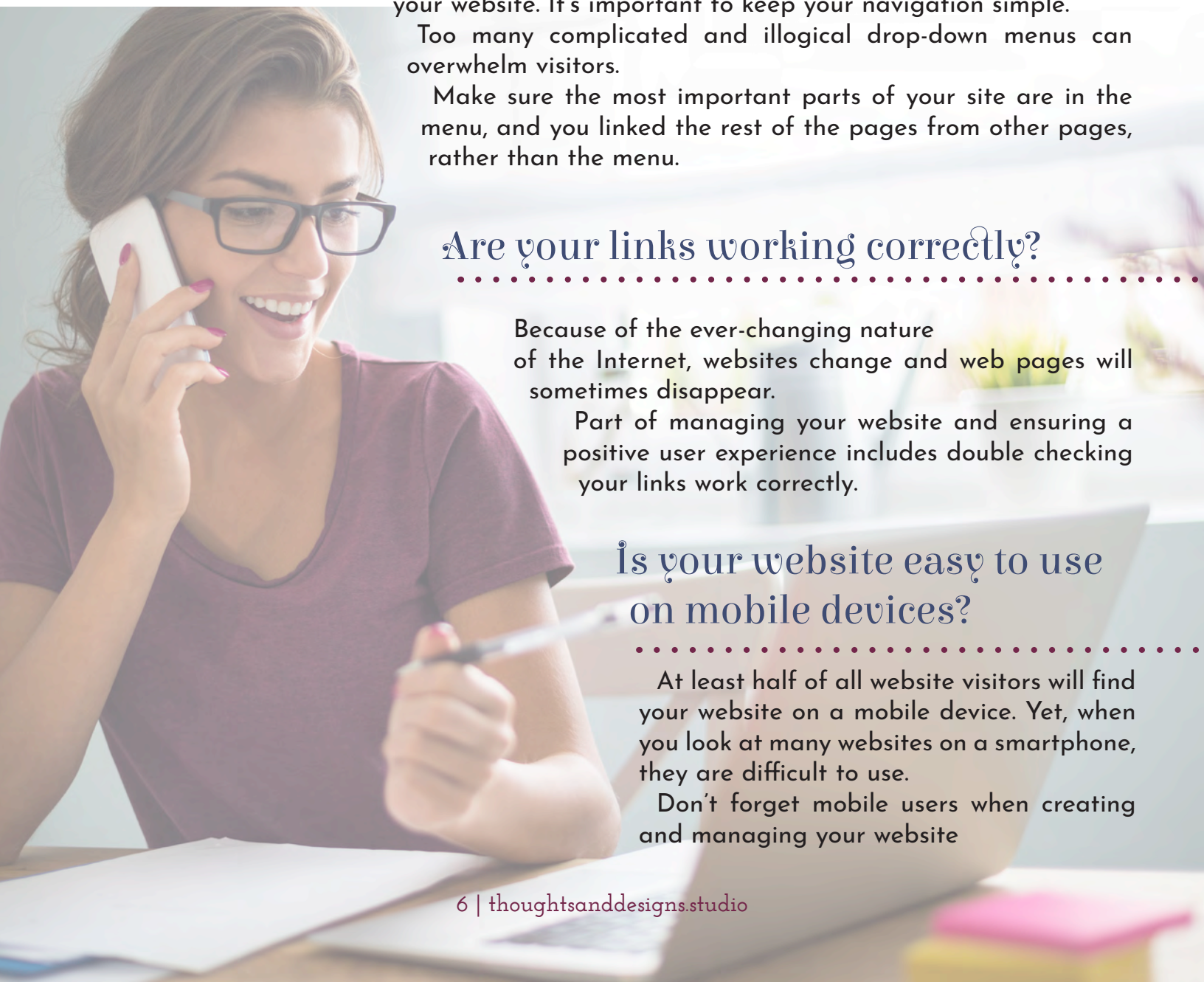
Do you have a simple message?

Your message and your design need to work hand in hand to attract and convert visitors.

You don't want your visitors to think too hard to figure out how to find something on your website.

Everything about your website's design and message should guide your visitor along, rather than throwing up roadblocks in their way.

When someone visits your website, what is the first thing they see?

Does the first message your visitors see make it clear what you can do for them?

Will they understand what you want them to do now that they are on your website?

If your website's message is not clear and pointing back to what you can do for your niche, rework that message a little. Problem spots in the message show up in the analytics of your website, under behavior. If too many people leave your site from a certain page, there may be a problem on that page, whether technical or messaging.

Are you being helpful in your message?

Your website should also offer value to your visitors rather than just being one big sales page. Take some time to be helpful to them.

Figure out, based on questions customers have asked in the past, some useful information they need to decide, and then give them that information in an article, FAQ, or series of blog posts.

There are millions of websites online selling the same basic thing you are selling. Do whatever you can to help your audience see you as the best choice for them.

One way to test out your message is to share it regularly in social media posts, to test out whether or not this message resonates with your target audience. I find this also helps me know what other questions my audience has about the topic. Most of my message revolves around technical issues with websites, and testing my message this way helps me figure out how to make a complex topic clearer to those I'm talking to.

Have you edited your website copy?

Proofread your website copy for mistakes and to ensure clarity.

Take some time to have a few eyes on your website copy, checking for spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes, confusing sentences, and anything else that would make your message less clear.

If you can test your website content with someone in your target audience, all the better. What questions come up? Be sure to answer any questions someone might still have after reading on your website.

Running your content through an editing program also helps.

I like to use a program called ProWritingAid to edit and strengthen my website copy.
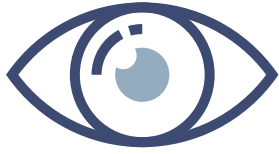
It isn't just a spell checker.

ProWritingAid also checks for grammar errors, style and usage problems, and more.

Website visitors' first impression of your business includes your website copy. Proofread.

Is your message formatted clearly?

Unlike print, people don't actually read online.
They skim over information to see if it's helpful to them.

And if it's not obvious whether the content will help them, they leave and try another website.

Formatting your content to be read online means making it easy to scan. This will help your visitors understand your message more easily.

Some ways to do this include:

- Include a clear, attention grabbing title.
- Headlines dividing up your content
- Bulleted or numbered lists
- Images or video

Formatting your content to be read online means making it easy to scan.

How fast does your website load?
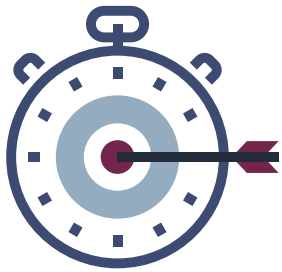
Make sure your website loads quickly by optimizing your site for fast load times.

This can be an enormous problem for many websites.

Some studies say that people leave a website if it doesn't load fast enough.

I believe it depends on the website and the audience you're speaking to, but speeding up your website is still a good idea.

One simple way to speed up your load time is to look at your images.

Make sure your photos are no larger than 150-200 kb in file size (no matter the exact dimensions - height and width). The file size itself should be as small as possible while still looking good. You can do this in a photo editing software by changing the resolution down to 72dpi (full resolution is 300 dpi and up) and optimizing the image for use on the Internet if that option exists in your image editing software.

Using a CDN (Content Delivery Network) like CloudFlare can also help your page load faster.

There are several plugins available to optimize your page load speed, including image optimizers and plugins that purge the cache on your website. WP Smush It and W3 Cache are two I've used.

To test your page speed, Google has a free Page Speed test here.
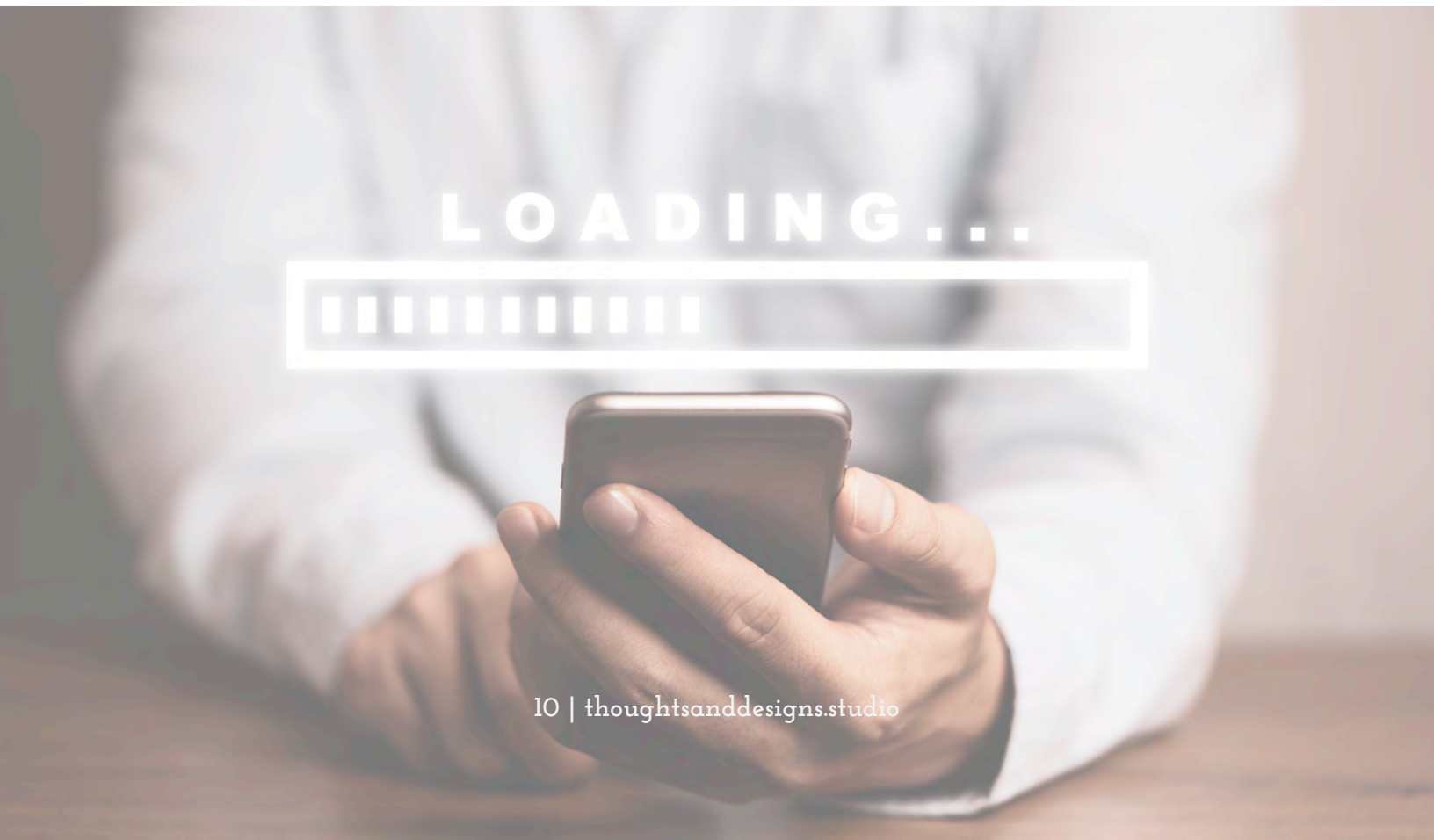
Keep track of your licenses & subscriptions
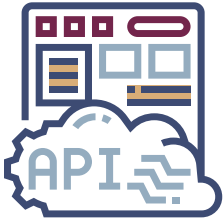
Keeping your website related accounts, subscriptions and software licenses in one spot will help you find them when you need them.

With a website comes all kinds of accounts and logins you'll need to keep track of. As a WordPress expert, I've had many clients who couldn't find basic login credentials so I could get in and fix their troubled website.

Here's what you'll need, and a handy place to store them.

Web hosting and cPanel access.

First of all, your website will have some kind of web hosting, which is where you rent server space to host your website. This is either a monthly or annual fee. There will be a spot to log into your account where you pay for your web hosting, and another spot to log into the cpanel where you manage the technical aspects of your website. All of this information was sent to your email when you first purchased your web hosting.

WEBHOST	USER NAME:	PASSWORD:

Domain Name

Your domain name is usually purchased from the same place as your web hosting, but not always. It is an annual fee of $20-40.

Your WordPress Login

If you are using a content management system like WordPress, there is a separate login for that too. You can also create separate users in your WordPress set up.

USER NAME:	PASSWORD:

Your Google Analytics and Google Search Console

This is usually your Google Account. If your web master created this for you, ask them to "invite" you to have access to this account, so you can look at your analytics.

USER NAME:	PASSWORD:

Your Premium Plugins

If you use any premium plugins in WordPress, you'll need the information about this, including when they renew and how much it costs.

CDN

If you use a Content Delivery Network like Cloudflare, keep track of that login information too.

CDN:	USER NAME:	PASSWORD:

Pulling it all together...

I'd love to help you improve your website and grow your business.

So, if things aren't looking so great with regard to these different parts of your website, does that mean you need a new site?

Not necessarily.

If you really don't like your existing site, have at it. But, to use a home improvement analogy, you don't need to gut your entire house when a fresh coat of paint will do.

I am a big believer in using small changes to make incremental improvements based on what your analytics are showing us.

So, before you make any big changes, look at the data, see how your visitors find and use your site, and pick one thing to improve at a time.

As a website designer and developer, I'd be happy to meet with you over Zoom or Google Meet, and discuss ways I can help you improve your site to make your website investment work better for you.

Visit my site to schedule a call today!

ThoughtsandDesigns.studio

I also have several resources designed to help entrepreneurs like you more effectively use design and copywriting to grow their businesses. Be sure to look for my weekly emails and social media posts for encouragement and help.