



**Understanding the Importance of Website  
Performance for Ecommerce Success**

**2021**

# Why Speed Matters for Ecommerce Sites

As a business owner, you know all about the importance of speed. The faster you can resolve problems, provide customer service, ship a product, or process payment, the better. But are you aware of how critical the speed of your website is to your business?

The consequences of a slow site are real. **90% of consumers** say that they have left an ecommerce site because it did not load in the time expected.<sup>1</sup> And the expected time is fast—**two seconds** is considered the acceptable benchmark for an ecommerce website loading time.<sup>2</sup> Despite its significance, website speed is a frequently overlooked contributor to business success. Even as your ecommerce business expands, poor website performance will undermine your growth. Prioritizing speed is mandatory—it's a crucial way to outpace the competition.

## How Poor Website Performance Impacts Your Bottom Line

Customers expect fast sites. Since meeting and exceeding your customers' expectations is likely your highest priority as a business owner, this is probably your most important takeaway. But a slow site can be detrimental to your business in a number of other ways, too.

### Bounce Rate

Speed has a direct impact on the amount of time potential customers spend on your website. The probability of immediately leaving your site **increases by 32% as page load time goes from one second to three seconds.**<sup>3</sup>

Bounce rates are even more dramatic on mobile sites. One survey found that **53% of mobile sites were abandoned** if a page took longer than three seconds to load.<sup>4</sup> This rate is even more shocking when you consider that the **average time to fully load a mobile landing page is 22 seconds.**<sup>5</sup>



From this information, we can conclude that speed is critical to reducing bounce. Ensuring that the mobile version of your site is also fast gives you a prime opportunity to set your business apart and convert a higher rate of site visits into meaningful transactions.

## Search Engine Ranking

Search engine ranking is the real estate of the ecommerce world—and just like brick-and-mortar real estate, it's all about location. In 2018, Google announced that page speed would be a search ranking factor for both desktop and mobile sites, and that a slower site would negatively impact its ranking. Since 91% of people don't look beyond page one of their Google search results and **50% don't even look past the first three results on the page**,<sup>6</sup> it's imperative to rank as highly as possible.

## Brand Perception

Your brand's reputation is a delicate, intangible asset that's hard to repair once it's broken. You may have won the hearts of your customers with your top-notch service and quality, but when it comes to website performance, customers take it personally: **53% of customers have said their biggest issue with a slow retail site is that it wastes their personal time**, and 23% said they never returned to a brand's website because of slow page performance.<sup>7</sup>

If those stats aren't motivating enough, Google recently unveiled a new plan to make negative experiences with slow sites even more apparent. In 2020, Google announced that it would implement new initiatives to help users identify the best performing websites. In addition to ranking lower in search results, slow websites will be labeled with a "slow speed warning" if they're opened in Google Chrome.<sup>8</sup> Almost 60% of Americans use Chrome as their browser,<sup>9</sup> which means there are about **173 million people who could be preemptively warned of a bad shopping experience** before even loading your site.<sup>10</sup>

## Increased Speed Means Increased Revenue

Of course, bounce rates, search engine rankings, and poor brand perception can all lead to lost revenue—but website performance as a standalone variable has a notable impact on customer buying decisions. Nearly 70% of consumers say that page speed impacts their willingness to buy from an online retailer, and **57% have said they would leave a slow ecommerce site and purchase from a similar retailer instead**.<sup>11</sup> A report by Google found that a delay of just one second in mobile site load time can cause conversions to fall by 20%.<sup>12</sup>



# Testing The Speed of Your Site is Easy.

You can easily find out whether your ecommerce site meets the standards for speed and customer expectations with a number of free, easy-to-use tools. Each tool will present the results of your speed test in a slightly different way or according to different metrics, so we recommend using multiple tools to get the full picture of your website's performance and create a game plan for improvement. Here are some widely-used, dependable favorites for performance testing that we recommend:



**Lighthouse**: Lighthouse is an open-source tool that gives your website an easy-to-understand performance score between 0 and 100. It also provides simple scores for accessibility, best practices, and SEO.

This tool is best for those who want to understand or compare a website to modern web performance best practices.



**Webpage Test**: This tool provides detailed graphs and a scoring system to help you assess your website's performance, including the number of requests that were made to the site, a breakdown of the site's content (meaning how much of the content is HTML versus video, images, etc.), and more.

With its more advanced metrics, this tool is best for someone looking for technical guidance around debugging or a deeper dive into the performance of their site.



**TestMySite**: TestMySite is a simplified, user-friendly tool that tells you your average mobile site speed and gives you a picture of monthly trends in your site's performance. It also lets you benchmark your speed against your competitors, evaluates the impact of website speed on your business, and suggests fixes to make pages on your site faster.

This is a great tool if you're trying to build a business case for improving the performance of your website as it can help you quantify the opportunity cost and benefit of reinvesting in your site.





**PageSpeed Insights**: Similar to Lighthouse, this tool also gives your site a performance score between 0 and 100 and compares it to other websites to assign it a percentile ranking. It also provides detailed diagnostics.

This tool is especially helpful for understanding the performance of your site as experienced by Chrome users.



**Chrome Developer Tools**: This set of tools is built into the Google Chrome browser. They can help you analyze your site's performance, but also include a range of helpful tools to debug and prototype CSS on your site.

This is another great tool for drilling deeper into website performance issues with helpful technical guidance.

Testing your site's performance is a critical but simple first step towards optimizing your ecommerce business for success. All of the above tools are fast, easy to understand, and can be used by developers and non-developers alike. If you've been experiencing a growth plateau or haven't reached the next level of sales and aren't sure why, these test results could show you the answer.

## Increase Your Website's Performance with the Right Tools

At this point, you've learned about the business consequences of having a slow website and the results from your performance testing are in. Where do you go from here? What steps can you take to enhance performance and take your ecommerce business to the next level?

### 1. Evaluate Your Ecommerce Platform

When evaluating a new ecommerce platform, you should look specifically for features and tools that are designed to decrease page loading times. A couple of key features to look for that will dramatically increase speed include:



**Optimized site rendering.** Fast sites require optimized, efficient rendering. Rendering content before a page loads takes the "heavy lifting" off of the web browser by giving it less information to process.



- ✔ **Automated image compression.** Images can be taxing and time-consuming for websites to load and are often a key culprit in slow-moving web pages. Sites that can automatically convert all uploaded images to JPEG 2000 compressed images will load faster.
- ✔ **On-demand image loading.** Tools that load only the images a visitor sees on a page, instead of loading hundreds of yet-to-be-seen images at once, will make your site speedier.
- ✔ **Technical flexibility.** Platforms that are built on flexible tech stacks that let you create custom apps to solve problems unique to your business and allow the use of all standard web development technologies are critical. This is because they will let you customize your own solutions as needed and will always scale with future technological advancements, unlike many existing ecommerce platforms.

## 2. Embrace a Mobile-First Mindset

As mentioned above, the average mobile site takes 22 seconds to load, but mobile site visits are abandoned more than half the time if they load in longer than three.



Focusing on mobile site performance is a huge opportunity because over **50% of ecommerce traffic happens on a mobile device**.<sup>13</sup> Typically, only 39% of total ecommerce business revenue comes from mobile,<sup>14</sup> but these conversion rates are only so low because the mobile experience is so much slower than it is on a desktop device. In fact, **77% of smartphone shoppers say they are more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps allow them to make purchases quickly**.<sup>15</sup> If your ecommerce business can improve the mobile shopping experience, your conversion rates could skyrocket.

Further, in 2016, Google announced that it had begun experiments to make its search results index mobile-first, meaning that its algorithms would start primarily using the mobile version of a site's content to rank pages from the site. So, prioritizing mobile site speed not only means a better customer experience and more revenue; it also means better SEO.



## Final Thoughts

As an ecommerce business, your website is your storefront, your customer touchpoint, and your reputation. You've likely invested a lot of time, money, and energy into managing your brand and site design. But if your website isn't fast, you're missing out on the full potential of your business, and possibly even damaging the reputation you've worked so hard to build. The data, industry trends, and decision-making by powerhouses like Google all prove the same point: you have to be fast to compete.



## Resources

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## About Volusion

Volusion is an all-in-one ecommerce solution that helps entrepreneurs build and manage successful online businesses. Since 1999, our dedicated team of developers, marketers, designers, and technical support experts have been passionate about helping merchants operate and grow their stores, whether startup or established. Two decades later, Volusion has earned dozens of accolades and powered over 150,000 successful online businesses.

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