How to take your small business website from good to great

Staples

An effective website is a major asset for any small business. Roughly 97 percent of consumers search for products and services online, yet only 51 percent of small businesses have a website.

What's more, many of these websites are in need of an upgrade; for example, optimizing them to be mobile-friendly.

A polished and professional web presence can place your small business ahead of the pack.

Here’s how to create an effective, results-driven site by staying current, enhancing site structure and improving customer satisfaction.

Ask yourself: does your site match your current objectives?

Look directly to business objectives to shape your website content. For example, a new business may focus on using its website to educate visitors about its product offerings whereas a more established business might aim for an increase in sales.

To ensure objectives and content are aligned:

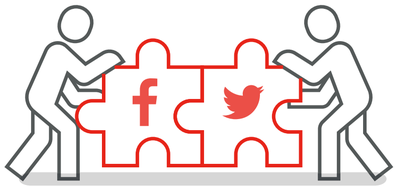
1

Evaluate your site from the customer's perspective

2

Assess your site in full

3



Extend your efforts to social

1

Evaluate your site from the customer's perspective

Arrange an audit to determine if your site's user experience aligns with your objectives. Enlist a handful of auditors, such as past customers or prospects, who represent your target audience.

If your site's current goal is education, you might ask your auditors to answer the following questions:

- How would you describe what we do?
- What's valuable about our product or service?
- Were the answers to your questions easy to find?
- What questions do you still have?

2

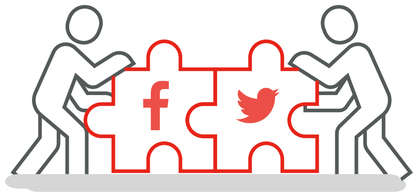
Assess your site in full

Make sure your entire site — not just your most popular or prominent sections — supports your goals.

Updating a select group of site elements while neglecting others creates a disjointed user experience and may mean certain areas aren't in line with the site's goals. Ensure consistency by revisiting all of your assets:

- **Product descriptions** — *do they position your products appropriately?*
- **Photos** — *do they accurately represent your product or service?*
- **Blog posts** — *are topics selected with a business goal in mind?*
- **Overall** — *are the brand voice and visuals consistent throughout?*

3



Extend your efforts to social

Updates made to your site — for example, a shift in branding — should likewise be reflected across social media outlets.

That way, users who visit your site via a social platform don't expect one experience and encounter another. If you have not already included links to your social media channels on your site, now is the time to do so.

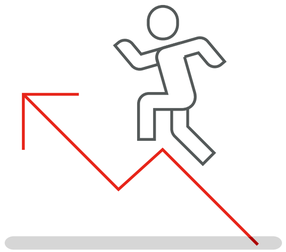
Enhance site structure by introducing purpose-driven design

While a good site is easy to navigate, a great website actively guides visitors through purpose-driven design — design that enriches the user experience while working to achieve a business goal.

For example, purpose-driven design might lead new customers to complementary product pages they otherwise may have missed or return customers to items left in their shopping cart.

To ensure purpose-driven design:

1

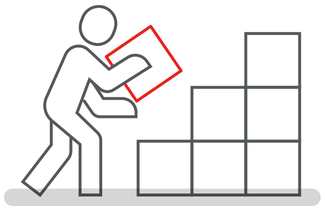


Use data to track visitor behavior

2

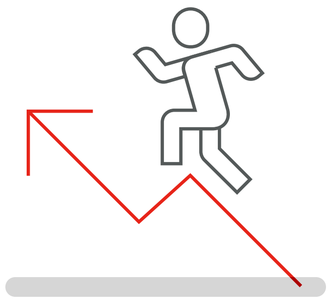
Eliminate unnecessary features

3



Encourage exploration with smart link placement

1



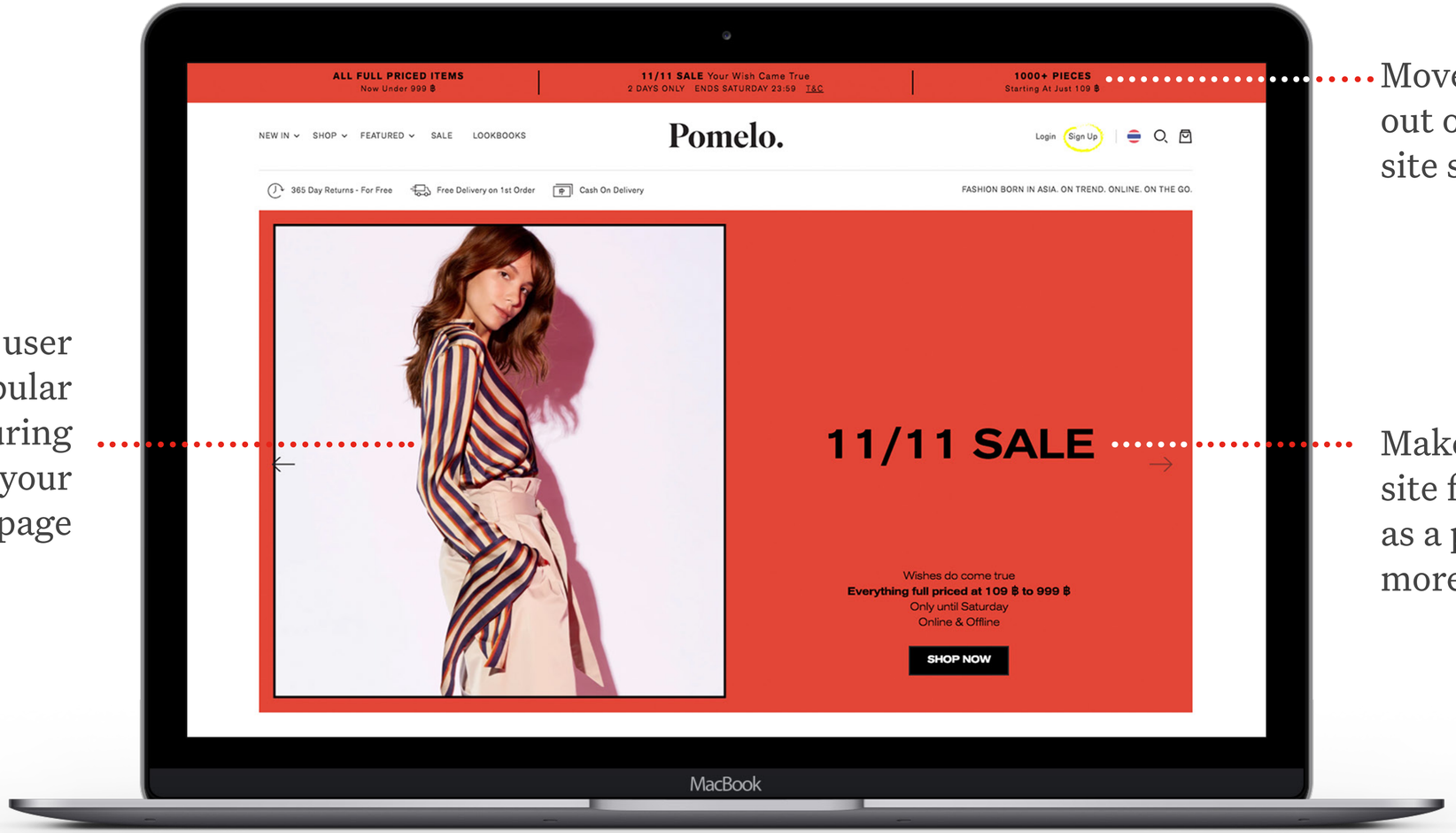
Use data to track visitor behavior

The more you know about visitor behavior, the better you can exceed their expectations.

Use a tool like Crazy Egg, which translates user behavior into a heat map, to see where your site visitors are clicking and how far they're scrolling.

Use the data you collect to optimize your page layout. Here are a few ways to put that information to work:

Streamline the user journey to a popular product by featuring the product on your homepage



Move key content out of less active site sections

Make “high heat” site features, such as a promotion, more prominent

Source: www.pomelofashion.com

2

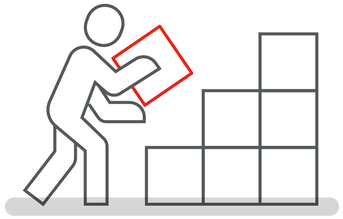
Eliminate unnecessary features

Data reveals your most popular site features, but it can also identify those that fall flat with your audience.

By removing unnecessary elements, you create a more focused, curated experience that guides users to a specific location or to complete an action.

3

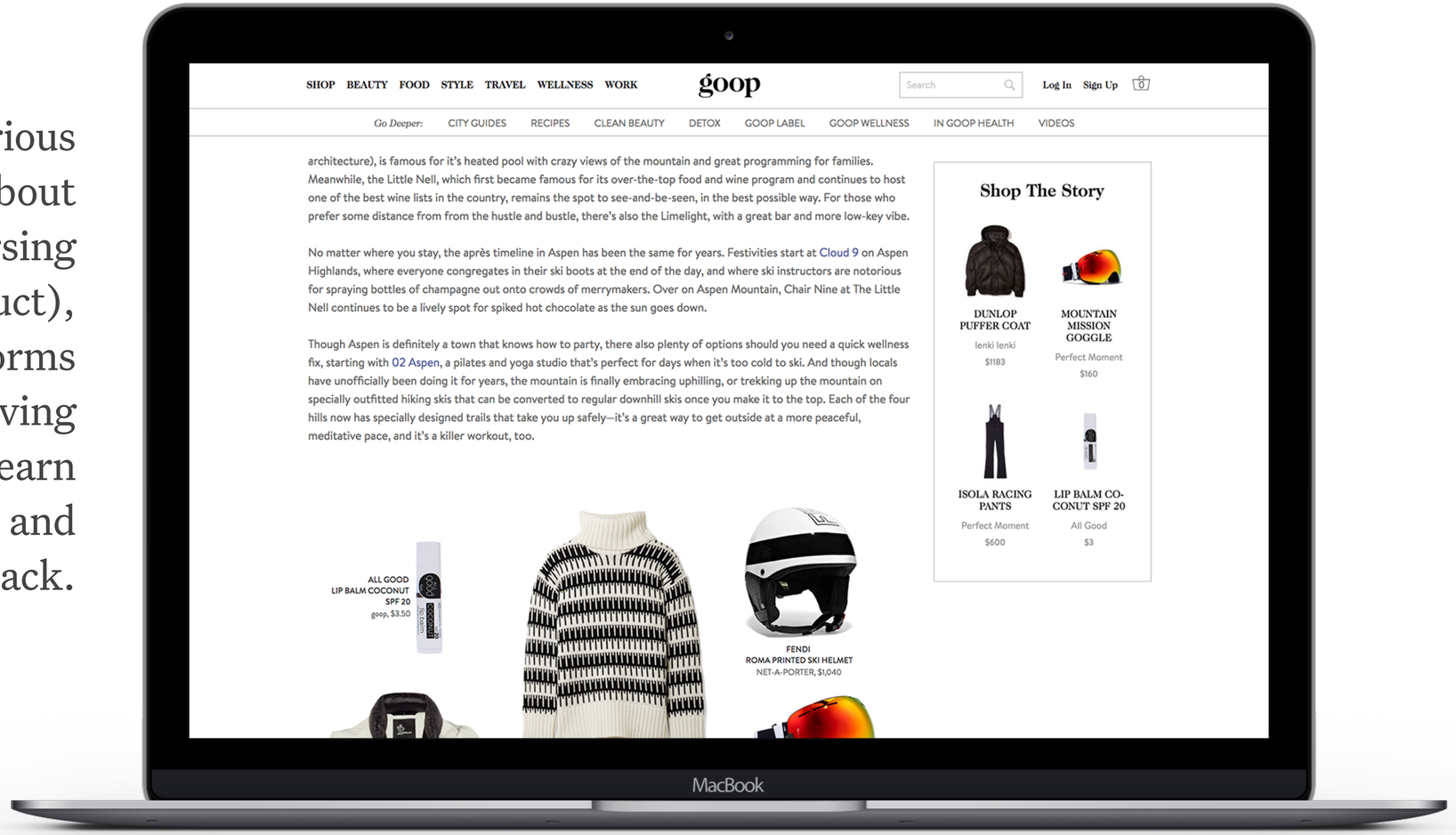
Encourage exploration with smart link placement



Think of your website as a physical space — you want customers to visit every aisle, not just one shelf. And you don’t want any “dead end” aisles, either.

Inspire users to extend their visit with embedded links that drive users from one page to another.

For example, by linking various words in the blog post about visiting Aspen (and interspersing the blog post with product), lifestyle brand Goop informs the reader while also driving them elsewhere on the site to learn more about the destination and purchase gear to pack.



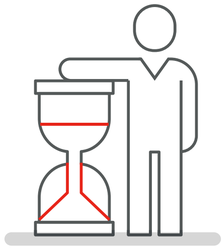
Source: www.goop.com

Improve Customer Satisfaction by Eliminating Obstacles

In addition to establishing credibility, a great website loads quickly and operates smoothly, resulting in a seamless experience that improves customer satisfaction.

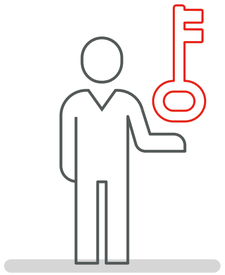
To eliminate hurdles on the path to purchase:

1



Monitor load time

2



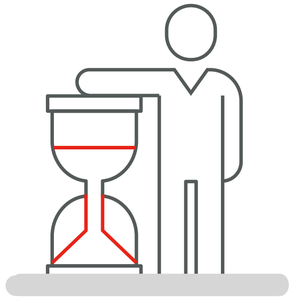
Highlight security features

3

Make your site mobile-friendly

1

Monitor load time



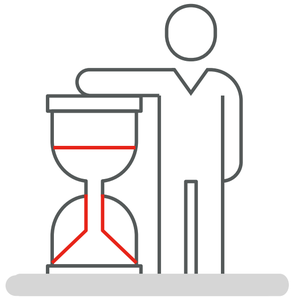
47% of consumers expect a page to load in two seconds or less. The longer your load time, the more customers you risk losing.

Use Google's testing tool to monitor your load time, testing your site across several devices. Ideally, your site will load in three seconds or less.

If your site speed is lagging, contact your hosting company to discuss solutions, including image optimization and browser caching. It may also be time to de-clutter your site.

2

Highlight security features



25% of North American consumers cite concerns about financial and personal data security as a barrier when shopping online.

Add a trust badge (or security certification) to your homepage and checkout to help ease concerns — especially among new visitors, who may be hesitant to share their email address, create an account or make purchases.

3

Make your site mobile-friendly

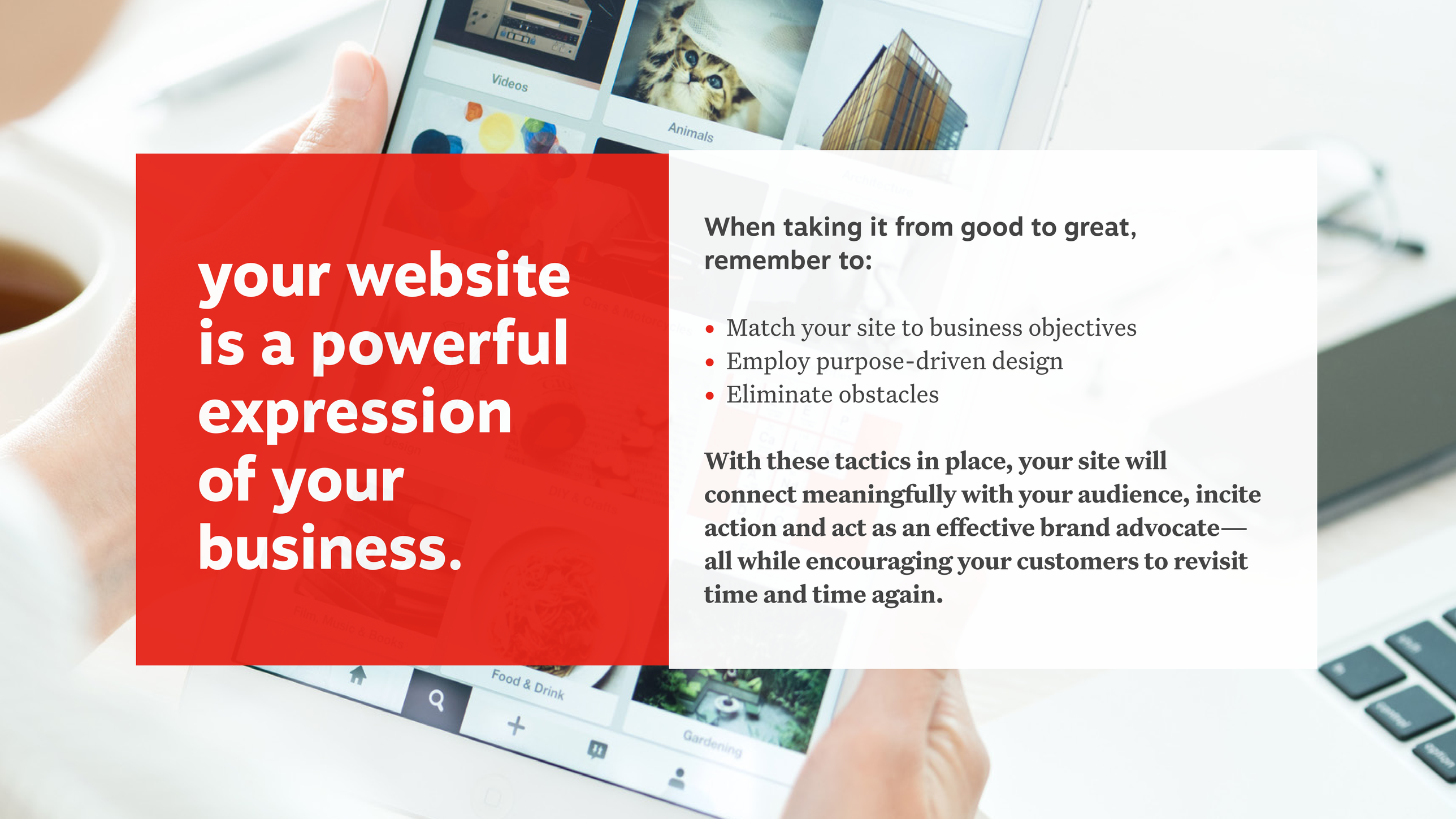
In 2015, Google announced that more searches begin on a smartphone or tablet than on a desktop of a laptop.

Still, more than a quarter of small business websites remained incompatible with mobile platforms in 2016 – a missed opportunity.

Here are a few actions you can take to adopt and maintain a mobile-friendly site:

- **Opt for a responsive web design for adaptability across devices**
  If you aren't sure how, consider outsourcing this step to a web developer
- **Choose a simple, clutter-free layout**
- **Condense copy by organizing text into bite-sized paragraphs**
  Ideally, 70-80 words
- **Include hi-res images that are striking yet simple**
- **Make sure your font is legible**
  Google recommends a font size between 18-22 px

Use Google's testing tool to determine whether or not your site is really mobile-friendly — the search engine's current algorithm rewards mobile-friendly sites with higher search rankings.



your website is a powerful expression of your business.

When taking it from good to great, remember to:

- Match your site to business objectives
- Employ purpose-driven design
- Eliminate obstacles

With these tactics in place, your site will connect meaningfully with your audience, incite action and act as an effective brand advocate—all while encouraging your customers to revisit time and time again.

Looking for more web optimization ideas and inspiration?

Visit the Staples Business Resource Center.

Staples

Sources

post-gazette.com
blog.kissmetrics.com
businessinsider.com
adweek.com
entrepreneur.com