

Caffine released

The web is speeding up.

Google continues its never ending barrage of new products and capabilities but one of the more significant recently is the much heralded release of 'Caffeine'

Google says this will speed internet indexing by 50%. ie Google searches will contain even more recent information.

Its already apparent that internet updates are speeding up with website updates being reflect in Google searches within 24 hours rather weeks or months previously.

Caffeine has been in beta for several months, but is now officially launched.

Hasten your virtual seatbelts...

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You might assume that everyone sees the same thing on the internet, but we don't. Your clients might see different search results than you, and your website may even look very different to them.

This newsletter explores how this happens and provides tips to ensure you don't loose sales from this:

Personalised searches

In Dec 09 Google introduced *personalised search* which examines your search history and 'adjusts' your search results accordingly. Read more here:

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/personalized-search-for-everyone.html>

Are you *really* ranking that well ?

While the concept of personalised search sounds great, there are a couple of pitfalls you should be aware of.

Lets say you've been monitoring your website ranking by occasionally searching for it, so Google's *personalised search* will display it with a higher rank, but just for you.

Meanwhile everyone else (including prospective clients) will see the site in its real ranking position which may be way down the list and out of sight from where you see it :(

In your personalised search induced naivety you'll believe your site is doing real well, but actually it might be really, really bad!

A suggested solution

If you do monitor your site's ranking, (and I commend you for doing this!) then use your browsers 'stealth mode' to check rankings and see what the rest of the internet sees.

Most browsers have this facility:

- Internet Explorer 8 calls it 'In private Filtering' Ctrl Shift F
- FireFox calls it 'Private Browsing' Ctrl Shift P
- Chrome calls it 'Incognito' Ctrl Shift N
- Safari calls it 'Private Browsing'

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How much does Google know about you?

Are you signed into your Google ID when you are searching? Google might be skewing search results based info you've provided in your Google ID.

Log out of your Google ID, or use your browser's stealth mode.

Invisible Flash

Apple iPhones and iPads are becoming increasingly popular internet devices. Sites I monitor have up to 6% of visitors arriving on their iPhones and the new iPad usage will explode soon too.

Flash is used to provide visual interest in websites, and is important for emotional based sales i.e. products and services that make us feel good and attracting attention (i.e. engaging us or kids) etc

As any iDevice devotee will tell you, iPhones & iPads don't display Adobe Flash.

Any Flash in your website looks like a gapping black hole to these visitors. There's no emotional sales value, it looks ugly; even defiled and predictably undermines your website's ability to engage iDevice visitors .

Read what Apple has to say about Flash and why they are unlikely to ever support it. <http://www.apple.com/hotnews/thoughts-on-flash/>

What does this mean for your business website?

If you use Flash in your website, plan to replace it on your next refresh. If your target market is likely to visit using an iDevice then get rid of the Flash in your site ASAP if not sooner as you are probably already losing business because of it.

Display Standards

The last and ongoing display anomaly relates to web design standards. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has a set of technical standards for websites to ensure they all display OK, but many sites don't comply.

Display compatibility is complex as your website must be displayed faithfully in the plethora of browsers each with multiple software versions. As context; in the last 30 days, 52 different browsers/browser versions visited just one clients' site.

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This has been further exacerbated by browsers that didn't comply with the W3C standards (Microsoft being one of the worst offenders), and as a result W3C has lost relevance for some frustrated Web Developers.

Who cares about standards, I just want sales!

Fortunately there are typically few if any display issues for non-compliant websites, but occasionally the outcomes can be catastrophic sales-wise:

- Menus don't work properly, so the visitor can't access product information or sales pages.
- Product information is displayed completely off the screen and unable to be read.
- Search engine spiders are unable to navigate the site, so products don't feature in search results.
- Text and/or images are displayed over the top of other content making it impossible to read

These are all excellent *sales preventers* and something I'm sure you don't want in your site.

Is my site W3C compliant ?

Fortunately W3C has an easy to use validation tool that you can check each page in your website for compliance.

<http://validator.w3.org/>

I suggest you discuss any W3C errors you find with your Web Dev as some are trivial and might cost you a lot to achieve very little.

<http://www.browsershots.org/> is also an excellent free resource to see how your site looks in a wide range of other browsers. It is also interesting just to see how many there are out there...

Where to from here

- Monitor the traffic in your site
I *strongly* recommend Google Analytics. It's free and world class.
- Use Analytics to check your website's visitor clickstreams to see if they are doing what *you want them to do*. If not, take action.
- Use Analytics to identify then check correct display for the more popular browsers used to access your site.

- Check the main pages in your site for W3C compliance

Summary

Don't assume that everyone sees the same as you online. Your Clients may have a very different experience, and it's *their reality* that determines your online sales success.

sincerely,

Peter Cornish

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Cheers,
Peter Cornish

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