

YOUR WEBSITE SUCKS

Here's how to fix it

BRIAN
HALL

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ECRU PRESS

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INTRODUCTION

Why you should read this book

The chapters that follow will help you diagnose and fix issues with your website. Some of these issues may be obvious to you. Others may be completely off your radar.

By “issues” I mean anything that makes visitors to your site feel confused, frustrated, or simply underwhelmed. With the help of this book, you’ll have the knowledge to make low-risk, high-impact improvements that create a seamless user experience.

When you do this, you’ll see more visitors convert, whether that means making a purchase, signing up for your software, or filling out a form to talk with your sales team. As you’re probably well aware, the more visitors you convert, the more money you make from the same amount of traffic.

So assuming you *have* a website, and it’s important to your business (or overall happiness), it’s worth checking to see if it violates any of the tried-and-true principles outlined in this book.

Each chapter focuses on a single common problem. If you happen to notice it on your site, I'll tell you how to fix it. (Alternatively, if you find you're in the clear, pat yourself on the back.)

This book won't get into the technical considerations of implementing updates to a website—the ins and outs are far too vast and fast-changing to capture in a single document.

It also won't go into specifics about how to use analytics tools to quantify visitor behavior, though there are a few suggestions on how to get started with them.

It doesn't delve deep into research and theory regarding the behavioral psychology of why people use websites the way they do. Instead, it relies on obvious, uncontroversial observations about basic emotions to make its case.

The focus is on easily identifying issues that are worth your attention and fixing them with as little effort as possible. Simple as that.

Work your way through the whole book and you will be the proud proprietor of the rarely-observed Website That Doesn't Suck.

Why you should listen to me

Since 2016 I've specialized in conversion optimization—the marketing practice of using data, research, psychology, and experimentation to measurably increase revenue generated by websites.

Along the way I've worked with brands like Udemy, L'Oreal, and Ghirardelli, to name a few. Several hundred experiments later (many of them successful and some not), I've gotten a good sense of what stops website visitors from doing what we want them to do.

That said, you don't have to run a lab to build a better website. Controlled experiments frequently lead to surprising insights, but the fact is most website usability issues can be discovered with just a bit of focused attention and empathy with the visitor.

The challenge is in prioritizing potential issues, and knowing how to fix them. I wrote this book to help you do just that.

How to use this book

All chapters follow the same structure. They open with a section describing a common website problem, offer an explanation of why it's a problem, and then give a series of steps you can take to fix it.

Some of these steps will mention research methods you can use to pinpoint issues and highlight potential solutions - techniques like 5 second tests, user testing, polls, and session recording analysis. You can learn more about these topics by visiting the book's website at <https://yourwebsitesucks.fyi/book-resources>.

There are two parts to the book: User Experience (UX) and Content. The chapters on UX cover issues with visual layout and interactive components (buttons, forms, menus), while the second half of the book focuses on the words, images, and videos that make up your site (aka content).

Within each part, the chapters are ordered from "extremely critical" to "worth your attention, but not critical."

Finally, each chapter is self-contained. So you can read the book front-to-back, compiling a to-do list as you go, or you can jump around and read in whatever order suits you.

Ready to make your website suck less? Read on.

PART I

UX

... BECAUSE IT'S BROKEN

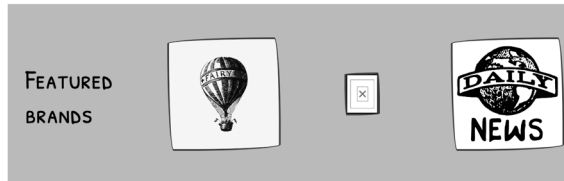
In a perfect world, “Make sure your site isn’t broken” would be such a laughably obvious piece of advice that no one would bother putting it in a book.

And yet.

As a guy who gets hired to inspect websites and come up with ways to improve them, I find that about 50% of the time my suggestions start with “Fix these broken things.”

4 | YOUR WEBSITE SUCKS

Maybe one of your images isn't loading:



Or your form is missing:

PDF-A-LYZER 5000 TODAY!

Enjoy all of the benefits of PDF-a-lyzer 5000 Pro free for 2 days.

No fine print and no credit card required.

Please fill out the form below to begin your download

Or a link on your site points to a page that doesn't exist.

Or nothing happens when I click a button.

Or I literally see an error message on the page.

All of these issues are easier to fix, and higher priority, than any other problems you could have. But paying a conversion consultant to find them for you is like hiring an electrician to plug in a

toaster. You're better off dealing with them on your own, whether it's through scheduling checks (see below) or asking a friend or colleague to kick the tires on your site.

Here's how to fix it

First, have some sort of early warning system that will alert you if something's keeping visitors from converting. Not all errors will prevent conversion entirely, but when this does happen, you need to know about it and address it as quickly as you can.

The system could be some sort of monitoring function built into your analytics, or it could be as simple as "check leads on a daily basis and make sure they're not at zero."

Visually inspect your highest-traffic pages and any others that are crucial to conversion (e.g., Checkout or Contact Us).

Repeat the process monthly, and whenever you launch a new sitewide change. "Sitewide changes" include:

- A redesign or theme update
- Adding a new tool (like a chat or popup widget)
- Adding a new element to multiple pages (like a banner or sticky footer)

The correct cadence and degree of scrutiny is something you'll dial in over time. Just be sure it's not "never" and "none."

And whatever you do, be sure to spot check your site for "obviously broken stuff" before you pay someone to audit it for you.

... BECAUSE IT WON'T CLOSE THE DEAL

I get it: you don't want to be too pushy, too sales-y.
Your website exists to inform, to build awareness and reputation, not just to sell something.

But ... you do sell something, right? *Right?*

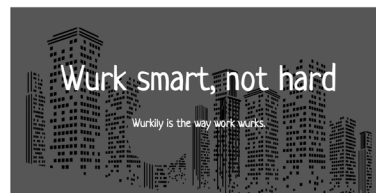
If so, don't get so caught up in storytelling and education that you neglect to mention the very thing you're storytelling and educating about.

Take the example below. Let's say I've heard good things about a product called Wurkily, so I Google it and land on its homepage. What can I do here?



It's not exactly obvious what they sell—some kind of platform?
But if I want to take action, the only option is to Let Them Help.

So I click that button and visit another page. What can I do here?



WE WORK DIFFERENT.

Find out how the Wurkily platform can engage your organization in transformational change.



"At Hiringly, we work a lot. So we needed Wurkily."
—Chelsea Vespersion, VP Work Ops, Hiringly

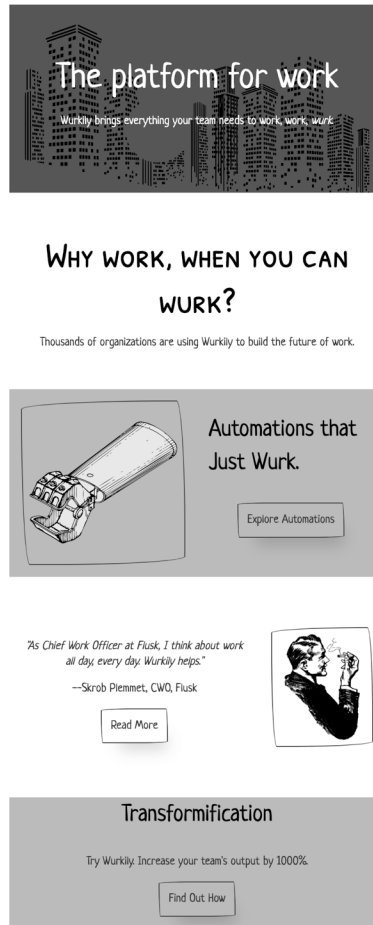
[Read More](#)



Not a whole lot. I can read, read some more, or Explore Their Platform.

... because it won't close the deal | 9

Fine. I'll go ahead and explore. Here's what I see now:



The screenshot displays the Wurlily website with the following sections:

- The platform for work**: A dark header with the text "Wurlily brings everything your team needs to work, work, work." and a background of city buildings.
- WHY WORK, WHEN YOU CAN WURK?**: A section with the subtext "Thousands of organizations are using Wurlily to build the future of work."
- Automations that Just Wurk.**: A section featuring an illustration of a robotic arm and a button labeled "Explore Automations".
- Testimonial**: A quote from Skrob Plemet, CWO, Flusk: "As Chief Work Officer at Flusk, I think about work all day, every day. Wurlily helps." with a "Read More" button and a small portrait of a man.
- Transformification**: A section with the text "Try Wurlily. Increase your team's output by 1000%." and a "Find Out How" button.

Here I can ... continue to explore, and continue to read. But if I really want to become a customer, I need to Find Out How.

Except "Find Out How" leads me back to the page I came from. That's frustrating.

So, once again ... what can I do here?

Here's how to fix it

Have a button that represents a single, relevant, clear next step for visitors who want to become customers. Display it throughout your site.

Make it the most prominent button in your header navigation, feature it on your homepage, add it as its own section to other high-traffic pages on your site.

As visitors navigate the site and learn about your product, knowing that this button will take them to the next step will save them time and potential confusion.

For example, if the next step is “Start Free Trial,” they will understand they don’t have to learn everything about your product before they make a move—just enough to decide if they want to try it.

They’re not studying your site for academic purposes— they want to make a decision. A simple, repeated call to action helps them frame the decision and be purposeful in their research.

Give your visitors the gift of this clarity, and they will thank you through conversion.

... BECAUSE ITS FORMS ARE TOO LONG

Ah, that magical moment.
The moment somebody clicks a button that says
Contact Us. (Or Get a Demo, or Start Free Trial, or
Subscribe, or Download Report.)

It means they're willing to trade some personal information for
what you're offering. It means your website works!

So, don't push your luck.

They *expect* to see a form after that click. And as long as the form
is asking for relevant, reasonable info, they'll probably fill it out.

On the other hand, imagine they've searched for "small business lawyer," clicked on a result, and they see this:

COMPLETE THIS FORM AND WE'LL BE IN TOUCH!

First Name	Last Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address 1	
<input type="text"/>	
Address 2	
<input type="text"/>	
City	
<input type="text"/>	
State	
<input type="text"/>	
Zip Code	
<input type="text"/>	
Email Address	
<input type="text"/>	
Phone Number	
<input type="text"/>	
Note	
<input type="text" value="How can we help you?"/>	

The form doesn't even fit on the screen. It asks for an address, phone number, and email—should they expect a call, a message, and a home visit? Do they *want* that?

Imagine they decide to download a white paper and they see this form:

DOWNLOAD OUR WHITE PAPER! X

First Name

Last Name

Company Email

Company Name

Job Title

Company Revenue

Phone Number

Country

☐ I am not a robot

Submit

Is it worth sharing your job title and company revenue to read a white paper? Is it even worth the keystrokes it takes to type that information?

If you're like most people, the answer is no.

Here's how to fix it

Consider these two rules of thumb. In general,

- Shorter forms mean more form fills
- You should only ask for information you obviously need

No doubt the sales team wants the name, address, phone number, blood type, and astrological sign of everyone who visits your site. You know, just in case!

But from a visitor's perspective, it should be clear why you're asking for certain information, and what you're going to do with it.

Scheduling a 1-on-1 demo? Company size is probably relevant. Downloading an infographic? Not so much.

Given these rules of thumb, audit every field on every form on your site and ask:

Do we need this? Is it clear to the visitor why we need this?

If not, just remove it.

PART II

CONTENT

... BECAUSE IT'S UNCLEAR WHAT YOU'RE EVEN SELLING

Every single visitor to your site is a victory, and an opportunity.

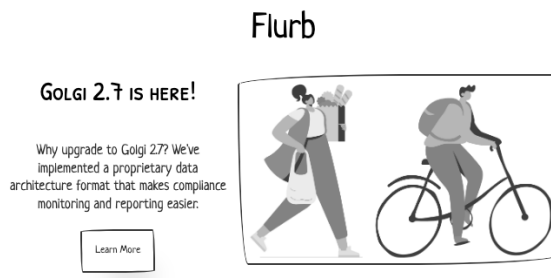
Out of all the queries I might have typed into the search engine, I chose one that points to one of your pages. Out of all the search results, I clicked on yours.

Amazing.

Maybe I even arrived with a measure of trust in and familiarity with you or your site. Maybe I Googled you because a friend mentioned your product favorably. Even more amazing!

Unless what I see upon landing is completely inscrutable.

Unless, after developing an interest in self-hosted alternatives to Google Drive / Dropbox, and talking to a trusted friend who is an expert in the field, and finding out that he uses a thing called Flurb for file storage, and excitedly typing “flurb” into the search engine and clicking the top result ... unless after all that, I see this:



What is Golgi? Why should I care about a new data architecture format? “Makes compliance monitoring and reporting easier”—easier than what? What am I looking at?

The fact that there’s no visual representation of the product is a problem we’ll address in a future chapter. Our concern here is more fundamental: there’s no indication on the page of what the product even *is*.

Here's how to fix it

Make sure the top section of your homepage clearly communicates what your product is, and what problem it solves.

(For bonus points, you should also convey who it’s for and what makes it different from alternatives.)

Test and improve on this language until it’s as elegant as possible.

... because it's unclear what you're even selling | 83

If you have an exciting announcement to make, use a narrow banner at the top of the page, or a section further down the page, or maybe an annoying popup. Or even all three.

But remember that (a) nobody is as excited about this announcement as you, and (b) new visitors have to understand what you do before they can celebrate amazing news.

**... BECAUSE IT DOESN'T TELL ME
WHAT I'M GETTING**

Once upon a time there was a viral video of a teenager trying to trade a “mystery box” for a \$6.50 video game at a pawn shop. The shop owner says no—
“Can’t run a business on a gamble.”

Spoiler alert, there’s \$500 in the box.

But the shop owner’s right. It doesn’t make sense to accept an unspecified offer from someone you don’t know.

So as much as I might want to sign up for this champagne delivery box:

THE PARTY BOX!

Time to party! This box includes two sparkling wines to liven up your next gathering.



You'll receive:

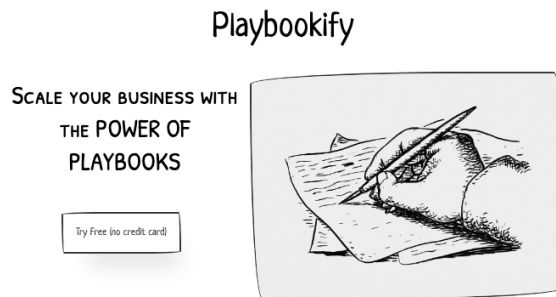
- Complimentary sipping glass
- Your choice of two wines
- Pairing guide

Order now

... I'm not going to click Order Now without knowing the details. "Two wines"—are those cans, boxes, or bottles? Splits or demis? The page doesn't say.

... because it doesn't tell me what I'm getting | 87

I might be persuaded to sign up for this playbooks-as-a-service platform:



... but when I click "Try Free" here's what I see:



This product has different plans and pricing tiers. Which one am I getting for the 7-day trial? What happens after the trial ends? What's in the mystery box?

Here's how to fix it

If you have an e-commerce website, make sure you include thorough product details for everything in your store. Dimensions, volume, weight, quantity, color, materials.

If you have a SaaS product and offer a free trial, make sure you tell visitors what plan they're trialing and what happens after the trial is over.

Either way, consider adding a small, unobtrusive popup to key internal pages on your site. Just ask one question: "What's missing from this page?"

After a few weeks, if you've left out any essential information, some kind-hearted soul will take the time to type it into the popup.

There are so many reasons for losing conversions on your website, and lots of them are out of your control. Don't let "I dunno what yer selling" be one of them.

... BECAUSE IT WON'T SHOW ME THE GOODS

You and I know that you actually have a product. (Or a service. Or both.)

It exists, it solves problems, it's wonderful. People love it.

But we also know that there are unscrupulous types out there who advertise (and even sell) products that *don't* exist, or that fail to live up to expectations.

And the poor souls visiting your website, they don't know you like I know you. They don't know how truly scrupulous you are. They're on constant alert for scams.

The easiest way to show them that you have a real product is to ... show them the product. So why don't you?

It's embarrassingly common to land on the homepage of a SaaS product and find plenty of weird illustrated people, or stock photos, but no images of the product itself. This despite the fact that people come to these pages for the *sole purpose* of learning about the product.

This issue is less common in e-commerce, where you're generally obligated to show at least a single picture of what you're selling. But from a visitor's perspective, one grainy photo might as well be nothing.

When you're secretive about what your product actually looks like, you force visitors to take a leap of faith. Before they engage further with your site, they have to decide, "Well, okay, this is *probably* real ..."

But for every visitor who decides to trust you, how many are just closing the tab and moving on with their lives?

Here's how to fix it

Prominently display images of your product on your website. Show people *what they'll see after becoming customers*.

For SaaS products, this typically looks like screenshots. If you're selling a payment platform, show images of earnings reports and checkout screens.

This imagery will communicate the following: "If you become a customer, you'll be looking at earnings reports and checkout screens." But beyond that, it unambiguously says, "We have an actual product that works."

For e-commerce, show products from multiple angles, in context, with good lighting, and on a human model where appropriate. Use high resolution, zoomable images.

If what you sell doesn't have much to show for itself visually—like services, or an API—this gets trickier. It's not impossible, though.

Ask yourself, "What will this website visitor be looking at *after* they become a customer?"

... *because it won't show me the goods* | 91

Is it your smiling face on a Zoom call? A monthly report? Server logs that tell them their request latency has gone down? Slap a photo of *that* on your website.

