



HIGH PERFORMING WEBSITES[®] THAT LAST

Creating Digital Experiences that Engage



Ever wonder what the expiration date is on your website?



Unfortunately, there's no windshield sticker reminding you that it's approaching, or label suggesting you should take a whiff before using. Most website designers and developers have advised a redesign every one to two years. Just 730 days (or less) before brands should take another long hard look at their online selves and question, does this site still accurately reflect my brand?

Does it support my users and stand out from my competitors?

Especially when you think back to the plight of your last launch, this doesn't seem like much time at all. But there's a reason why your website requires an upgrade annually or every other year. The web environment is changing — and fast. So are the behaviors and preferences of your users. And this rate of change isn't slowing up any time soon. It's actually getting more intense.

PROD: 22.01.2014 THAILAND
BEST BEFORE: 21.01.2017

Here's what we know about today's website user:



They have a limited attention span



They browse more often via mobile device than desktop



They are increasingly drawn to visual content



They are looking for clear, concise answers



They love an exceptional user experience (UX)



They value convenience, speed and intuitiveness



DOES YOUR WEBSITE CATER TO THESE BEHAVIORS AND PREFERENCES?

If not, it's stale and we'd bet it's not performing as it should.

The good news?

Website designers and developers have been chasing change since the advent of the Internet, and (may we add) getting quite good at it.

Instead of focusing on what users want today, the new course is to create websites that are scalable and capable of constantly adapting based on actual user engagement to provide a continuously optimized UX. For brands, this means a much longer shelf life.

These websites are high performing, and trust us — they're no accident. Designers and developers carefully calculate and construct them from the ground up using a core blend of approaches and strategies, such as Growth-Driven Design, Mobile First, and Progressive Enhancement. They also incorporate advanced styles and features, including strong content, eye-catching visuals, new scroll techniques and unique navigation — to better engage and delight visitors. Each of these components contributes to the UX in a specific way, and collectively empower websites to deliver a top-notch performance. But before we dig into these components and what they mean for your website and user, let's take a look at the problems these components address.



The Problems With Traditional Website Redesign

For the brave many who have undergone traditional website redesign, the risks and headaches are all too familiar:

1

Marketing gets pulled from its focus on business goals to assist with branding and messaging, which stifles any momentum they've gained in the market.

2

Organizations place significant cost, resources and energy into the website upfront without any guarantee that the finished product will perform to their standard. And the entire process is largely based on assumptions about what the brand thinks they know about their audience.

3

Redesigns have a way of running over budget, drifting out of scope and surpassing their intended due dates.

4

Websites are launched and left to linger in cyberspace without the necessary care to help them succeed. That care means implementing an inbound strategy to help users find the website, observing how visitors interact with it, and applying what's learned to improve the form, function and overall UX.

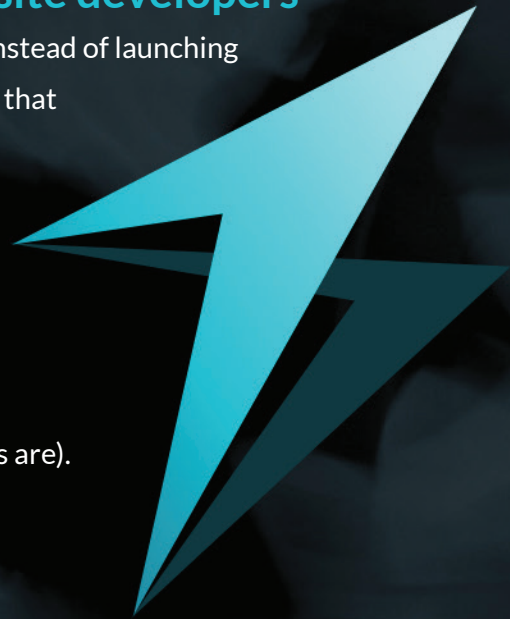
Before brands know it, two years fly by, and it's time for a complete redesign again. And once more, they have little information to go on for improving the site's performance. **Enter, core component No. 1.**

Growth-Driven Design (GDD)

With traditional website construction, the site is built, polished and launched with fingers crossed. The hope is that assumptions made about audience wants and needs are correct. The reality is that there is no warranty. And too often, assumptions miss the mark.

With Growth-Driven Design, website developers take a more adaptable approach.

Instead of launching a finished product, they launch a more pliable website that represents their best assumptions about what brand audiences want and need. Then, they observe audience impact closely to validate assumptions and adjust the website according to these validations until all website features truly align with audience wants and needs (not just a guesstimate of what those wants and needs are).



This strategy for website redesign implements a systematic process that extends throughout the course of a year and beyond. Simultaneously, it supports marketing momentum. ***Here's how it works:***

Discovery & Launch Pad Development

Approximate time frame: 3-6 months

This phase must be done from the user's perspective, and involves setting goals, creating a strategy, and of course — plenty of persona research.

First, interviews and keyword research should be performed on the current website and its users to gain user feedback regarding how users arrive at a site, how they interact with it once there, and the cause for any drop-offs or bounce rates.

This information validates assumptions about why users visit a site, what value they receive once there, and how/when they prefer to access it (desktop, mobile, at home, at work, on the go, etc.).

Next, brands and redesign teams brainstorm a master “wish list” that embodies every possible feature and function that could serve these validated assumptions, improve the UX and increase the site's overall performance.



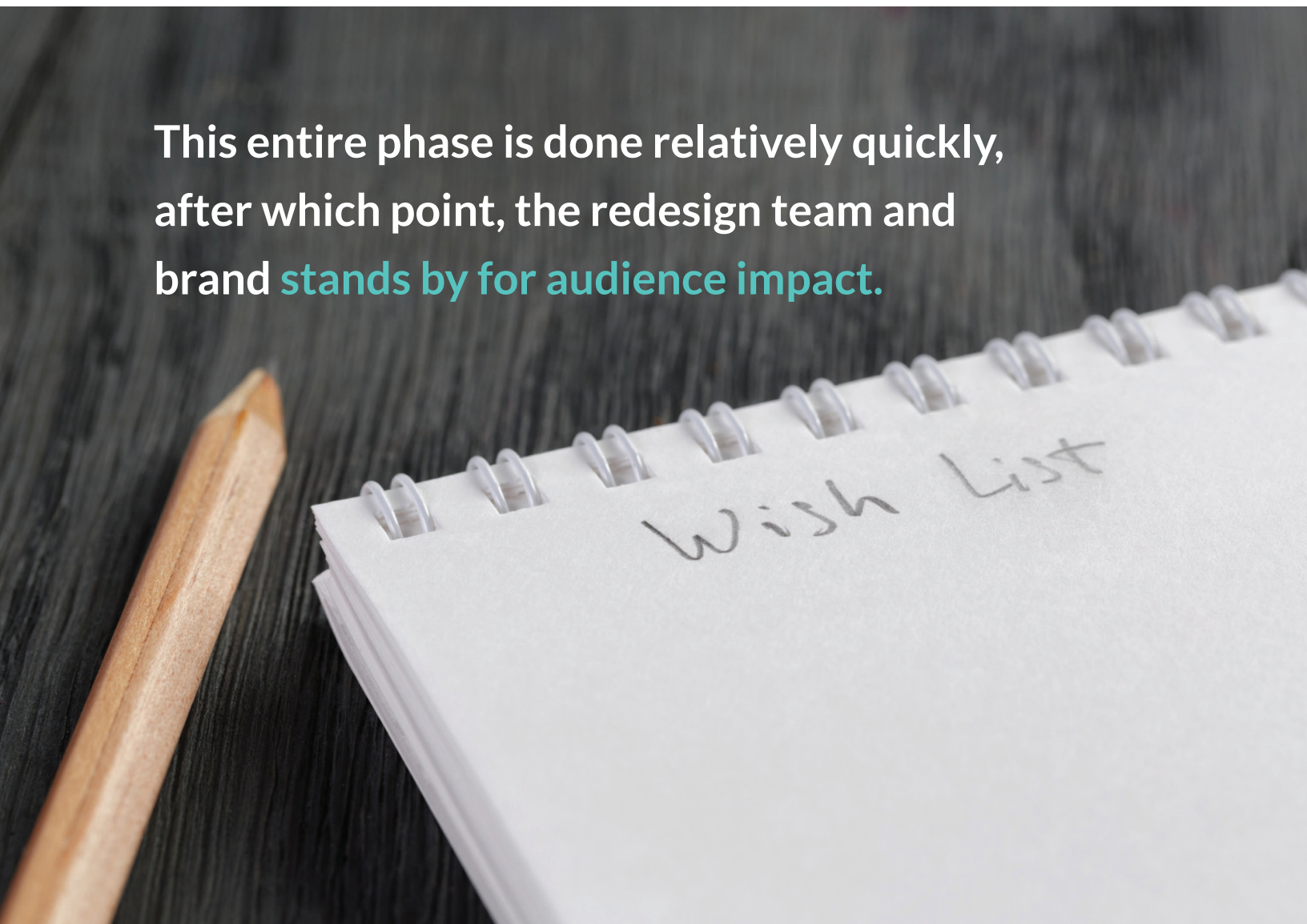
Apply the 80/20 Rule

The 80/20 rule states that 80 percent of results can be attributed to 20 percent of efforts.

Once the wish list is complete, the 80/20 rule is applied and the list is whittled down to what the brand and redesign team believes are the top most impactful elements. In other words, the list is segregated into “must have” and “would like to have” lists. The “must have” list becomes the core features that define the true purpose of a website.

From here, traditional redesign takes back the wheel. Content and messaging is crafted, information architecture is performed, wireframes are made, design, programming and development takes place, and light UX testing is performed before the site is launched.

This entire phase is done relatively quickly, after which point, the redesign team and brand stands by for audience impact.



Phase 2: GDD

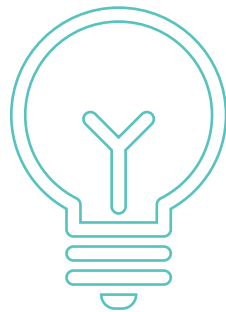
Optimization and Ongoing Development

Approximate time frame: Ongoing

This is where things get interesting. Phase 2 will involve creating and assessing monthly sprint cycles, and will require a fundamental shift in thinking. All focus will now be placed on the site visitor and how they interact with the new website. **A four-step process guides this phase:**

1) PLAN

Here, redesign teams and brands decide what will be accomplished during each monthly sprint cycle. The current website's performance is also compared with goals to get a baseline understanding of where things are.



2) DEVELOP

Next, the brand must create traffic flow by experimenting with different tasks and deliverables. Content should be created based on user feedback and input from relevant departments (marketing, sales, etc). Validation tracking codes should be embedded within content campaigns, and target marketing and content distribution channels should be utilized to drive traffic to the new website.


3) LEARN

As content generates data, redesign teams and brands must analyze results to even further validate or eliminate assumptions about what target audiences truly want and need. Content on the website (both text-based and visual) must be adapted to better resonate with audiences based on these newly discovered facts, and new findings should be documented for future use.

4) SHARE

Finally, new findings should be shared with marketing and sales teams so inbound marketing and sales approaches can be even further refined to better reach target audiences.





As you can see — growth-driven design alleviates the pain points of traditional website redesign.

Marketing goals are supported during and after the redesign process.

The number of assumptions brands use to guide decisions are significantly reduced, and websites receive the ongoing care they require to reach top performance. The entire idea of rebuilding your website every two years is challenged by growth-driven design, which enables your website to continuously evolve as the wants, needs and expectations of your target audiences do. But the real unsung hero is the data generated throughout the GDD process, which will be fed back into other parts of your business (marketing, sales, product design, etc.) to improve the overall operation.

Mobile First Strategy

Mobile has already taken over Internet browsing with about

52.7 percent of people worldwide

using their smartphones, wearables and tablets instead of their desktops to surf.

This percentage is expected to continue climbing, which means every website needs to be optimized for a variety of screen sizes.

Mobile optimization makes websites look great and function well for users on mobile devices. But that's not what we're talking about. Truly high performing websites dig deeper with a [mobile first approach](#). As the name suggests, mobile first means designing and developing for mobile before considering display and function on larger screens. This forces designers and developers to solve the challenges of mobile before thinking about more manageable large-screen displays.

This isn't just making things fit on a variety of screen sizes. Mobile users may not have a stable Internet connection, and they operate on less electric and computing power. They frequently browse on-the-go, too, which means changes in lighting (especially sunlight) must be considered when creating the viewing experience.



A Progressive Enhancement Approach

There are two general approaches by which a website can be designed. Complex to minimalistic, which we call [graceful degradation](#), and minimalistic to complex, which we call progressive enhancement.



Graceful Degradation

Graceful degradation builds for the most sophisticated browsers first, and “gracefully” strips away features and ornamentation to enable the same site to work on older, less capable browsers. Poor quality may get a passing grade by this approach because the focus isn’t on the user, it’s on the browser. It’s not uncommon for users with old browsers to receive a subpar UX on a site built using the graceful degradation approach, and many website development professionals don’t agree with it. After all, everyone deserves a great UX.

Progressive enhancement takes the opposite approach, building a core foundation first, and gradually “enhancing” complexity from that solid infrastructure. Sounds a lot like mobile first, right? Except the focus isn’t on screen size, device or browser, it’s on the content (HTML) and ultimately, the UX.

Progressive Enhancement



Progressive enhancement places greater value on accessibility and layers technologies in a way that allows all user types to access basic Webpage content and functionality, outdated or not.


You'll see this “layering” compared to a cake, an avocado—basically any food with distinct strata.

- **At the core** is content or semantic HTML markups that reinforce the meaning of the Webpage information by enabling text-based, speech-based, robotic and outdated user agents to properly navigate it.
- **Wrapped around this core** is a website's presentation—the external style sheet (CSS) that dictates how a Webpage will look, both in layout and style and allows visual-based user-agents to display or alter the display accordingly.
- **Lastly, the outermost layer** is the client-side scripting (JavaScript), which allows for interactivity (if available) to enhance usability.



The Case for Progressive Enhancement

Progressive enhancement is considered “the right way” to build a website for several reasons. First, the style and script is wrapped around the content, which means no matter which of the thousands of user-agents is being used, visitors can still interact with content however their agent allows. Progressive enhancement also improves SEO by serving actual page content as HTML, which is the easiest way to get search engines to crawl your pages. Like growth-driven design and mobile first approach, PE focuses on building a solid foundation using only the components most critical to function before it builds up the bells and whistles. This ensures an outstanding UX for all user types.



Powerful Content

If your entire website is built in layers around (and in support of) content, its content better be on point. This isn't something that just haphazardly falls into place over time, either. Powerful content requires serious user research (including deep audience insights and demographics to flesh out buyer personas) and optimization.

Despite its gravity, content is often the last detail brands consider during a website redesign. They assume it will be written along the way (you know, during all that free time), or they devise a shortcut to plug the old content into the new site, and this creates a dangerous pitfall for the UX.

Think about how much information you encounter each day via email, social media, online resources and applications. As this sea of information swells and rages on, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to connect with target audiences. Putting useful information out there isn't enough anymore.

Content must be specifically optimized for the individual user in terms of quality, tone, style, messaging and actionability. It must speak directly to individuals in a way that personalizes the experience for them. It must engage them, delight them, and clearly guide them to a next step. Remember, users today have limited attention spans. Which means long, arduous blocks of content should be replaced with concise value propositions with solution-focused messaging.

Recycling old content, or writing new content as an afterthought will reduce the power of all the other steps you've taken to create a high-performance website (including extensive consideration for the UX). So if you don't have the time, manpower or talent in-house, hire a professional writer or talk to your inbound marketing agency for research and writing support.



Strong Visuals

Just how short are attention spans today? According to a [study by Microsoft Corp.](#) — officially less than that of a goldfish. Seriously—we’re talking about 8 seconds before our minds wander on to the next thought. Which gives brands little time to more deeply engage website visitors. This got designers, developers and brand experts thinking: How can we get our messages across in less time?

It’s well documented that about [65 percent of the total population](#) are visual learners. When ideas, concepts, stories and data are associated with imagery, they become more appealing to the masses and, more importantly, the information resonates deeper than text or audio alone.

“Content accompanied
by a relevant image gets
94 percent more views”

[According to HubSpot](#), content accompanied by a relevant image gets 94 percent more views and [59 percent of top-level executives](#) admit that if they have the choice to read text or watch a video, they would opt for the video. But remember, simply incorporating images and video isn’t enough. These strong visuals must align with the brand and messaging, and must also be responsive to cater to all user types.

Smooth Scrolling



If your website's architecture chops up the flow of your brand story into layers upon layers of different subpages, you're doing yourself a serious disservice. Not only does this make a chore of navigating your website on mobile devices, it also interrupts the narrative, and hampers your ability to effectively communicate how your product or service meets the user's wants or needs.

Instead of clicking to access segmented information, single-page design and parallax scrolling will guide visitors through information in a single or few fluidly scrolling pages to empower your website's storytelling ability.

Parallax scrolling is a graphics technique wherein the background images move more slowly than the foreground. This creates an illusion of depth. Visitors scroll text on one plane while the imagery on the underlying plane moves at a different pace. Not only does this style of design help mask the length of content, it also visually engages your visitors and encourages them to keep scrolling through your story.



Clean Navigation

Naturally, a single-page parallax scrolling website is going to influence navigational changes. Instead of extensive drop-down navigation lists that take up valuable screen real estate, navigation is becoming more subtle.

Take, for example, the “hamburger menu”: three horizontal lines stacked atop one another, indicating more navigation options for users. We’re also seeing more large icons or “cards” indicating a pathway for users to follow. These navigation alternatives are less distracting and allow content to take center stage while at the same time, providing an obvious path for the user.



Growth-Driven Design

Mobile First Strategy

Progressive
Enhancement

Powerful Content

Strong Visuals

Smooth Scrolling

Clean Navigation

Core Components **COMBINED**

The one thing that will never change is change itself. Which means the highest performing websites go beyond meeting the immediate behaviors and preferences of today's user. They do more than create a personalized experience for specific audiences. High performing websites learn, adapt and grow in accordance with the world around them. They are lifelike in their response to engagement, and they constantly evolve to deliver an optimal UX. By incorporating these approaches, strategies and features into your next website redesign, you will maximize your investment and meet your audiences in motion.

The grand takeaway — website redesigns need to stop focusing on just the now, and start focusing on both the now and later. Is your website designed and developed for adaptability, scalability and on-going optimization?

If not, reach out to a high performing website expert...

to learn how Kuno Creative incorporates these elements into our one-of-a-kind process, Kuno X Design.



Request a free consultation today
[CLICK HERE](#)



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