

Digital Lead Generation

for Architecture, Engineering
& Construction Companies

An Analysis of Website Effectiveness



Your audience is spending more time online than ever before. Is your website positioned to attract and convert them into customers?

We decided to investigate. Our goal? Determine just how well AEC firms are competing with the thousands of marketing messages consumers receive each day. Our team of lead generation and digital marketing experts analyzed the websites of 100 AEC firms.

While some fared better than others, it quickly became clear that many AEC sites need a lot of work to out-perform their competitors online.

In this study, you'll not only find relevant and surprising data, but also a list of best practices for making your website stand out.

Today, more than 85% of searches for products or services are being conducted online.

Therefore, it's imperative that your site:

- Shows up when your prospective buyers are doing their research, and
- Creates a positive impression of your company once they find you.

We hope you'll find the following information valuable to your own marketing and sales strategies. Continue on to learn more about AEC website best practices, discover the strengths and weaknesses of the 100 websites we analyzed, and see how your company stacks up. And of course, we are here to answer any questions you have along the way.

Sincerely,
Jason Johnston



Methodology & Demographics

We approached this study by first identifying 17 marketing best practices that all AEC firms should follow to maximize their website traffic and lead building potential. From there, we conducted our analysis of 100 AEC firm websites, reviewing each site individually to determine how well they met the predefined criteria. You'll find here a summary of the results and explanations of the significance of each best practice.

Marketing Best Practice Categories Assessed



Lead Generation

- Digital resources (white papers, technical docs, eBooks, webinars, etc.)
- 2+ pieces of content gated behind lead generation forms
- Form on page
- Clear sales conversion points



Website Content

- Visual Call-to-Action buttons
- Video content
- Case studies and/or customer testimonials
- Email subscription



Social Media

- Blog with social sharing options
- Follow links for social media channels; active social media posting
- LinkedIn Company Page



Search Engine Optimization

- Mobile-friendly / responsive
- Analytics enabled
- Fully optimized for search

Select Business

The 100 manufacturers were randomly selected and incorporated companies from a number of different sub-industries including Facilities Services, Architecture & Planning, Design, Construction, Civil Engineering, IT & Services.

Executive Summary and Key Findings

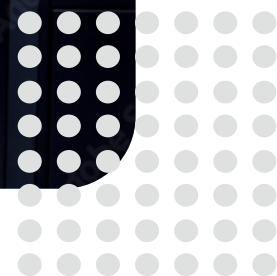
There are numerous ways you can qualitatively slice and dice a website to evaluate its efficacy and performance. But if you strip away all the bells and whistles, the most effective AEC websites:

- Encourage visit-to-lead conversions
- Integrate with social media marketing efforts
- Have great educational content
- Are fully optimized for search

Using these elements as guidelines for our best practices, we then categorized our assessments into four main groups:

- Lead Generation
- Website Content
- Social Media
- Optimization

The following pages break down each of our key findings in this area.





Lead Generation

To gain potential customers, your website must incorporate streamlined ways to collect their contact information. Yes, a Contact Us page will help with this, but this typically only caters to prospects that are near the point of purchase.

What about all those other prospects who need to learn why your services are a perfect fit before they buy?

We found that only 30% of AEC companies offer educational resources as downloads on their site, and 8% of AEC websites gate resources behind a lead generation form. So many firms are missing out on easy opportunities to generate new leads, and as buyers continue to conduct their research and formulate most of their decisions online before even picking up the phone, these firms will likely be finding themselves falling behind others in their industry.

Only 8% of AEC websites gate resources behind a lead generation form.



Social Media

As an AEC company, you may be asking yourself if it's really that important to follow social media best practices or whether your audience is even on social media in the first place.

According to the [Pew Research Center](#), social media use has gone from just 5% of Americans in 2005 to a whopping 72% of the population today. While the nature and extent of their use may vary, a majority of your buyers – and the decision-makers who influence them – are on social media. And there are many ways you can target and connect with them. While a majority of the AEC companies in our study have a LinkedIn Company page, nearly 20% still fail to include social follow options directly on their websites.



Website Content

Prospects are coming to your website more informed than ever. They have a vast bank of knowledge to pull from when it comes to making purchases, and you want to be sure to offer them anything they might need when assessing their options. Video content is one of the easiest ways to explain your product or service, share customer stories, and provide a window into your company's culture—and research shows video is becoming an absolute MUST. Nearly two-thirds of AEC sites lack video content, and 46% are missing customer testimonials and case studies. Yet these are the elements that will tip the scales in your favor when a sales-ready prospect is narrowing down the decision between your business and your competitor.

Nearly two-thirds of AEC sites lack video content, and 46% are missing customer testimonials and case studies.



Search Engine Optimization

After conducting our analysis, we found that 57% of AEC websites inspected were not fully optimized for search. In fact, many are missing several key on-page optimization elements, making it much more difficult not only for search engines to crawl their websites but for users to find them as well. While most companies in our randomly selected pool do have mobile-friendly, responsive websites and analytics enabled, there are still a large number of poorly optimized sites relative to other industry benchmarks.

57% of AEC websites inspected were not fully optimized for search.

Lead Generation Best Practices

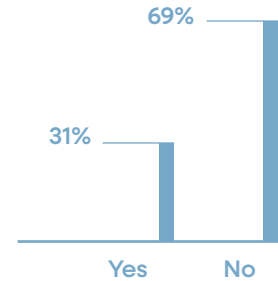
- Utilize Digital Resources
- Gate Content Behind Forms
- ▲ Add a Form to Your Contact Us Page
- Create Multiple Clear Sales Conversion Points

Lead Generation Best Practices

Utilize Digital Resources

Providing helpful, relevant content for website visitors is critical if your site is going to help your business generate qualified leads. Your target buyers want their solutions to come from the experts—and who doesn't? Among many other content creation benefits, consistently producing and publishing digital resources helps AEC companies showcase their thought leadership and industry knowledge—and establish a stronger presence in the market. Moreover, business buyers are looking for solutions to problems they're encountering on a regular basis, and engineers and other industrial sector decision-makers are increasingly turning to online sources to find answers. Shouldn't you be that go-to answer?

Companies without Educational Content



Interestingly, our research showed that 69% of the AEC company websites examined did not offer any educational content. The good news is that a majority of companies are boarding the content marketing train. The bad news is that those without educational content are falling behind their competitors.

Without cluttering your site, you can offer valuable downloadable resources, all of which will provide visitors with information about a complex issue that your company is working to solve, or further inform them about a particular hot-button industry topic they might be interested in. Those resources could take the form of any number of things:

- White Papers
- Technical Documents
- eBooks & Checklists
- Infographics
- Sales Sheets
- Webinars, etc.
- Calculators
- How-to Guides
- Research Reports

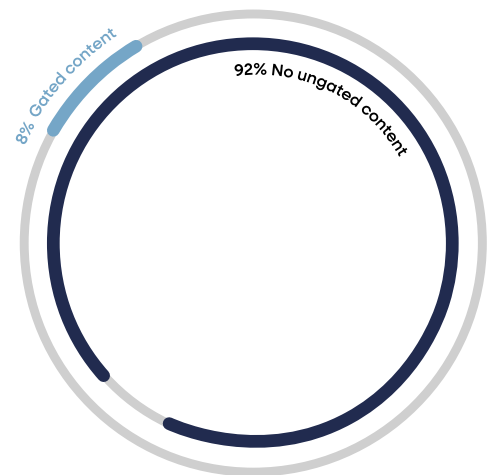
The best AEC marketers will leverage content that addresses prospects' needs at all points in the buyer's journey. Once you've established yourself as a thought leader in your field, the right people will keep coming back to your site for more help until they're ready to buy.

Gate Content Behind Forms

While it's important to offer easy-to-access educational website content to your audience (via a blog, for instance), it's just as important to gate some of that content behind lead generation forms. If an anonymous website visitor finds the description of your gated resource compelling enough, they will fill out and submit the form to view it, thereby converting into a lead. This not only provides your team with contact information to follow up with the lead, but it also helps you gauge their interest in your business, potentially identify their buying stage, and nurtures them down the funnel with other pieces of relevant content later.

According to our study, a staggering 92% of AEC companies have left all of their content ungated! This large percentage is missing the opportunity to obtain a prospect's email address and continue marketing to that new contact. By simply including a lead generation form (on an appealing landing page) "in front" of some pre-existing content you have on your site, you can easily gather basic information (name, email, company, etc.) about who is interested in what you have to offer. All of your content is still free and accessible, but now you can also generate new leads with it.

AEC Companies with Ungated Content



Add a Form to Your Contact Us Page

The Contact Us page is one of the most visited pages on any website, particularly for prospects in the middle or at the bottom of your sales funnel. We found that many AECs (68%) are aware of this, and have provided visitors with a form on their Contact Us page (which not only promotes lead conversion but also encourages the beginning of a conversation). But that still leaves almost one third of the randomly selected companies without a form on the Contact Us page.

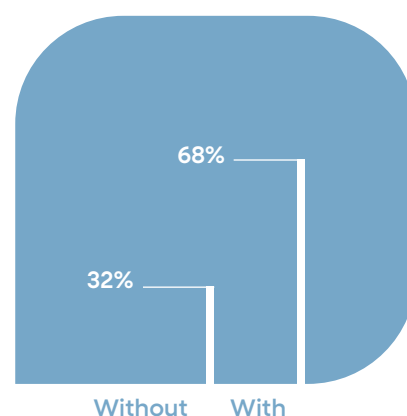
People click over to a Contact Us page for a variety of reasons—to find your location, ask questions, inquire about a product or request a quote—but keep in mind that they may also be visiting this page outside of your business hours. Sure, they may pick up the phone and call, but a contact form gives prospects a chance to connect with you on their time AND affords you the opportunity to collect information about them before you respond. You can then customize your approach to the follow-up call.

Contact Us page forms can be very basic. On the other hand, a Contact Us page form can be more comprehensive. Whatever information your sales rep (or appropriate person) must have to qualify the prospect, that's what you should include on your form. For example, you might:

- Ask for a Job Role or Company Name
- Add a drop-down menu of available services or products that might interest them

If you are looking to gather information about your potential customers or are feeling frustrated with the messages coming through due to lack of information, a comprehensive contact form will suit your business.

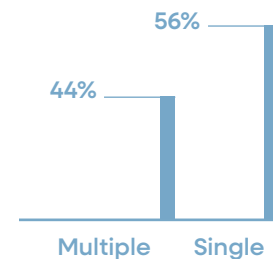
Companies with Contact Forms



Create Multiple Clear Sales Conversion Points

Clear sales conversion points are closely related to Call-to-Action buttons. Sales conversion points are hotspots throughout your website where you're essentially trying to motivate the website visitor to provide some form of contact information (or other personal info) in exchange for a bottom-of-the-funnel offering. These visitors may not be anonymous; in fact, they might already be leads (perhaps they've already converted on a resource landing page), and the next CTA might be a push in the purchasing direction. Whether it's Get a Quote, Ask an Expert or Schedule a Consultation, your goal is for these prospects to convert into sales qualified leads.

Companies with Multiple Conversion Points



It's crucial to provide a digital location for prospects to indicate they are sales ready – and, if your business sells products, it's just as critical for buyers to be able to complete a purchase via the website. In the study, we discovered that 44% of AECs have included several conversion points throughout their websites, beyond the Contact page.

With more clickable CTAs, sales-related forms and pages on which prospects can signal an interest in your business, your sales team can use real-time website visit and conversion data to inform their decisions about how, when and what to communicate to a potential customer.

As long as your analytics are enabled and you have access to website performance metrics, having a greater number of sales conversion points will greatly assist your selling process.

Social Media Best Practices

- Have A Blog Complete With Social Sharing Options
- Be Socially Savvy with Follow Links and Active Posting
- ▲ Have An Active LinkedIn Company Page

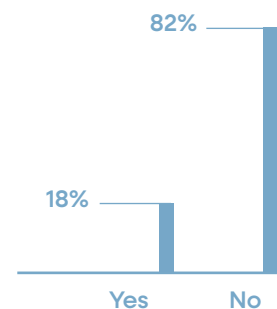
■ Social Media Best Practices

Have A Blog Complete With Social Sharing Options

Creating and maintaining a company blog is a great way to provide new content to your followers, prospects and customers. Its uses range from announcing company news and introducing staff members to discussing important industry topics and publishing educational content that helps your audience solve problems. That last one is particularly important!

By providing your website visitors with NON-promotional content that addresses their pain points, or posts that simply shed light on a deeply relevant industry issue, you're demonstrating your expertise and building credibility with potential buyers. No need to tout your products and services on your blog – the rest of your website is already serving that purpose. More often than not, it's about showing people you're the experts, not telling them. Interestingly, only 18% of AEC websites take advantage of blogging benefits.

Companies with Blogs



And speaking of benefits, a well-executed blog also provides your business with more website traffic, more opportunities for lead conversion, and stronger rankings in search engine results. Google's algorithms take into consideration the frequency at which you post fresh content to your website. If your blog is managed properly and you're posting on a consistent basis, that signals to Google and other search engine providers that your website is up-to-date.

Another website best practice? Your blog should also have social sharing options enabled. When people read your blog articles, they should be able to easily Tweet it out to their followers, share it to Facebook or LinkedIn, email it to a colleague, etc. Convenience is key. Think about how many more people in the right fields will see your post if you streamline the social sharing process.

Yet 20% of the sites we analyzed that do have a blog do not have social share options

Be Socially Savvy with Follow Links and Active Posting

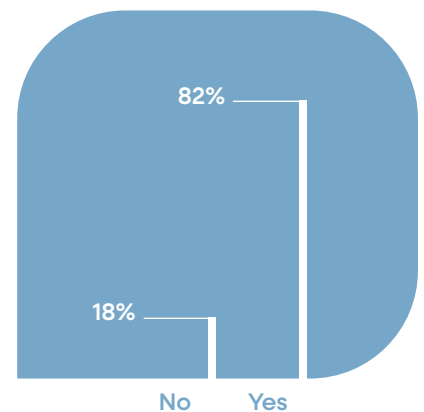
Being “socially savvy” can mean a lot of different things. You don’t have to be a social media marketer to have a legitimate and effective presence online. But in the context of your website, this means that your company has active social media accounts, and as social follow options on display—perhaps in the website footer or above the top navigation.

In our study, we found that 44% of AEC firms are leveraging social channels to better promote their content. When compared to recent research from eMarketer stating that 88% of companies overall are using social media marketing tactics, that number isn’t very strong. So why aren’t AEC firms keeping up with these changing times?

Well, for starters, word-of-mouth was the number one source of an AEC firm’s new business for decades. Trade shows also historically played an incredibly important role. Therefore, launching a full-blown inbound marketing program wasn’t a priority, nor was social media. But today, everyone is on social media. Period. And although not everyone is using social media at work or for research purposes, it’s still a great way to foster engagement, show off your company culture and build relationships.

Note that your social strategy isn’t going to incorporate every major channel, nor should it. What’s great about social media today is that it’s become highly targeted. On the paid side, you’re able to affordably advertise posts (perhaps showcasing a specific resource, webinar or technical paper) to a very specific demographic of people. LinkedIn Sponsored posts are great options for this type of content. Twitter, on the other hand, isn’t so helpful when trying to reach engineers, but it’s a reliable way to connect with the engineering press. Whatever social media sites make the most sense for your business (a.k.a. the ones your clients are using) is where you should spend time. And embedding social “follow” buttons or icons right on your website will help you attract those followers.

Does the company post on social media channels?




Have an Active LinkedIn Company Page

It's important to keep in mind that a Company Page is not the same thing as your personal account. Moreover, LinkedIn Company Pages should not be set up the same way personal accounts are set up. However, your employees can and should add to their profiles that they work for your business, which, in turn, allows them to serve as digital ambassadors and content sharers.

We're happy to report that 96 of the 100 AEC firm websites we investigated have a presence on LinkedIn. In terms of the depth or quality of each LinkedIn account, there was a broad spectrum; some companies had clearly put a little more time in than others. Yes, there were a few stragglers who solely had their company name on a LinkedIn page with no further information. But it was encouraging to see that many pages included great descriptions of their businesses, recent updates, an accurate number of employees and much more!

If you're only going to "get social" on a single social media network, it probably should be LinkedIn (unless your audience uniquely uses another platform much more frequently). Think about it... if someone (like you!) is curious about a company and wants to know more, they usually turn to Google for answers. Regularly updated LinkedIn profiles typically show up right under your website. And statistics show that business buyers are increasingly turning to LinkedIn for additional information.

What's more, having a Company Page allows LinkedIn users to follow your company (presenting them with another option to receive updates). Plus, if your sales and marketing team members are skilled LinkedIn users themselves, there are many tools LI offers that can help your business discover, market to and connect with target prospects. There are literally no downsides to creating a LinkedIn Company Page.



In the past two years, content consumption on LinkedIn has increased by 21%.

Website Content Best Practices

- Include Visual Call-to-Action Buttons
- Take Advantage of Video Content
- ▲ Conduct Case Studies
and Add Customer Testimonials
- Offer an Email Subscription

Website Content Best Practices

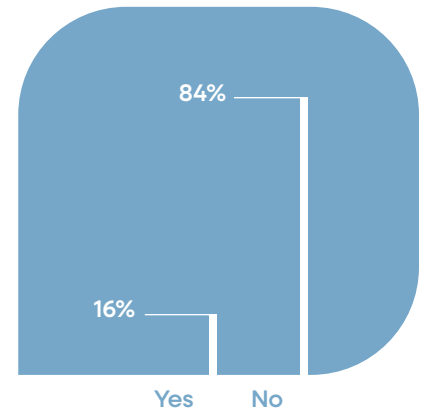
Include Visual Call-to-Action Buttons

Graphic Call-to-Action buttons are arguably one of the most important parts of your website. The purpose of a Call-to-Action (or CTA) is to provide your visitor with a logical next step. For example, your home page might feature a CTA button that says something along the lines of “Request a Quote”—when a user clicks on the button, they are redirected to the website page where they can do so. For new site visitors who are just getting to know your company (and who might check out your blog to evaluate your expertise!), including a CTA that highlights a downloadable piece of content at the bottom of a relevant blog post is a common and effective lead conversion best practice. If the reader likes the article, why not learn more information on that topic in an eBook gated behind a lead gen form?

We found that a mere 16% of AECs have implemented quality Calls-to-Action on their websites! Although we don’t have access to their visit-to-lead conversion data, it’s safe to assume that those with CTAs that stand out from the background are producing more new contacts online than those without. As long as the copy used in the Call-to-Action is aligned with the connected landing page copy, you’re on the right track.

Remember, CTA buttons also serve as navigational aids, guiding visitors deeper into your website and shifting their attention to the content on which you want them to focus. If your CTAs are strategically placed, customers and prospects alike will be much more likely to subscribe, buy, sign up or carry out whatever action you are asking them to perform.

Websites with Call-to-Action buttons



When it comes to lead generation, call-to-action buttons are one of the most important aspects of your website.

Take Advantage of Video Content

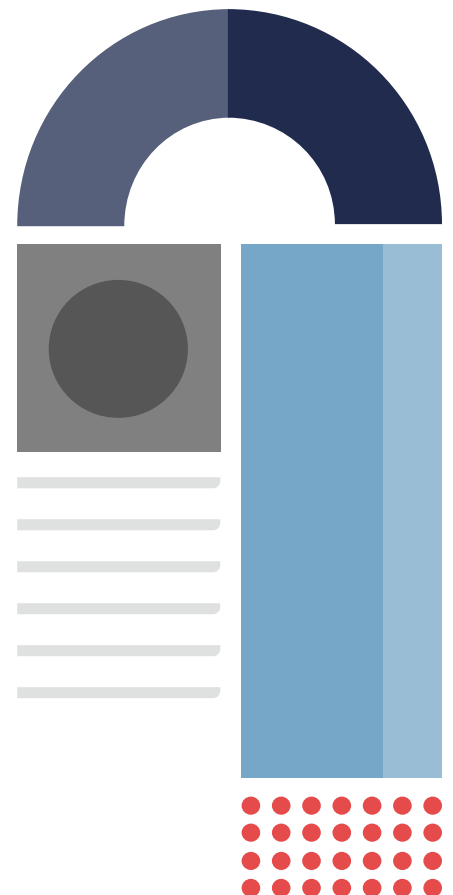
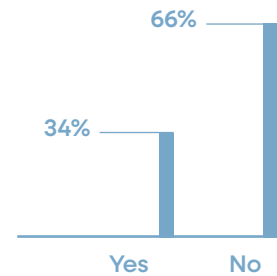
It's become crystal clear that video marketing will only become more and more important to a successful B2B marketing strategy, regardless of industry. Moreover, video marketing tactics are widely reported to outperform many other types of content for AEC companies.

In fact, a recent Survey of AEC Video Marketing from Society for Marketing Professional Services reveals that 84% of the AEC firms they assessed have some form of video content.

That's quite a big difference from the 34% of AEC companies from our study who have included videos on their sites. And perhaps it's because video marketing can be a bit intimidating for SMBs who do not have a substantial marketing budget. However, you don't need to spend a lot of time or money to produce effective video content. Even posting short videos showing off your company culture, production line or interactions with customers taken on team members' phones can make for great material if positioned correctly.

The whole point is to offer your prospects and customers an easy, enjoyable way to consume your content. You should be marketing to buyers the way they want to be marketed to. And all signs point to video as being the versatile, reliable and trust-building solution. Plus it's a great technique for "humanizing" your business. People want to do business with people, not companies—so putting faces to a brand's name can have a dramatic impact on sales. Highlighting product videos can increase purchase rates by 144%.

Websites with Video Content

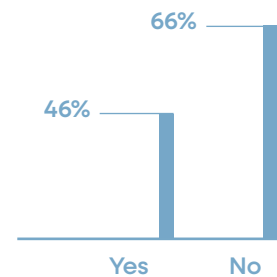


Conduct Case Studies and Add Customer Testimonials

Case studies and customer testimonials are powerful marketing and sales tools. They provide social proof of your work, and they can reinforce the benefits of using your product. Particularly in industries where the product or service is difficult to understand, a well-executed customer story can serve as a tipping point for prospects who need that extra bit of insight to fully grasp how your business will make their jobs (or lives) easier.

When you or people you know search online for information about consumer products, vacation spots, restaurants and bars, vehicles, hotels (you name it), you take into account really great (or really poor) reviews, right? B2B customer testimonials work the same way. Particularly if the testimonial is from a respected industry professional, publication or company, public affirmation that your product solves a common problem will go a long way. Putting success stories on display is an easy way to reassure customers that your work is the best! So can you believe 46% of the AEC sites we assessed don't include them?

Companies featuring case studies or testimonials



Customer testimonials don't need to be long or complicated. Simply publishing a quick two-sentence blurb on a product page or About page from a satisfied customer is sometimes enough to do the trick. If you have a client who found a resource on your website particularly valuable, you can also include a brief quote on the lead generation landing page to encourage conversions. Have a long-time customer who's been buying from you for years? Ask them if they'd be interested in helping out with a Q&A piece or sharing their experience through a case study. More often than not, they'll be happy you asked. Your prospects want to know how you've helped people like them – so go ahead and tell them

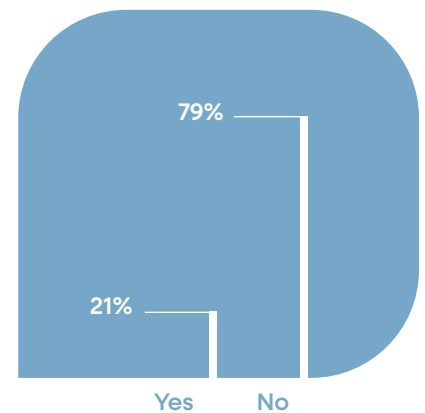
Offer an Email Subscription

When a website visitor—be it a customer, prospect, partner or fan (and potential referral)—subscribes to your newsletter, this offers your business an easy way to nurture them and stay top of mind. Whether you're sending out coupons and other promotional material, blog updates, links to new white papers or anything else you have to pass along to engaged readers, having an email subscription option will help you keep your audience in the loop about what's going on with your company and industry.

Email marketing may be an oldie, but it's still a goodie — HubSpot reports that 86% of professionals prefer to use email when communicating for business purposes, and Econsultancy reveals that 75% of companies agree email marketing offers “excellent” to “good” ROI. For these reasons, we were concerned to see only 21% of the AEC companies we surveyed were providing email subscription options on their sites.

No matter what industry you're in, most people check their email daily. Yes, they're going to immediately delete anything that doesn't appear relevant to them. But with the right subject line, preview text and email design, you can easily cut right through the clutter and connect with your prospects.

Companies with email subscriptions



75% of companies agree email marketing offers “excellent” to “good” ROI.

Optimization Best Practices

- Make Your Website Mobile-Friendly and Responsive
- Enable Analytics on Your Website
- ▲ Fully Optimize Your Site for Search

■ Optimization Best Practices

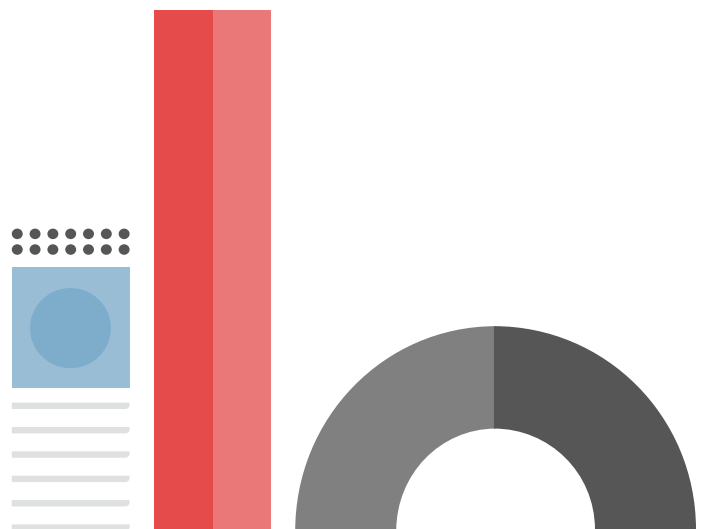
Make Your Website Mobile-Friendly and Responsive

Did you know that over half of searches today are being conducted via mobile devices? Because of this, Google has made recent changes to its algorithms that give even more weight to mobile-friendly websites, so if your business doesn't have a responsive site, you're likely being penalized in search results. But what exactly does "responsive" mean?

Using media queries and CSS rules, a responsive website design adapts to a visitor's browser size and resolution, automatically rescaling page layouts to accommodate. A responsive design can also adjust the actual content that's displayed – so page elements like contact info or directions render more prominently for non-desktop visitors of your site.

If your site is one of the 18% that isn't mobile ready, it's time to step into the future. Websites that aren't mobile-friendly have much higher bounce rates. Suppose your site doesn't work well or load quickly on a smartphone internet browser. In that case, the prospect is simply going to leave the page and choose another search result, further signaling to Google and other search engines that your site lacks quality – and of course, you lose the chance to convert a lead.

Websites that aren't mobile-friendly have much higher bounce rates

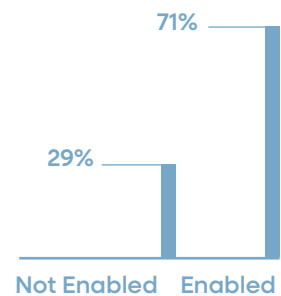


Enable Analytics on Your Website

Data analytics help you track and monitor website performance and user behavior. They can provide you with information about the number of visitors on your site, specific page views, through which channels site traffic is originating, from which devices or geographic areas traffic is coming, how campaigns are doing, and so much more. Plain and simple: when you have analytics enabled on your site, it's a heck of a lot easier to figure out what's working and what isn't.

Most AECs are familiar with the perks of having access to data analytics, seeing as 71% of sites have some form already enabled. Two very popular options are Google Analytics and HubSpot Analytics. Both user-friendly tools exhibit sophisticated functionality, and provide comprehensive data that help users make highly informed business decisions that drive marketing and sales activities.

Websites with data analytics enabled



Fully Optimize Your Site for Search

A website that's well optimized for search is going to be easy for search engines to crawl and "understand" on a technical level (and thus, it will likely rank higher in search results), and it will also be easier for people to find on a practical level when conducting a search. These days, a very positive website user experience is one of the most important Search Engine Optimization (SEO) factors, as Google wants to rank pages that provide better results and a better experience for people using its search bar. There are many metrics Google uses to evaluate this.

However, on-page SEO elements are still important, as they help both Google and human visitors determine the meaning and relevancy of your site pages. Although there are other attributes involved (like the page URL and image ALT text), on-page optimization is comprised of 4 key elements.

PAGE TITLES – Page titles are the blue hyperlinked lines of text that show up on search engine results pages. They should be no longer than 55-70 characters, and they should not repeat keywords. (Keywords refer to the search terms and phrases someone types into the search engine, and "keyword stuffing" is a poor SEO practice that actually hurts your site's rankings). The best page titles are unique, specific, and compelling, so as to attract a searcher when they scan a results page.

META DESCRIPTIONS – Meta descriptions are the short blurbs that show up underneath the page titles on a results page. Your meta description should be no longer than 150-160 characters and should very accurately describe what the user will find when they click on the result. Although these do not contribute directly to technical SEO, a search term-to-content message match is important for the reader; therefore you should still include the keyword in the meta description if you can do so naturally.

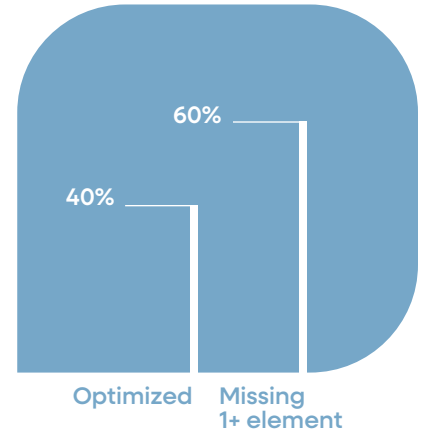
H1 TAGS – H1 tags (or page headers) are used to present a clearer structure of your web page and help search engines determine what the content on the page is about. Different levels of headings (there are H2s, H3s, H4s...) provide different sized titles that also indicate varying levels of importance, helping organize your site for both users and search engine bots.

SITEMAPS – A sitemap is much like a blueprint; it's a file where you can list all of your web pages to tell search engines about the organization of your site's content. Googlebot and other web crawlers read this file to more intelligently navigate your site. In addition, your sitemap can provide metadata associated with the pages you list in that sitemap, such as when the page was last updated, how often the page is changed, and the importance of the page relative to other URLs in the site. Particularly for sites that do not have many external links to it, sitemaps help them get discovered.

Our study found less than half of the AEC websites we surveyed were optimized for search, and 60% of websites were missing at least one key on-page optimization element.

If your team has little to no experience with SEO marketing, it just takes some training. But for those companies missing key optimization elements, it is likely that you're not receiving a high amount of organic search traffic (people who are searching using terms that might describe your product or service without using any company name). No optimization means missing out on loads of lead generation opportunities.

Websites missing at least one key on-page optimization element



The More You Know...

AEC firms are already ahead of the curve in some areas—they're LinkedIn presence leaders and mobile-friendly masters. But the truth is that many AEC companies, both in and out of this study, have a great deal of opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their websites.

Most of the websites in this investigation, aside from the need to consider a clean and responsive design, could advance their online presence with just a few tweaks. With a couple of “quick win” tactics built into their marketing strategies, the traffic and leads from these sites could skyrocket (It really is all about the simple fix!). We've seen it before with our partners and clients – it's a strategy that's backed by numbers

After over 15 years in business, we're proud to say that some of our longest client relationships are with business owners from AEC industries. We hope you enjoyed reading this study as much as we liked making it. If you'd like to learn more, we'd be glad to offer an in-depth assessment of your website and inbound marketing efforts. Please feel free to [contact us](#) for more information or with any questions. We are here to help when you're ready!

About Conveyor Marketing Group

Could your company benefit from some great marketing? Conveyor Marketing Group is a strategic marketing and business growth agency specializing in brand identity, thought leadership, full-funnel digital strategy and sales enablement. We partner with heads of manufacturing and AEC firms to deliver results that align with business goals, from awareness and market credibility to qualified sales leads.

Interested in receiving a complimentary marketing assessment? Send us a message or call today! For additional information, visit us at www.conveyormg.com.

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