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WEBSITE WEDNESDAY · MODERN DESIGN CHECK

Keep your website modern without the gimmicks.

A plain-English guide for business owners who aren't web designers: how to tell a useful design trend from a distraction, a simple test for any new feature, and a review you can run on your own site, finished off with a free tool that shows you what real visitors actually do.

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HOW THIS GUIDE BREAKS DOWN

PART 1	3-question feature test · Parking lot test
PART 2	Phones first · Speed · Headlines · Real photos · Contact · Readability
PART 3	Trends to skip or tone down
BONUS	Staying current without the overwhelm
WRAP-UP	See what visitors do with Microsoft Clarity

~90 min

About 90 minutes to review your site and set up Clarity.

3 questions

A quick test you can use on any new feature or design pitch.

$0

Every tool in this guide is free: PageSpeed Insights, TinyPNG and Microsoft Clarity.

Part 1 15 MINUTES

The 3-question feature test

New design ideas show up constantly, from your web builder, a salesperson, or a competitor's site. You don't need to follow all of them. You just need a quick way to decide.

1 Ask three questions before adding anything

10 min

1
Does it help a customer do something?
Call you, book, find your hours, see prices, get directions.

2
Does it work well on a phone?
Most local customers will see it on one.

3
Does it slow anything down?
Page speed, or the time it takes to find what they came for.

DO If a feature fails any one of these, skip it. Here's how two common pitches score:

Skip

~~**Animated cursor that follows the mouse**~~

Helps a customer? No
Works on a phone? Phones don't have a cursor
Slows things down? Yes

Keep

Tap-to-call button that stays on screen

Helps a customer? Yes
Works on a phone? Yes, it's built for phones
Slows things down? No

2 Run the parking lot test

5 min

DO Pull up your own website on your phone, the way a customer would while sitting in their car. Time how long it takes to find each of these:

1
Your phone number
Target: under 5 seconds

2
Your hours
Target: under 5 seconds

3
Your service area
Target: under 5 seconds

> A customer on a phone is usually in a hurry. Every bit of decoration they have to get past is a chance for them to hit the back button and call someone else.

Part 2 30 MINUTES

Trends worth keeping

The best modern design trends all have one thing in common: they make your site faster, clearer, or easier to use on a phone. Work through these on your own site.

1 Built for phones first

5 min

DO Open your site on your phone and check that the text is readable without zooming, buttons are big enough for a thumb, and nothing makes you scroll sideways.

2 Fast loading

5 min

DO Run your homepage through Google PageSpeed Insights at `pagespeed.web.dev`. If large images are flagged, shrink them with a free tool like TinyPNG and re-upload them.

3 Plain, specific headlines

5 min

DO Read the big headline at the top of your homepage. It should say what you do and where.

Weak

~~Elevating Your Comfort~~
~~Welcome to Our Website~~

Strong

Furnace & AC Repair in McHenry County
Family Dentist in Richmond, IL. New Patients Welcome

4 Real photos

5 min

DO Swap stock photos for real ones of you, your team, your work, and your storefront or vehicles. A decent phone photo in good daylight beats a polished stock image, because customers can tell the difference.

5 Easy ways to reach you

5 min

DO Make your phone number tap-to-call, keep contact forms short (name, phone, what you need), and add online booking if customers in your industry expect it.

6 Easy to read for everyone

5 min

DO Check that body text is a comfortable size (about 16px or larger), dark text sits on a light background, and buttons say what they do ("Get a Quote" instead of "Submit"). This helps older customers and anyone reading in bright sunlight.

Also worth a look

A short menu (five to seven items, using words your customers use) and trust signals near the top of the page, such as reviews, licenses, years in business, and the towns you serve.

Part 3 15 MINUTES

Trends to skip or tone down

These features look impressive in a demo but tend to get in the way of real customers. If your site has any of them, consider removing or toning them down.

TREND	WHY IT GETS IN THE WAY	BETTER CHOICE
Custom cursors and cursor trails	Phones don't have a cursor, and on a computer they distract and can lag	A normal cursor
Video or music that plays on its own	Startles visitors, uses up phone data, slows the page	A video with a play button and captions
Heavy scroll animations	Things flying in from the sides keep content hidden until they finish moving, which feels slow and can make some people dizzy	Content that's simply there, or a subtle fade
Homepage slideshows (carousels)	Most visitors never see past the first slide, and they slow the page	One strong photo with a clear headline
Pop-ups the moment someone arrives	Blocks what they came for, and Google may rank pages lower when pop-ups cover content on phones	A small banner, or no pop-up at all
Scrolling that's been taken over (scroll-jacking)	The page moves at its own speed instead of the visitor's	Normal scrolling
Tiny, light-gray "minimal" text	Hard to read, especially for older customers	Larger, darker text
Chat bots that can't answer real questions	Frustrates people who just want a human	A clear phone number, plus an FAQ section

Tone down, don't ban

Not all motion is bad. A button that changes color when you hover over it, or a gentle fade, is fine. **The rule of thumb: motion should point people toward something useful, never make them wait for it.**

Bonus ONGOING

Staying current without the overwhelm

You don't need to follow design blogs to keep your site modern. These habits do the job:

Notice the businesses you buy from

When a website is easy to use, or annoying, take note of why. That's real-world research.

Check your own site monthly

Five minutes on your phone, running the parking lot test.

Look at your numbers

If you use Google Search Console or analytics, check which pages people leave quickly. Those are the ones to simplify.

Ask one question of every pitch

"What does this do for my customers, and how will we know it worked?" If the answer is vague, pass.

Change one thing at a time

That way you can tell what helped.

Watch a real person use your site

Ask a friend or customer to find your hours or request a quote while you watch quietly. You'll learn more in two minutes than from any trend list.

Wrap-up 30 MIN TO SET UP · 10 MIN A WEEK

See what visitors actually do with Microsoft Clarity

Trends and checklists are educated guesses. The only way to know whether a design choice is helping is to watch what real visitors do. Microsoft Clarity is a free tool that shows you exactly that: where people click, how far they scroll, and where they lose interest and leave. There are no traffic limits and nothing to pay.

1 **Create your free account** 5 min

DO Go to `clarity.microsoft.com` and sign in with a Microsoft, Google, or Facebook account. Click **Add new project** and enter your business name and website address.

2 Connect it to your website

10 min

DO Choose the method that matches how your site was built.

PLATFORM	HOW TO CONNECT
WordPress	Install the free "Microsoft Clarity" plugin (Plugins > Add New), then link it to your Clarity project
Wix · Shopify	Pick your platform on Clarity's setup screen and follow the guided steps
Squarespace and most other builders	Copy the tracking code Clarity gives you and paste it into the header code area in your site settings (often called Code Injection or Custom Code)

> Data usually starts showing within about two hours. Visit your own site from your phone to give it something to record.

A quick privacy note

Clarity hides what visitors type into forms by default. Add a sentence to your website's privacy policy saying you use Microsoft Clarity to understand how visitors use your site.

3 Learn the three views that matter

5 min

Heatmaps

A color map of where people click or tap, and how far down the page they scroll. Warmer colors mean more activity.

Recordings

Anonymous replays of real visits, so you can watch how people move through your site.

Dashboard

Frustration signals: rage clicks (tapping the same spot over and over), dead clicks (tapping something that isn't a link), and quick backs (leaving a page right after arriving).

4 Use it to judge your design

10 min a week

DO Once a week, check these four things:

- **Scroll heatmap on your homepage.** If most visitors never reach your phone number or "Get a Quote" button, move it higher.
- **Click heatmap.** If people keep tapping a photo or heading that isn't a link, they expect it to go somewhere. Make it a link.
- **Rage clicks and dead clicks.** These point straight to broken or confusing spots.
- **Five recordings from phone visitors.** Note where they hesitate, get stuck, or leave.

> Then make one change, give it two to four weeks, and compare.

This closes the loop

The 3-question test helps you decide before you add a feature. Clarity tells you afterward whether it worked. If visitors scroll right past an animation, ignore a slideshow, or rage-click a fancy menu, you have your answer, no guessing required.

Your progress checklist

- [ ] Parking lot test done: phone, hours, and service area each found in under 5 seconds
  Part 1
- [ ] Homepage run through PageSpeed Insights and large images compressed
  Part 2
- [ ] At least one stock photo replaced with a real one
  Part 2
- [ ] Skip-list features removed or toned down
  Part 3
- [ ] Privacy policy updated to mention Clarity
  Wrap-up
- [ ] Site checked on a phone: readable text, thumb-sized buttons, no sideways scrolling
  Part 2
- [ ] Homepage headline says what you do and where
  Part 2
- [ ] Phone number is tap-to-call, contact form is short, and text is easy to read
  Part 2
- [ ] Microsoft Clarity account created and connected to your site
  Wrap-up
- [ ] First weekly Clarity check done and one change made
  Wrap-up

About this series

Website Wednesday is a series of free, practical guides for business owners who aren't web designers. Each one covers a single improvement you can make to your own website.

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Want a hand with any of this?

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