

WHO'S WATCHING YOUR WEBSITE?

> It's a week before Valentine's Day. Website sales are down, and you've heard from a few customers who have called to complain that your website is slow, or not working at all — yet every time you visit the home page it seems fine. What's going on?

Your website is an important part of your business: serving customers, generating orders and making a great impression 24 hours a day. But how can you be sure it's working? Some florists check by simply visiting their websites on a regular basis, but most won't be aware of any problems until they happen to take a look or, even worse, hear from a disappointed customer.

Monitoring services offer the solution. They let you set up different "checks" that test your website for different problems, as often as every minute, and alert you via email, text message or app.

Monitoring For Availability

The most basic check confirms that your site is online and available. If it goes down you'll be notified immediately. Adding different checks will help you understand the problem and who you should contact about fixing it.

The big fear is a prolonged outage of several minutes or hours, but brief intermittent outages, as short as a few seconds, are another serious concern. These are almost impossible to detect by checking manually because they are so brief, but they're hard to ignore when you're the shopper. Without a monitoring service you probably won't ever know they are happening.

Is it really a big deal if your website briefly goes offline on a regular basis? Yes! The site will be available to most visitors when they arrive, but the longer they stay the more likely they are to encounter an outage that will end their session and make them start over. And when do people spend the most time on your website? When you least want to interrupt them: when they are placing an order. When a site experiences an outage, 9 percent of online customers permanently abandon the site, according to Jupiter Research, and 48 percent of site users establish a relationship with a competitor.



WEB VISIT INTERRUPTED This monitoring report from Pingdom shows a website having brief, intermittent outages that would not be caught without a monitoring service.

"A twerking website (one that goes up and down) frustrates your customers and it can also hurt your standing with search engines," said SEO expert and monitoring enthusiast expert Ryan Freeman of Florist 2.0. "They see a website that is less reliable and are reluctant to endorse it with a high ranking."

Monitoring For Experience

It's tempting to think "my site feels pretty fast when I visit it," but that isn't enough. In our industry, user experience is most likely to suffer when you are least likely to have the time to check it: the major floral holidays.

Research shows that 52 percent of online shoppers consider quick page loading important to their site loyalty, and 79 percent are less likely to buy from the same site again when dissatisfied with site performance. Again, monitoring can help by providing detailed reports on performance.

You should also remember that you will almost always see your website perform better than the average visitor, because you likely visit it frequently and have much of the content cached on your machine. A monitoring service gives you a better sense of the real experience.

Monitoring For Content

Checking for availability and quality of user experience are the most obvious uses of a monitoring service, but there is another use as well: monitoring for content (products and links) that you do not want on your website.

Some website vendors will add outbound links or make changes to your website in an effort to keep it current — often adding seasonal products, some of which are shipped overnight directly from the website provider. Florists who

don't want to feature these products on their websites can remove them. The problem is that they are often unaware that changes have been made until they visit the website themselves or, worse, see an order for a product they don't sell.

A monitoring service will alert you when a certain page on your website is not available, as well as when certain text or links appear. You can then remove the products from the website, or ask the vendor to remove the link.

Monitoring Options

My current favorite is Pingdom. It offers a great combination of value, quality reporting, variety/frequency of checks and alert options. Other options include:

- www.pingdom.com
- www.monitor.us
- www.serviceuptime.com
- www.statuscake.com
- www.site24x7.com
- www.siteuptime.com

Like Pingdom, most sites offer a free option with a limited number of checks. Switching to a paid account generally gets you more checks more often. Remember: Infrequent checks will almost always miss the brief outages that are so frustrating to your online visitors. Ten different checks running every minute is probably adequate for most florists. With Pingdom, this would cost less than \$10 a month if you pay for the year up front (\$14.95 if you pay monthly). One approach is to try the free options from different services. This lets you evaluate all aspects of the service before committing. 🦋

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