

Angela Kelly Smith

3 Ways to Make a Great First Impression with Your Website Brand + Design Scoop ep. 006 Podcast Transcript

Welcome to brand design scoop where I share practical relatable tips on branding, design, and building a business for sole proprietors.

I'm Kelly, a brand strategist and Squarespace, website designer and founder of AKS Design Studio.

Today we're going to talk about three ways to make a great first impression with your website.

Now, first, let me say something about how to make a bad first impression.

Let's start with page load time. People are not going to wait forever to get to your page, no matter how much they want to see it. People expect a page to load in two seconds or less. That's pretty much instantaneous. The last time I checked, my homepage loads in 1.6 seconds. It varies every time I check. So, I check on it frequently. There are lots of sites where you can check your page load time for free. So I use pingdom.com. But you can look around and see what you prefer.

How many times do you remember waiting through the “spinning wheel of death” before giving up on a webpage to load? I mean, if I really want to see a website, I might give it 15 seconds, ooh, possibly 20. But that's an eternity on the internet! I could have loaded like 10 other pages in that time. So, no, people are not going to wait through the “spinning wheel of death” for your website to load. They'll even get annoyed if the load time feels just a little bit longer than quote average. And that means just a few seconds.

So, how can you decrease your load time?

A key way is to optimize your image size. This is a big mistake people make. They'll just upload the raw images that they've got. And those images are huge, especially if it's a photograph. So you want to make sure that your images are no more than just a few hundred kilobytes in size. No more than one megabyte if they absolutely have to be. So this usually means a width of no more than 2000 pixels. And that's great for a banner image. But if an image is going to be displayed at like 400 pixels, then resize it to that.

Now, to **resize your images, if you're on a Mac**, open the image in preview. I always duplicate my images so that I have a copy of the original in case there's something else I want to do with it. Now, save the duplicate. Then in the menu bar, click Tools, and go to adjust size. Make sure the “scale proportionately” box is checked. Set the resolution to 72, no more than 150. Then adjust either the width or the height,. The other will scale automatically. So, no need to do math. Look in the bottom left, and you'll see the old and the new file sizes. Ideally, you want your file size to be just a few hundred kilobytes, no more than about 500. Like I said, if for some crazy reason, it has to be a megabyte, okay. But really try to keep it to just a few hundred kilobytes. Now click OK. And then save it.

Now use that image to upload your website. It's going to make a world of difference. And there are also websites where you can upload your images and have the website resize it automatically. But I think that doing it yourself on a Mac easier. I'm sorry I can't give instructions for doing it on a PC. I haven't used a PC in more than 20 years! But you can google it.

Another way to decrease your load time is to make sure the links on your site aren't broken. If they're broken, servers keep pinging the links while trying to load your site. This slows down the loading process. You can use various websites to scan your site for broken links and for links that take too long to connect. I use brokenlinkcheck.com. It recently found a link that I could have sworn was correct but clearly wasn't. And it was an important internal link. So I'm glad I checked it.

Once your page loads, you have 10 seconds to let visitors know who you are, what you do, and how you can help them. Only 10 seconds to make a great first impression. And that's not a conscious decision that a visitor makes, it's more of a gut reaction based on a variety of factors.

Now, how do you do that? In only 10 seconds, that's not much time for visitors to read text. In fact, 32% of visitors will leave if there's too much text on your site. In those first 10 seconds, they can really read just a headline, or maybe a short paragraph. They'll see your logo or your site title, your branded colors, and an image at the top of the page. They'll probably do a quick scroll. They'll get a feel of the page layout. So there's actually a lot that they can take in. But it's a breadth of information, not text-focused, not even really image focused.

Think about what you do when you first arrive at a website. I look at the headline and the top image, then I immediately do a quick scroll. I actually want to see what's at the bottom of the page before I read from top down. And I don't read everything unless it really grabs me. I prefer to read bits and pieces. And I want the text to look interesting—some of the text on the left some on the right. I do not want it to look like a book or even a newspaper, unless maybe I'm on a news site. But we're talking about service websites right now. So you're definitely not going to do that.

So, the look of your website is important. And yet, only 38% of visitors will leave a website if they think the aesthetics are bad or scrappy. You'd think it would be more than that.

What makes a bad or scrappy looking website?

Having a cluttered or crowded layout is the top mistake in designing a layout. It's understandable, since you've got so much information you want to share. But it's essential to find a way to share it economically with as few words and images as possible.

And that also doesn't mean having to click five times to get all the information. You shouldn't have to click more than twice to get in-depth information. For example, I've got my top two services listed on my homepage. If you click on them, you're taken to that services page for in-depth information. That takes just one click from the homepage. Or, you can click or hover over the services listing in the main navigation menu. That takes you to a listing of all my services. And then that's just one click to each of them.

For blog posts and podcasts, the most recent ones are listed at the bottom of the homepage. That's one click. Or you can click on blog or podcast in the navigation bar and click on any of the posts there. That's two clicks. If you sell products, you can list a couple of featured products on your homepage. That's one click. Then you'd have a store listed in the top navigation bar with all the products listed there. That's two clicks.

While 38% of visitors leave because the bad aesthetic, 48% of visitors will leave because of bad design. That is, they leave because the functionality of the site is bad or not user-friendly. Notice that I and statisticians and even visitors list aesthetics and design separately. I've written about this on my blog in a post called [website art versus website design](#). I'll put the link in the show notes.

There are differences between aesthetics and design. **Aesthetics are about how a website looks, how pretty or scrappy it is. Design is about the functionality of a website, how user-centric or user-unfriendly it is.**

Most of the time when we think of website design, we imagine what our website is going to look like. Again, totally understandable. As website users, we tend to take for granted the functionality of the websites of service providers and sole providers. And that's okay, because unless your services something in tech, so that your website has to show off a high level of UI and UX, user interface and user experience. The rest of us want our website to focus on our brand, our service offerings, and our content. We want the functionality of the website to be seamless, elegant, and flawless, but also fairly invisible, where it supports the business goals and isn't the thrust of the website.

That being said, if the functional design of your site is clunky, unfriendly, broken, or outright bad, people will have a terrible first impression of you. So, no matter how beautiful your website

is, no matter what the “wow” factor, visitors will leave if it doesn't function as they expect it to or better.

Functionality includes issues such as being mobile responsive, navigable, and accessible. You can read more about this in my blog post about website design called [What Makes a Good Website](#). I'll put that link in the show notes, too.

All right, we're gonna say that you now have a simple, uncluttered layout; you're using images that load quickly; you fixed broken links; you've reduced the amount of text on your site; you've made sure that everything is no more than two clicks away; and your site is totally mobile-responsive.

Now you're ready to make sure that you're going to make an awesome first impression.

So, the three items in our checklist to make a great first impression are:

- One, make your brand clear,
- Two, direct your visitors, and
- Three, build your credibility.

(1) So, first, make your brand clear.

The number one way to make a great first impression is to be clear about who you are, what you do, and how you help your ideal client. If visitors are confused about that, they will leave.

What is branding? Paraphrasing Branding Mag here: **“Branding is a process in which you identify, create and manage the assets and actions that shape the perceptions of your brand in your clients minds.”**

Branding is your brand personality, color, fonts, and voice. It's the look and feel of your logo website, business cards and social media accounts. And it's how you post on social media, what you write in your blog posts, and what you say in your podcast.

Why does branding matter? Branding increases your value, it attracts more clients, and it creates trust between you and your ideal client.

So, how do you make your brand clear? Remember, you've got 10 seconds to make a great first impression.

You're going to use your brand colors as your website colors. If you have a tagline, you're going to use that on your website. Same thing with a logo. You're going to be explicit about who you are, what you do, and how you help your ideal client.

So, let me use my website as an example: AKSDesignStudio.com. I have a simple typographic logo at the top left, I don't have a tagline. My headline at the top, which by the way is essential for search engine optimization, reads customized "Squarespace website design." I use my brand colors, primarily teal backed up with a pink as focal points. Underneath the banner and headline, I write out explicitly that I create custom Squarespace websites for sole proprietors. Scroll down a bit, and I introduce myself with a short one-paragraph bio.

The headline can be read in less than two seconds, even shorter, just half a second. You just, you don't have to read it. You just see it and it clicks. The key parts of the top paragraph can be gleaned in a few seconds, and scrolling to my photo and one-paragraph bio takes a few seconds. So, my visitors can take in who I am, what I do, whom I do it for, and how I help them all within 10 seconds. If they're interested, they'll linger longer.

(2) And that takes us to directing your visitors.

When your visitors decide to stay more than 10 seconds, and even within those 10 seconds, you don't want to leave them just bobbing there wondering what to do. Some of them may have googled specific information and know exactly what they're looking for. Most will need you to tell them what to do and where to go, even if they did know what they're looking for.

So, how do you do that? **You use Calls to Action.** Let your visitors know exactly what action you want them to take.

What is the main goal of your website? For some people, it's to get visitors to sign up for their newsletters so visitors can get to know them over time before hiring them. In that case, the newsletter signup form needs to be at the top of the homepage or toward the top of the homepage.

Some people want visitors to buy products on their first visit. Their featured products need to go right up at the top. For some people, the function of their website is to share content. Their featured blog posts or evergreen articles, podcasts, or videos should go at the top.

In my case, I want people to think about hiring me to build their website as soon as they arrive at my website. So, I have a Learn More button just under my intro, who I am, and what I do paragraph that takes people to my services. For the bottom of the page, I have an invitation for people to click on Services or email me directly. And in the middle of the page I have clickable images to my two main services. So, I make it very clear what I want visitors to do.

You need to be judicious about your calls to action. You'll have internal links all over your website. But only the most important ones should be the prominent ones, the actions that you really want your visitors to take.

Don't confuse visitors by giving them too many options. This is really tough because you're going to have lots of awesome content on your website. I've got a blog and podcast on my site. I put the two most recent posts for each at the bottom of my homepage. I want visitors to see that information. It boosts my credibility and gives them a reason to linger longer on my website. But I put it at the bottom of the page because I don't want visitors to think that that's the big action I want them to take.

What if they arrived on my website through the blog?

A big Google hit I get is [how to start a Squarespace website](#). That's a specific Google search. And it's the title of one of my blog posts. So, some people arrive at my site directly on that post. I love that they're watching that video. But what I really want them to do is check out my services. So, I have a sidebar on my blog and podcast. And in the sidebar, I have an image for my main service that links to that service page. The only other items in the sidebar are my photo and one-sentence bio, a search bar, and an accordion menu for blog and podcast archives. It's clear that I want them to click on that service image.

Okay, you've made your brand clear, and you've directed your visitors with calls to action. Where are you directing them? **You're directing them to awesome content.**

(2) This is the third way to make a great impression: Building your credibility with awesome content.

I told you that I'm directing my visitors to my services. But that's actually still content. I've got a general services page and then separate pages for the main services. I created text and images and layouts with visual interest and a nice flow for each page all designed to keep the visitors attention while giving them enough information to make a decision or to get in touch to discuss their project with me. They can buy right then and there online. Or they can call or email to ask questions.

The most common content on websites, of course, is articles and blogs. This is your chance to show off your expertise in your industry. People are constantly googling how-to information. Figure out what that is, what the keywords and phrases are, and build your titles around that. Don't overdo the keywords in the body of the post. The articles and posts have to be genuine and truly helpful. The keywords are so that people can find the information and find you.

If you're giving away all this free valuable information, won't that mean that visitors will be less likely to hire you if you're service provider? No. As I said, you're writing all this wonderful content to boost your credibility to show that you know your stuff. Of course, lots of content

also makes it easier for search engines to find you. I talked about that a few weeks ago in [How to Create Content for Your Blog or Podcast](#). I'll share that link in the show notes. When visitors see all the quality, helpful information you're sharing on your website, they'll trust you more. They'll see you as an authority on that subject. It will make them more prone to hire you.

What if I give away so much information that they go off and do it themselves? If that happens, it means they were never going to hire you in the first place.

In my case, my ideal client is someone who wants a Squarespace website because they want a site that's easy for them to update and maintain. Either they don't want to create it themselves at all, or they started it themselves, and found that they can't get it to look exactly how they want it to look. So, they're coming to me. Those tend to be the people that my content really attracts. I tend to share content for do-it-yourselfers, like right now.

Lots of people, most people who find my content, have no intention to hire me. They'll use what I give them and go off and do it themselves. That's fine. I love helping people. But my ideal clients will be googling how-to information to fix their websites. They'll find my posts and podcasts, they'll find the information helpful but decide that it's not something they want to spend their time messing with after all. So, they look at my services and decide to hire me to do it for them. My content attracts them to my website and builds credibility and trust from reading my content. They see me as being knowledgeable and possessing the skills to solve their problem.

So, to build your credibility as an authority in your field, you need to create lots of valuable content that you share for free. Make it easily accessible, as in, put a link to your blog in the main navigation menu and in the footer menu. Put two to four of the most recent posts on your homepage. Of course, if the goal of your website is to share content, then your strategy is going to be different, wherein your content will be at top and center.

So, to recap, the three ways to make a great first impression on your website are:

- One, have a clear brand,
- Two, direct your visitors where you want them to go, and
- Three, build your credibility with lots of free, high-quality content.

I hope this helps. I'll summarize the list on my website. You can follow the link in the show notes. And if you're do-it-yourselfer, which you probably are if you've listened to the whole podcast, best of luck. I know you can do it!

If you made it this far, and you've decided you don't want to do it yourself, get in touch. That's what I'm here for!

So that's it for today. I'll be back next week with more branding, design, and business building tips. See you next time on Brand + Design Scoop!

[Link to this episode on the website](#)

Angela Kelly Smith provides custom Squarespace websites, branding strategy, and marketing instruction so freelancers and entrepreneurs can run a successful business while spending more time focusing on the work they really love doing. Check out her [website design + marketing strategy services](#).