MEDIAKIM

BRAND STRATEGY

# The 50-Millisecond Verdict: How Strangers Decide If You're Credible

People judge your business in less time than a blink — and almost entirely on how it looks. Here is the science of the first impression, and how to win it on purpose.

A MEDIAKIM INSIGHTS RESOURCE PACK

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You never get a second chance to make a first impression — and online, the first impression happens faster than you can read this sentence. Long before a visitor weighs your offer, your prices or your promises, they have already decided whether your business looks trustworthy. The clock on that decision is brutally short.

**50 ms**

is roughly how long it takes a person to form a first opinion of a website.

SOURCE: LINDGAARD ET AL., BEHAVIOUR & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2006)

Fifty milliseconds is faster than a blink. In that sliver of time, nobody has read a word. They are reacting to colour, layout, spacing and imagery — to design. And that snap judgment is sticky: it quietly colours everything they read afterwards.

**FIGURE**

The verdict lands in about 50ms, before a single word is read — and you do not get a second one.

## Why we really do judge books by their covers

It is not shallow; it is efficient. A stranger cannot test your competence in a few seconds, so the brain reaches for the fastest available proxy: does this look like a business that has its act together? Psychologists call it the halo effect — looks credible, therefore is credible. Unfair, perhaps. But it is how human attention works, and pretending otherwise costs you customers.

**75%**

of people admit to judging a company's credibility based on its website design.

SOURCE: STANFORD WEB CREDIBILITY PROJECT

**38%**

will stop engaging with a site entirely if the layout is unattractive.

SOURCE: ADOBE — STATE OF CONTENT

## How to win the verdict on purpose

The good news: the first impression is not luck. It is designed. A handful of choices do most of the work in those first milliseconds.

- Clarity over clever: one clear message, generous white space, an obvious next step.
- Consistent colour and type: a small, deliberate palette signals control.
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Real, well-lit imagery: stock clichés quietly say generic; considered photography says real.

- Speed: a slow load is a bad first impression before design even gets a vote.
- Remove, do not add: clutter reads as chaos, and chaos reads as risk.

> **THE MEDIAKIM VIEW**
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> We treat the first 50 milliseconds as a design problem to be solved, not left to chance. Composition, colour, hierarchy and pace are tuned so that the instant verdict is yes — before your words ever get the chance to make the case.

## The bottom line

You are being judged in half a tenth of a second, on design, whether you like it or not. That is not a reason for anxiety — it is a lever. Win the first impression deliberately, and every word that follows is read by someone already inclined to believe you.

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### Sources


- Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek & Brown — Attention web designers: You have 50 milliseconds to make a good first impression (2006).
- Stanford Web Credibility Project — credibility judgments based on design.
- Adobe — research on layout and content engagement.

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## Want this done properly?

You can absolutely build on this yourself — that's why we wrote it. But if you'd rather have your brand, website and profile built as one considered system, that's exactly what we do. No obligation — just a conversation.

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