

Web Performance Today

Are your website's performance goals audacious enough?

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“We want you to be able to flick from one page to another as quickly as you can flick a page on a book. So we’re really aiming very, very high here... at something like 100 milliseconds.”

~Urs Hölzle, Senior VP Operations, Google

Urs said this at Velocity this past June (you can hear it at 3:45 of this video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MStKwEff_kY), and it's resonated with me ever since.

I talk a lot about the business value of performance and why there's no such thing as fast enough. But to my knowledge, **Google is the only big company out there that has truly internalized this philosophy.** In fact, I was down in Mountain View at the Googleplex a few weeks ago, and I heard on more than a few occasions the 100 ms goal spoken about in real terms — things like “This project will help us get closer to the goal.”



I'm Joshua Bixby. By day, I'm VP Application Acceleration at Radware, where I evangelize web performance both internally and externally. By night, I mine data about performance and its impact on users.

I'm not trying to imply that the folks at Google are the only people who care about performance. If you're reading this blog, you clearly care. But the folks at Google are the only people I've met who have a clearly stated performance goal: **all pages on their sites will load in 100 ms or less.** In fact, they take it one step further and have the audacity to try and get **all pages on the world wide web down to 100 ms.**

This is a fascinating contrast to the rest of our industry, which tends to focus on benchmarks as indicators of success:

- The average website in Keynote's "Business Top 40" takes 2.34 seconds to load.
- The average web page loads in 4.9 seconds.
- The average Fortune 500 website takes about 7 seconds.

So, do you consider your site successful if it loads in less than 7 seconds? Less than 4.9? 2.34? How do you decide where to take aim? Or do you take the attitude that you'll just sort of chip away at load time when you have time, and content yourself with the knowledge that everyone else has the same attitude?

Benchmarks are useful tools. They give us a sense of our place in the world, and how we perform relative to others. They're a good starting point for self-analysis. **The problem with benchmarks is when they tempt us to focus solely on how we compare to others, who may be as flawed as we are.** Google has wisely stepped outside the benchmark arena and has created a goal that has nothing to do with their competitors and everything to do with the actual people who use their products.

Google's decision to aim at 100 ms makes sense from a human factors perspective. 100 ms gives us the illusion of instantaneous response. **100 ms makes a web experience feel real.**

Is 100 ms possible? No, not right now. Will it be possible? Yes, most definitely, largely through the efforts of people who didn't settle for benchmarks.

My challenge to you is to ignore benchmarks. Create an audacious goal for your site. Evangelize it in your organization. And take aim.