Houston, we've had a problem.

For Apollo 13, it was certainly a life or death problem to run out of oxygen. No longer was the mission "to get to the moon and return safely," it was pure survival.

Sometimes in business it's like that. It may feel like we are moving along with our mission to reach the moon, but if there's an air leak, it's only a matter of time before we suffocate.

A website is no longer a luxury in business. If a company does not have a web presence, it's only a matter of time before the company is no longer viable. Why? Because we have created a **culture and society of immediate instant gratification that is driven by digital devices.** We have them on our desks, backpacks, pockets, wrists, and soon our eyewear. In fact, the website is the central marketing device under company control. It becomes the first and last place a potential client visits before making a purchase.

A website serves a few primary functions.
- A digital business card (where are you, what is your phone number)
- Basic messaging (What are you selling, products and services. Most importantly, why should I buy from you)
- Catalog (More detailed description of exactly the products and services)
- Lead generator (Information exchange for the right to communicate)
- Ecommerce platform (Ability to purchase without human interaction)

One of the biggest challenges for virtually every business—particularly smaller businesses—is deciding which level they want their site to perform. More importantly is understanding the order of operations. For example, like building a house, you can't install windows before the walls, and you can't install the walls without the foundation. The **order of operations starts with business card and culminates in Ecommerce.**

E-Commerce

Leads

Catalog

Messaging

Business Card

At American Stone, we would ultimately like our site to **serve all of these functions.** Unfortunately, we have challenges at every level. To fix things, we need to start at the foundational level. We need to have a healthy oxygen supply. We need to plug the most obvious leaks and move forward.

Bounce Rate
Bounce rate is a key indicator of a website's health. A healthy site will have somewhere between 26 to 70 percent, with lower numbers better. Of course, this is a huge variance. An ideal goal for us should be to start under the 70 percent mark, with an ultimate goal of 50 or less. We have had real difficulty in ascertaining the American-stone.com bounce rate. In part, because of the integrated nature of Odoo. Until the latest iteration of Google Analytics, our rate appeared to be in the 20s; however, the new G4 version is allowing us to see a bit more clearly. To get a better picture, we have reinstituted the IP disregard for Salt Lake. Unfortunately, we can't do the same for the other locations since they don't have static IP addresses. More importantly, we have removed the home page and login page from the equation to arrive at our **current site wide bounce rate of 89 percent.** We do have a few pages that rate in the mid 70s and below, but only a few. Those pages do pull the rate down to the 89 number. Unfortunately, the majority of our pages are solidly in the 90s.

What is It
So, what exactly is a bounce rate? Great question. Let's use an example from our own key phrases. We currently have a page that ranks for the search, "how to cut pavers with a chisel."

The page it would take a visitor to is one titled, "Chisel Cut Flats – Brindle." There is nothing on the page about cutting pavers with a chisel, and the word "pavers" doesn't even appear. This is obviously receiving a rank for something that we did not intend, nor do we particularly want to for this page. Funny thing, neither does a potential web surfer looking for "how to cut pavers with a chisel." By the way, this appears to be the only key phrase it ranks for.

If by some chance an individual landed on this page with this key phrase, they would quickly see that the page does not answer their question and leave, or bounce. By not immediately providing the requested information to the instant gratification surfer, our rate goes up.

Negative Impacts

The impact to **SEO for Google is very important**. We first have to acknowledge the strange animal that is Google. They don't share what their algorithm does exactly with anyone. I've even heard it said anecdotally, the algorithm has grown so unwieldy that even the engineers at Alphabet don't know exactly how it does its magic. What we do know is what is being observed.

Google makes money by selling ads. To do this requires their platform to provide value, and to provide that value within the few seconds a web user will look at a page, the results they display must answer the question the user is looking for. The better the answers, the better it is for Google's bottom line.

What that means is pages that don't give the correct answers are given a lower score and pages like "Chisel Cut Flats – Brindle" fall in the rankings. **High bounce rates kill SEO**. Google punishes and lowers the ranking of pages that don't answer the asked question.

Impact to Users and Branding

There are some startling results from multiple studies that show how poor performing websites impact users.

If we look at the first functions of a website—business card and basic messaging—surfers have some high expectations.

Two Seconds is Too Long

Half of users expect a page to load in two seconds or less

40% Are Out

40 percent of users leave if it takes longer than three seconds to load

80% Aren't Coming Back

Upward of 80 percent of users who have a poor experience with a site never return

75% Opt for Someone Else

About 75 percent of users who experience poor performance of a site during peak use times go to a competitor's site

43% Think and Say Bad Things

43 percent of users who have a negative website experience transfer that **negative perception of the company and tell others**

Across different studies, these numbers will shift slightly within margins of error by a few percentage points. Regardless, the story is the same. **Poor website experience damages customer loyalty and retention.** After all, those surfers are only one click away from a competitor, never to return.

In today's world of hyper communication and tails wagging dogs, a brand and image can be destroyed overnight by a few negative social comments. Unfortunately, these types of social contagions can spread rapidly. To keep a good name, we need to mitigate that poor experience.

We have the stated goal and desire to live in the **Ecommerce world. For poor performing websites that story is even more grim.**

- Amazon discovered that each additional 100ms delay in response costs the company one percent. For Amazon, that equals $3.8 billion annually. Amazon's load goal is half a second.

- A British study showed retailers lose £59.6bn annually because of poor site performance

- Walmart discovered a two percent higher conversion per second of faster response

In order to effectively fulfil the desired goals of our website, it's important that we figure out how to fix our oxygen supply.

What can we do to build an air purifier? In a world without any cost or other resource restraints, we would simply build a new better Saturn V and blast off to save the day. We don't live there, so we have to do what we can.

Content is King
If we go back to our site functionality, **we need to not only drive but retain traffic**. The only way to retain traffic is to provide users the information they are looking for. In the case of the first need, phone number is essential. We do have that in a good location on the site. There are some challenges with the way it is being displayed. Some small changes can improve that.

The big challenge begins with the next level—messaging. It is important to clarify that when dealing **with SEO, sites don't rank, pages rank.** Except for a few pages, **our website has very little written content.** Without some sort of actual content that answers the user's question, a page doesn't function well. The example we have been using involves the "how to cut pavers with a chisel" that resolves to the "Chisel Cut Flats – Brindle" page. As mentioned, the page content doesn't mention anything about cutting pavers with a chisel. There is no meta description for the page, and no meta key words or phrases included. The search bot is seeing the title of the page that includes two words from the search phrase, "chisel" and "cut." From there, it is **extrapolating that the content might answer the question**. Of course, it doesn't. From this example you can see that the H1 title of the page has an impact on search phrases.

Ultimately, if we create the appropriate H1, with content that includes our desired key phrase, and ensure the meta data description does the same, we can answer the user's question. A more refined **content strategy alone can help dramatically improve bounce rate**. Beginning with the most important pages, we will adjust, and adapt by adding the right content. As time goes on, we will add content to the third, fourth, and deeper level pages for overall site stability.

This strategy is the basis of effective SEO. Without this foundation, just adding desired keywords to random pages, most often our homepage, provides zero answer to the user question. Even if we buy ads or words on Google, without the appropriate place to land i.e. answer the search question, we still encourage bounce.

Better Structure can Improve Bounce Rate
When we pick up a book, we start from the left upper right and progressively move through the book until it ultimately concludes—typically in the lower right. Books were/are fairly easy to navigate. They have sections, chapters, and page numbers. If you want to find something, you might look in the table of contents. Regardless, there is an established method for progression.

Websites aren't as straightforward. An individual can literally enter at any point/page and move in virtually any direction. When a site is structured to lead and guide a user, it makes the user less likely to lose interest and leave quickly.

The first step is/was to create pillar pages that define the type of projects we support. From there, product categories and then individual products flow downward. The beauty of this **structure is that it starts right from the content**. Pillars answer the basic questions of what and why. As these pages mature, we can place video content that provides further value to the user.

There is a high probability that we may need to add additional pillars to the current structure. We also need to reconfigure the homepage to support and lead people where we want them to go.

Catalog Challenges
We also have two other serious challenges regarding content on pages.
- There are some pages where we currently aren't able to add any content. These include all the pages we would consider a product category page. For example, the Western Interlock page. This applies to all the pages currently listed beneath the Products menu. This has been attempted to be resolved in the past without success. It has been reinitiated with the developers once again, hopping for a better result.
- Adding content to a real product page has the unfortunate result of adding the content to both the American and Star sites. The challenge becomes that we would be competing for the same key phrases for both sites. This too has been requested of the developers to help resolve.

Preliminary research indicates that both of these issues would be resolved with a newer version of Odoo.

Elephant in The Capsule (room)—Site Speed/Responsiveness

Seconds	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Bounce Rate	7%	6%	11%	24%	38%	46%	53%	59%	61%	65%

Earlier, we discussed and showed studies that indicate how destructive slow and unresponsive sites can be. Every added second increases bounce rate. Our current website implementation shows **more than a six second load for each page**, which indicates this is a system wide problem. **The typical speed of sites that rank on the first page of results is 1.65 seconds.** Recommendations to reduce this bounce rate killer include:

- Engaging the devs for better code (already in progress)
- Upgrading the Odoo server with greater speed, response, and capacity
- Upgrading the Odoo software to a more modern robust version
- Upgrading the com line for Salt Lake
- Installing a dedicated com line just for the Odoo Server
- Removing video cameras and other high bandwidth devices (placing them on their own com lines)
- Moving the Odoo implementation to the cloud

I personally don't believe code solutions will make a significant impact on our site's responsiveness and speed; however, we will see what code enhancements can do to alleviate the challenges.

Current State
It will be nearly impossible to expand lead generating goals without the wall being torn down. This says nothing of moving onto the moonshot of Ecommerce. We will start with what we have, but in order to perform optimally, other things will need to be done.