

Use the 80-20 Rule to Increase Your Website's Effectiveness

Sep 2 2010 by [Oleg Mokhov](#) | [39 Comments](#) | [Stumble](#) [Bookmark](#)



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Want to increase your website's conversion rate? Want more subscribers, opt-ins, members, customers? How about doing **less work** while you're at it?

Too good to be true? Nope.

It's possible if you apply the 80-20 rule: focus on the **20% that will bring you 80% of the results.**

By doing an 80-20 optimization of your website — whittling your pages down to the 20% of things that produces 80% of the results — you'll not only have a simpler site that'll convert better, but you'll have less work in developing and managing it since there'll be fewer elements to think about.

Okay, so the above claim about less work was only partly true — you'll have to do a bit more work upfront, but the benefit is less work and more rewards afterwards.

80-20 What?

The 80-20 rule is another term for the [Pareto principle](#).

While dropping the term "Pareto principle" will make you sound smart and hip to your

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friends — not to mention increasing your conversion factor with the opposite sex — we'll go with the simple and self-explanatory "80-20 rule."

So what the heck is this 80-20 rule? It means that 80% of all outcomes come from 20% of the causes.



Business management thinker Joseph M. Juran suggested the principle and named it

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after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto who observed in 1906 that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. Juran developed the principle after observing that 20% of the pea pods in his garden contained 80% of the peas.

The 80-20 rule is also a common rule of thumb in business, i.e. 80% of your sales come from 20% of your clients.

The 80-20 Rule Can be Applied to Your Website

The 80-20 rule applies to anything. Personal tasks, business, software, whatever.

The 80-20 rule can *even* be applied your website.

Hey, websites — that's the topic of this article. What a coincidence!

Applied in designing and running a website, we can interpret the 80-20 rule to say that 20% of things on your site would give you 80% of your desired results. What this means is that you should focus on that 20% and really perfect it, instead of spreading yourself thin.

Ruthlessly [get rid of the other 80% of things](#) as they're non-essential details that only give you 20% of the results (the return of investment for that other 80% is low).

Some examples:

- **Sidebar widgets** that aren't being used
- **Social media buttons** (how many users do you think click on the Digg button on the article out of the thousands that visit it?)
- A **list of the latest blog posts** on the sidebar (users can go to the front page, it's redundant)
- **Main menu links** that aren't being viewed much such as FAQ and Help pages (move them somewhere else)

After taking things out, perfect and focus on what's left.

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Why Care About 80-20?

Yeah, yeah, so the 80-20 rule is all fine and dandy, you might say.

"But what's in it for me?" you might ask. "Why should I care about 80-20-ing my website? What are the benefits?"

All valid questions.

First, here's how it benefits your website visitors:

- Your visitors experience a lean, mean and simple site
- Less distraction and clicking away from the main goal or call-to-action
- Faster page response times
- The stuff that's left will be higher quality because you can concentrate on them and perfect them

And, even better, here's how it benefits you:

- Higher conversion rate: more subscribers, opt-ins, members, customers
- A higher percentage will go to your primary call-to-action
- Less work to do and more time to do it since you're only doing that 20% which actually matters
- Easier design and management work — less elements to deal with

5 Steps to 80-20 Your Website

1. Figure out what's your **main goal and/or call-to-action** (the 20%).
2. Round up all the rest of the things and elements on your site that **don't pertain** to your main goal/call-to-action (the 80%).
3. **Toss out the unneeded elements** from your site; easier said than done, but it's a critical step.
4. Determine if your changes are effective; use [split testing](#).
5. Tweak and perfect your site's design and interface so that the remaining 20% are **prominent and emphasized**.

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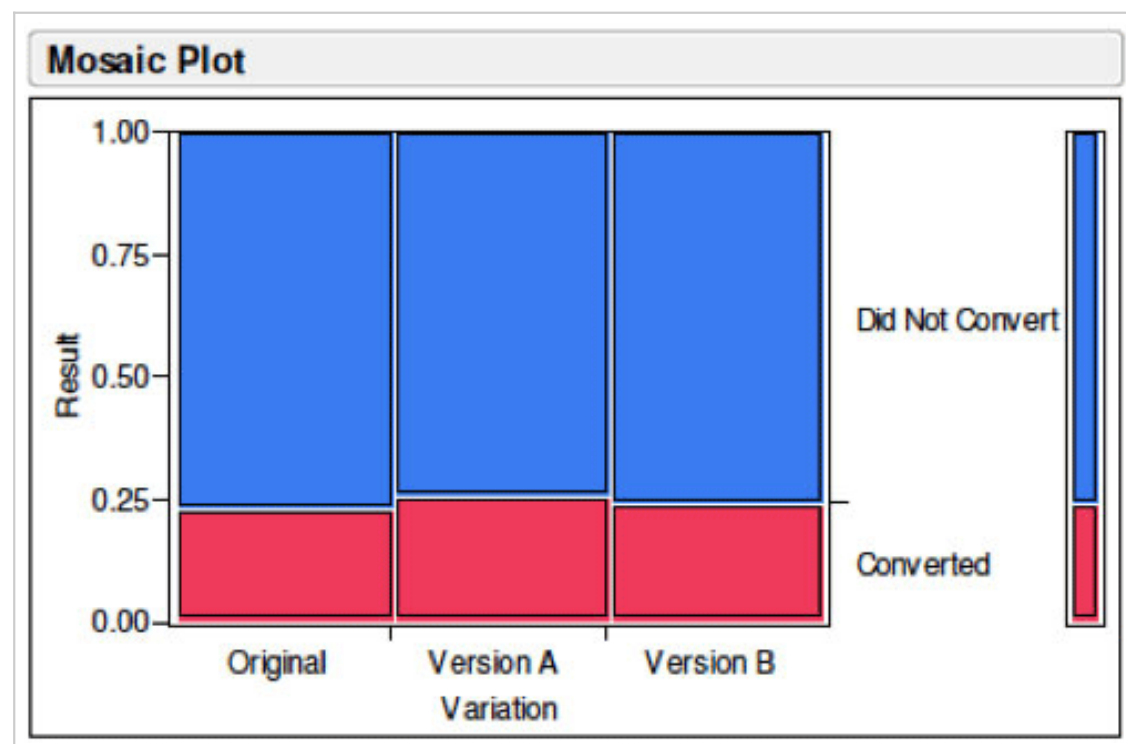
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Think 80-20 Is Bullshitake? Here's Proof It Works

80-20 rule proponent and analytics wizard Tim Ferriss has a [website optimization case study](#) of how an 80-20-optimized website received a **20%+ higher conversion rate**.



The best part? Only a few simple changes were needed to be made.

It was just a matter of reducing the homepage such that it only contained 20% of the elements that produced 80% of the results. The rest were tossed out.

These are the essential 20%:

- Clean call-to-action button
- Simple value statement
- Clear media credibility indicators

The Case Study: Daily Burn

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The homepage originally looked like this.

62,085,242 Calories Burned!

[Sign Up Now. It's Free!](#)

What Gyminee users are up to:



calvin_42 met a Running goal!



StevenG met a Swimming goal!



kpayne met a Body Weight goal!



Ready2BfitForever wrote a new message in [What are you doing to improve yourself?](#)



Ready2BfitForever wrote a new message in [What are you doing to improve yourself?](#)



woodwardonline added [Cheese Single 2 percent](#) as a favorite food.



jharris won the [VHT Challenge](#) challenge!

From The Blog

Essential Fatty Acids



I've stumbled upon alot of research recently regarding Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs), including how long chain Omega-3 fatty acids modulate hunger signals.

More on that later. In the meantime, as a primer, an essential nutrient is

1. Required by the body for proper function and,
2. One that cannot be made in sufficient quantities by the body and thus must be obtained through ones diet

The Essential...

[Read more.](#)

Gyminee is a Finalist

We're excited to announce that Gyminee is a finalist in [Mashable's Open Web Awards](#). The Open Web Awards are:

the only multilingual international online voting competition that covers major innovations in web technology. Through an online nominating and voting process, the Open Web Awards recognizes and honors the top achievements in 26 categories.

If you think Gyminee is the best fitness site o...

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Featured On:    

[Click Here To Start Improving Your Health Today!](#)

FEATURED EXERCISE



Concentration Curl

[Find more Gyminee exercises](#)

FITNESS TOPICS



Nordic Nightmare added a post to the [1 pound per week, too much?](#) topic.



owen18 added a post to the [Sleep Goal](#) topic.



Stephie8 added a post to the [Recommendation - Why Protein - no sweeteners](#) topic.

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Not bad, right? Nice, simple design.

But can you tell why it wasn't optimized?

Go ahead, look. I'll wait.

Back? Okay, so there's actually a bunch of unnecessary elements on that homepage that didn't fit with the main objective of the page; the 80%.

The things that don't relate to the main call-to-action, which converts visitors by getting them to register:

- A number tracker of how many calories burned
- User activity list
- Latest blog posts
- A bunch of junk in the footer
- Menu navigation at the top

So the website was 80-20-optimized by trimming the unimportant 80% of the elements from the homepage.

The simplified homepage now looks like this.

The image shows a screenshot of the Gyminee website homepage. At the top, there is a dark blue header with the Gyminee logo and the tagline "Stay motivated. Have fun. Get fit." To the right of the logo are "Login" and "Sign Up" buttons. Below the header, the main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a "My Locker Room" dashboard with a profile picture, a "Body Weight Progress" line graph, and various navigation links. The right column is titled "Workout and Food Tracking" and contains a descriptive paragraph, four bullet points with icons (Track your workouts, Monitor your diet, Meet new friends, Reach your goals), and two prominent call-to-action buttons: "Signup For Free" and "Take The Tour". Below this main content, there is a "Featured On" section with logos for TechCrunch, washingtonpost.com, radar, and Mashable. A large blue link "Click Here To Start Improving Your Health Today!" is centered below the featured logos. At the bottom, a dark grey footer contains navigation links for "Explore: Workout Programs | Food Search | Forums | Challenges | Exercise Library", "Contact Us | Advertising | Blog | Store | Legal Disclaimer | Privacy Policy", and a copyright notice: "© 2007-2008 Gyminee Corporation. Gyminee™ is a trademark of Gyminee Corporation."

What a huge improvement.

80% of the items were removed, leaving only the 20% of items that function to increase the conversion rate:

- The value statement and description
- The call-to-action button
- Media credibility indicators

So how did they know that the conversion rate increased? Two separate tests were done, [split testing](#) the simplified home page against the original (50% of visitors were

sent to one design, 50% to the other).

In the first test, there was a 21.1% increase in the conversion rate. In the second test, a 19.8% increase.

So, there was a 20% increase in the conversion rate just from 80-20-ing their website. As you've seen, pretty simple stuff was done — no heavy overhaul needed.

But they didn't stop there — they freakin' 80-20'ed even more. It's how it should be done.

They came up with 2 more variations of a new design that was even simpler.

Variation B

Gyminee
Stay motivated. Have fun. Get fit.

Sign Up | Login

Great with Mashable
PEOPLE'S CHOICE WINNER

Track your workouts.
Monitor your diet.
Meet new friends.
Reach your goals.

Join for Free!

Featured On: [washingtonpost.com](#) [TechCrunch](#) [iFadar](#) [Mashable](#)

Featured Workout Program:
Killer Abs
★★★★☆

[View all exercise videos](#)

Most Gyminee Users:
Lose 6.2 lbs of fat
Gain 5.75 lbs of muscle

Looking For a Challenge?
[Lose 20 Lbs](#)
[Run Across America](#)
[Swim The English Channel](#)

Stay fit and motivated through our wireless app. We explore current interactive technologies to determine the possible applications within the fitness industry and a selection device.

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Variation C



And sure enough, both were an improvement over the new simplified design, with variation B being the clear winner.

Why?

There are **2 big changes**:

- Value statement was made even more clear
- Much more noteworthy: one signup button instead of both the signup and tour button (so now instead of 2 options, a visitor has only one option)

By using the 80-20 rule to simplify their homepage, these folks optimized their site and increased the conversion rate.

So yeah. The 80-20 rule. It really works in improving a website's effectiveness.

80-20 Your Website to Increase Conversions

If you want to increase your website's conversion rate — and set yourself up to do less work while you're at it — then you absolutely need to 80-20 your website.

You've now hopefully seen that the 80-20 rule applied to your website isn't bullshitake but something that'll actually help you.

Look at what 20% of things on your site would give you 80% of your desired results: more subscribers, opt-ins, members, customers. Then only have those elements on your site, while getting rid of the rest of the 80% of elements.

By using the 80-20 rule to optimize your website, you'll be well on your way to increasing your site's effectiveness.

Now go out there and destroy that unnecessary 80% from your website, soldier.

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About the Author



Oleg Mokhov is the [world's most mobile electronic musician](#) and co-founder of the royalty free music store [Soundtrackster](#). He was born in Russia, but raised in the US. Follow him on Twitter as [@olegmokhov](#).

39 Comments



Joel

September 2nd, 2010

nice case studies – thanks for this!



Office Cavalry

September 2nd, 2010

I think a lot can be said for this rule. When I look at my own websites, and those others that I use, the majority are so over-complicated, so you end up spending too much time on areas which are unimportant.



kpjothivelu

September 2nd, 2010

really very useful resource :) thanks to post SR:)



Sankar Datti

September 2nd, 2010

Wonderful Case Study Oleg Mokhov.

Thank you so much for revealing your personal experience. I need to test it out on my personal blog. You are right only 20% matters a lot, Split Testing is the best way to test things.

Thanks
Sankar



tripdragon

September 2nd, 2010

Wait.... Version B the really busy one. The fugly like one. That worked even better? Then that would prove ugly works in sales on the net.

There was a fish article about that awhile back.



Francesco

September 2nd, 2010

Thanks for useful resource :-)

Francesco



Young

September 2nd, 2010

fantastic. i should just refer clients to this article before meeting with them.



Mark @ Alchemy United

September 2nd, 2010

Good article. I'm a fan of the 80/20 as well. However, I apply it inversely.

Instead of always shooting for 100% I ask, what does it take to meet 80% of Biz Need X? That gets divided and conquered. Then back to the remaining 20% and so on.

Let's face, shooting for 100% is overkill, if not impossible. Tackle 80% (with 20% of the effort?), get the ball in play, work forward forward from there.

Thanks again.



Jacob Gube

September 2nd, 2010

@Sankar Datti: Just to clarify, the case study was not done by Oleg, it was done by [Tim Ferriss](#) for one of his start-ups. Oleg just presented it here as an example of how the 80-20 rule can work.



Young

September 2nd, 2010

@Mark: I think you misunderstood the concept, but I can't blame you cuz of that stupid pie chart. Putting the principle in a pie chart is ever so misleading not to mention completely improper. I wasn't going to say anything but now that someone's misunderstood...



rushel

September 2nd, 2010

This was a really informative article—there are a lot of stuff on my website that I think aren't really necessarily making an impact. Also, I think if I found out what my readers enjoyed most, I could streamline the content better...and thus adopt the 80-20 rule.



Alex

September 2nd, 2010

Fascinating.



Sardar Mohkim Khan

September 2nd, 2010

Thanks for this one . clarifies a lot of confusion for me.



Matthew Wehrly

September 2nd, 2010

Thank you for this post. It would seem google was on to something all those years ago...

I still cannot understand why people use the yahoo "portal"

Thanks again, awesome post Oleg!



Youpele

September 2nd, 2010

Very informative and instructional post on applying the 80-20 thing. Pareto rule is very much like the universal laws of nature-you plant the seed God/Universe takes care of the rest;-)



Giselle

September 2nd, 2010

Thanks for the tips! I love using this rule in my designs and it does work!



tripdragon

September 2nd, 2010

Just so I am clear. Variation B had even better results right?
This -> http://images.sixrevisions.com/2010/08/23-07_gyminee_varb.jpg
(the flickr link goes to Variation C)

From what I read: And sure enough, both were an improvement over the new simplified design, with variation B being the clear winner."

But that was better right? Cause to me it looks a lot like the very first image with the footer clutter and that fake 3d.

If this is so, I am calling shenanigans. Cause that's a loop back to the first website. Only more fugly.



Steven

September 2nd, 2010

It is a plausible concept, but the proof of concept case study simply isn't significant enough to warrant the changes most websites would need to go through for it to work. Most websites are simply low traffic and do not benefit from a lot of these kind of concepts.

That aside, I totally think it is something to add to our repertoire when the right project arises.



Tim

September 2nd, 2010

Great article,

One question, how would you convince an SEO fanatic that this is a good idea?

gonna try out 80-20 myself



imran khan

September 3rd, 2010

Very nice post!!! i love the 80 - 20 rule idea



Jim

September 3rd, 2010

Great article, gonna look at trying it myself. . .just one question? By focusing on the 20% and making those changes don't you just end up creating another 80-20 scenario with your re-designed and lean website? So 80% of what you just did is now essentially useless? Just a thought. . .



Edwin Sandoval



September 3rd, 2010

We regularly forgot this rule and finish to work more in the less important. I'll try to maintain this rule in my mind in my futures projects :)



Bjørn Johansen

September 4th, 2010

Nice one! I have just cut away a lot of noise on my webpage. It's to soon to have results, but I expect a major improvement.



Stefan Stanley

September 4th, 2010

Thanks for sharing this very informative article David. I am a firm believer of the "less is more" concept, as often times there seems to be too much clutter when it comes to web design. I am currently in the process of revamping my website, and have found this article particularly helpful as I begin the process.

Thanks again!



Andrew Male

September 4th, 2010

Interesting article, thanks very much!

As with ant large, cumbersome site it always benefits to stand back and take a broad look at how the design is working and influencing the customer's choice. As a developer it can be easy to look at the finer details on a page; button size, text wording or considering 'the fold', but what really is needed is to strip down to the essentials and push the customer along the desired path.



Danielle Uskovic

September 5th, 2010

Well written advice for anyone with a website or thinking of getting one. Sound

principles to follow to get success. Design and content are important but the Pareto rules. Nice one.



Prashant Vadher

September 6th, 2010

Really Great and Wonderful Case Study.
I will test it out on my personal blog.

Thanks
Prashant Vadher



Philip Brown

September 6th, 2010

I like the idea of this article, and yes the 80/20 rule is significant in business as well as a whole lot of other areas of life. How could you truly measure and analyse this though? Also if you applied the same thoughts to blog/content creation, does this not totally confound the idea of the long tail? I do like the work of Tim Ferriss and yes I agree it speaks for itself. What do you think about the whole long tail aspect of design?



magdmartin

September 6th, 2010

The idea is good, but the basic of Pareto is not used here. Pareto starts with a statistical analysis. Here you jump directly to the action part. I will be very interested in a method to show how you selected the 20% of your content generate 80% of your conversion.

I've used Pareto a lot in Supply Chain, this is impressive how this principle works everywhere !

Just as an opening question, how do you get well on google if you remove 80% of your content ? ;)



Mike Rowan

September 6th, 2010

I agree with keeping things simple, but would the cutdown in content adversely affect the seo on the front page?



MAJ3STIC

September 8th, 2010

I definitely like this article and case studies. I really think that this version of the case study works better: http://images.sixrevisions.com/2010/08/23-06_gyminee_new.jpg

The reason being it's much cleaner and lots of space and not cluttered. I'm actually really shocked that the final image is the one that would convert more visitors even though it's not as beautiful as the one above. Just my thoughts.



Deepanjolie Figg

September 8th, 2010

This is terrific stuff – thanks Oleg!!

Been in web content writing for 6 years now and never thought of seriously applying website effectiveness tips like these, which i often write for my clients – for myself. Am off to implement these tips for my website!



Jason Morton

September 8th, 2010

I agree with what tripdragon posted. Variations B & C both added unnecessary (Ex. The Abs video) back to the page. I like this concept but it would seem you would have to do a study of adding and removing most of the items on the page one at a time to get a true idea of what was working or not.



ronaldofs



September 8th, 2010

Definitely going to start adding this kind of thought to my web projects.

Great article! thx



Oleg Mokhov

September 9th, 2010

@tripdragon You're right, Variation B should link to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/timferriss/3813626625/sizes/o/in/photostream/>. Jacob, this is easily fixed, right?

@magdmartin This is mostly for the design of your website, but for content it can be trimming the unrelated articles, pages, etc. Not fully 80-20 yes, but better than nothing perhaps? Good question ;)

@everyone else, I agree Variation B & C weren't as good looking, but it showed that a better design increased the conversion rate despite a pretty face. But once the site was rechristened as Daily Burn it went back to looking slick again IMO.



Rafi

September 9th, 2010

hey this is a great post on how to improve conversion rate on your website. The 80-20% is a very helpful testing that can help improve a website's conversion according to your article. But how about a blog's conversion rate??? A blog normally has a lot of things on the sidebar.. right?



Optimizely

September 9th, 2010

This is great stuff! I love the case studies. The 80-20 rule is a great way to remember that simplicity of design often works best!



Pedro

September 10th, 2010

80-20 rule will run endless. Its not a stop process. The case study is a good example but apply again the 80-20 rule. It will still work for improving.

80-20 is part of your life.

80% of your work is in 20% of the items.

80% of your income is from 20% of your costumers.

80% of what you say is from 20% of your vocabulary.

20% of what you eat is the cause of 80% of your fat.

...



Ryan

March 22nd, 2011

Some great case studies, thank you. I have found that Pareto's can be applied to many facets of life, not just business and making money.

Health for example. Most people have a difficult time sticking with diets and exercise regimens. Apply Pareto's. It's okay to snack a little and have your simple pleasures (coffee, cold beer, slice of cake), that's what makes us human and makes life fun. Instead of being a Nazi and cutting out those important things, focus on cutting out the bad foods that you don't really care about.

Don't add that extra butter to your bread when you are already adding jam. Go for low fat milk with your cereal instead of whole, you probably won't notice the difference. Stop snacking on those breakfast donuts that you don't even like simply because they are in the office kitchen.

Keep the 20% of great food that you love, drop the 80% of food that you don't care about.

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