



IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

"Improve...or melt away."

Fall, 2001

www.egmstrategy.com

Volume 1 Issue 2

Web Profits Come Through Experience

Nearly half of the people who try to make a purchase through your web site will fail. This startling statistic comes from recent research conducted by the Nielsen/Norman Group, leaders in the field of usability testing for the web.

"E-commerce sites lose almost half of their potential sales because users cannot use the site. In other words, with better usability, the average site could increase its current sales by 79%," says Dr. Jakob Nielsen.

The revenue lost because of a poor user experience can amount to millions of dollars for some businesses. The amount of lost revenue can mean the difference between success and failure, even for smaller businesses.

Our own research confirms these alarming numbers. In a recent study of two clients, we found failure rates as high as over 80%. The potential revenue lost added up to nearly a million dollars per year.

Fortunately, there are ways to recover a substantial proportion of this lost revenue by focusing more on the customer experience and usability of your web project.

By systematically re-evaluating how real users interact with your web site, you can uncover obstacles that are preventing customers from completing transactions.



Give your users a hand in using your web site. A good customer experience means increased revenue, more repeat customers, and increased customer satisfaction.

This process goes beyond just "common sense." It requires observing real users interacting with your web site. By watching where customers fail, you can provide a roadmap to providing a better user experience.

Obstacles can be found at nearly every stage of the purchase process including locating a product, placing a product into a shopping cart and attempting to checkout.

For more information on what poor user experience may be costing your business, check out the Case Studies section of our web site for an article entitled, "What is Poor Usability Costing You?"

Watching Is Better Than Listening

The old adage "Do as I say, not as I do" doesn't hold true when applied to getting feedback from users of your web site.

Users will often say one thing and then do something else entirely. To discover the truth, you must actually observe how real users interact with your web site.

The "focus group" has been a common tactic used by marketing-types for years. And while focus groups and other types of surveys do have a place in business planning, they may not always be the best method for improving your web site.

All too often, users will try to give the answers that they believe are expected of them or those answers that are seen as more socially desirable. However, this doesn't help web designers build a better web site.

The best way to get solid information on improving the user experience for your web project is to observe the problems real users have when using your site.

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*-Jakob Nielsen, Alertbox
August 2001*

Inside This Issue:

Web Profits Come Through Experience
Watching Is Better Than Listening
Improve The Search Function of Your Web Site
User Experience Vs. Traditional Marketing

page 1
page 1
page 2
page 2



Improve the Search Function of Your Web Site

As many as two-thirds of the visitors to your web site will use the search function at some point. If you do not have a search function, you may be losing customers who feel frustrated in finding the information they are seeking.

Even if you do have a search function, you need to be sure that it meets the needs of your customers in a way that they perceive as valuable and helpful.

Here are a few things to consider when designing the search system for your web site:

- Make search available on every page. Don't make users search for your search function.
- Make sure that the search results are helpful to your users. Good page titles can go a long way.
- Consider developing an advanced search capability to allow for more in-depth searches.
- Allow users to refine their searches, especially if many results are returned.
- Make sure that your search engine is flexible enough to handle variations on the names of items. What you call an item may not be the same name used by a customer.

Finally, keep track of the searches conducted on your web site. If you find something is commonly searched for, it may be an indication that the section is not appropriately placed within your site.

You can also use frequent search information to create specialty pages to better service your customers by providing easy access to the exact type of information they are seeking in one easy-to-use web page. If you make it easier for customers, they are more likely to buy!

User Experience Vs. Traditional Marketing

In difficult economic times, organizations doing business on the web often focus solely on traditional marketing methods to weather the storm. However, this may not provide the best return on their investment (ROI).

For example, banner advertising response rates have dropped, on average, to below one percent. That means that less than one out of a hundred people who see your ad will actually visit your web site.

Similarly, average conversion rate (i.e., the ratio of the number of visitors who

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actually become buyers) is around three percent. This means that the actual power of your banner ad to create a new customer is far smaller than once believed. Your banner may have to be shown thousands of times just to produce a single new customer.

Unfortunately, there isn't much that can be done to increase customer response to banner ads or other Internet marketing materials. The good news is that there are numerous things that can be done to influence the other side of the equation. Conversion rate is often related to customer experience.

You Should Clean Your House Before You Invite Company Over

If you are not converting browsers into buyers then the money you spend to bring people to your web site may be wasted. Emphasizing the user experience

first, can not only increase revenue from your existing web traffic, but it can also increase the ROI of your other marketing activities.

Traditional marketing activities suffer from a few inherent drawbacks. They are time-limited in that the benefits gained are experienced over a relatively brief period of time. They are offer-specific. Benefits from one marketing activity do not necessarily help other activities. And finally, they are expensive for the return on investment.

User experience activities have none of these problems. Increasing the usability of your web site is not time-limited because the benefits persist long after the work has been done. These activities also benefit nearly every aspect of your web project and are not tied to any one product or offer. And finally, the ROI is significantly better than traditional marketing efforts and may actually increase the ROI of those efforts as well.

While user experience issues may be seen as an easy target for cutbacks during hard times, progressive companies are using the opportunity to focus on activities such as these that lead to very stable results.

CONTACT US

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