



Improving the User Experience to Maximize Results

By Danielle Leitch, Executive VP, Client Strategy

www.MoreVisibility.com

For more information or questions, please contact
Danielle Leitch at dleitch@morevisibility.com

Google

YAHOO!

Enhance
INTERACTIVE

msn.
Search

 KaNoodle

overture
a Yahoo! Company

Ask
Jeeves
Ask.com

 AOL

findwhat
.com

 business.com

40% of users do not return to sites at which they have had a negative experience.

Source: Forrester

As online marketing and Internet usage continues to grow, there continues to be a more serious focus on understanding and improving the Experience of the Web site visitor- the "User Experience". If the clicks being brought to your site are not converting or progressing through the site as you feel that they should, then this exercise (objectively assessing the site and making appropriate changes) is a mission critical project for your company's online success. By incrementally enhancing the customer experience you will improve your order-conversion rate, the metric used to describe the rate at which Web visitors take your desired action steps.

USER EXPERIENCE IS THE KEY TO SITE PERFORMANCE

A site's User Experience takes into account the full spectrum experience that is provided for visitors. It includes the factors of presentation, organization, and interaction, and how each adds to the overall experience users have at a web site.

Presentation is how your site appears to your audience, **organization** is the structure of your site, and **interaction** is how your site behaves in response to user actions. Because all interactions between your audience and your company occur through the site's presentation, it must be understandable and engaging. If the web site or landing page is not clear, users might not be able to make it to their destination i.e., the point of CONVERSION. If the web site or landing pages are not engaging, visitors might not be motivated to continue moving through the site. When a site doesn't do what the visitor expects and wants it to, they may get confused and leave. No company can afford a web site that doesn't go a long way toward satisfying its users.

MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE

If you are selling products, how easily can people find what they're looking for and easily follow through to a sale? If you have more brochure like content, how easily can they find their particular area of interest? Always try to diminish the number of clicks that visitors have to make in order to purchase an item or take any other action step? In Paid search especially, direct the visitors to the pages

that are closely aligned with the keyword they searched and the descriptive copy that appeared in the search result.

DIFFERENT URGENCIES FOR DIFFERENT VISITORS?

A portion of your visitors arrive because they are already familiar with your company and type in your url. Others will arrive through a link in a search result. There is a marginally greater degree of latitude with those who knew of you when it comes to their willingness to hunt around until they find what they are seeking. The safest approach is to assume that anyone who comes to the site needs to be shown the GPS red carpet. In other words, make it extremely easy for them to navigate the site (like the GPS systems in many autos today) and incorporate a high degree of intuitiveness as well.

ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR COMPANY

There is no question that the credibility of the Internet and people's willingness to do business with companies that they discover online has increased exponentially over the past few years. That being said, it remains vital that prospects be able to achieve a high comfort level with your organization. Do you have a place where visitors can find out more on your company and validate whom you really are and how long you've been in business? Sharing these insights will and can help build trust and credibility. It is also important to display your physical address and phone number. Bios (with photos) of the management team are beneficial as well. Communicate your industry certifications, qualifications and any awards clearly to visitors. Furthermore, make sure that your site contains a "privacy policy" and security for e-commerce transactions (if appropriate).

FRESH NEWS, CONTENT & PRODUCTS DRIVE PRODUCTIVE AND REPEAT VISITORS

Is your content from 2004 or from this month? Visitors are more apt to interact with companies who update their sites frequently. Conversely, visitors will be less apt to remain on a site if it features content that is outdated. Attention to detail is a key point here. If for example you have a section on the site which talks about upcoming trade shows where you will be exhibiting, make sure they are in the future, not the past. Featuring discontinued or out of stock products is also counter productive to bonding with site visitors.

TRACK VISITORS MOVING THROUGH YOUR WEB SITE

Good web site analytics will help you understand what visitors are doing on the site, including pinpointing sections or links that are turning people off or leading them astray. By the same token, an analytics tool will shed light on which parts of the site are actually performing well, thereby enabling the creation of more of that type of content.

It's important to keep a very open mind when reviewing this sort of data. What may have seemed like a good / creative idea when implemented may not actually play out well with your visitors. Retain the ability to test different approaches within the site to objectively assess what delivers the best results. Maintain the objectivity to make changes based upon what is learned. This can become difficult when there are multiple contributors to a sites (individuals or departments) and decisions can become more subjective than objective.

CHECK OUT COMPETITOR'S SITES

For most businesses, it's easy to identify who your most significant online competitors are. It can be incredibly helpful to scrutinize these sites for their strengths / weaknesses. Put yourself in the shoes of the individual who is looking at your site and your competitors and figure out (unemotionally) where they are most apt to leave a footprint.

TYPICAL SITE HURDLES TO AVOID

Jargon - Writing on Web sites should be to the point and focus on providing useful information, without getting too technical or wordy. Create verbiage that is easy to understand. There are exceptions to this rule in the case of very specific application web sites (engineering, science, part numbers, etc.) where the site is designed to appeal to a very narrow market. Too often sites are unnecessarily technical and that detracts from the User Experience and the success of the site.

Errors – Make sure all links and pages are working properly. Also, provide users easy to understand error messages when completing forms or attempting to take action on the site.

Load Time – This used to be a larger problem than it is today, but it's important to maintain sensitivity to the amount of time it takes for the pages on the site (particularly the Home page) to load. If the pages are too graphics or flash

intensive, it may do more harm than good in terms of losing the attention of site visitors.

SUMMARY

The User Experience is directly reflected through both Conversions and ROI. Thus, its importance cannot be overemphasized. Unlike the olden days where brochures / catalogs were printed, and remained static until the next one went to press, your Web site is a dynamic entity. Companies who understand and embrace this fact are leading the pack within their industries. It's not too late to adopt this mindset about your site and the upside can be tremendous!