

MISSION POSSIBLE?

Designing a Friendlier User Experience

As more consumers shop online, web retailers are experiencing welcomed traffic spikes and recognizing the need to increase their IT spend in 2013 to keep up with the demand.

According to the 2013 Shop.org and Forrester Research Inc. *State Of Retailing Online* survey, more than half (51 percent) of retailers surveyed said their top priority for 2013 is site optimization, including checkout optimization, alternative payments, user experience, testing and product detail page enhancements. Among other customer experience investments this year, 27 percent of the retailers surveyed plan to prioritize site redesign, including overhauling the “look and feel” and implementing responsive design changes.

Every enterprise has its own processes for website design and development, but to avoid being left out in the digital cold, companies should take the following four steps to design an optimized user experience.

Understand the Objectives

“The most successful brands let their objectives drive the site design,” said Scott Pulsipher, general manager for Amazon Webstore. “This may include strengthening brand identity, increasing customer engagement or selling more products.”

Let’s look at examples of each. Pages that strengthen a brand’s identity are pages with executive bios, testimonials, press releases, etc. Pages that increase customer engagement are blogs, white papers and videos, and the list goes on. Lastly, pages that sell products are (you guessed it) product, subscription and checkout pages. Regardless of page type, it’s imperative to determine its objectives first and then think critically about content placement. The most basic rule to follow, for all pages, is to keep important information above the fold, such as images and calls-to-action.

“The ‘Add to Cart’ button and other CTAs should be displayed prominently,” said Pulsipher. “In addition,

place the most pertinent information — product descriptions, images, prices and reviews — above the fold to increase conversions.”

Provide Consistent Collateral

To make a lasting connection with visitors, digital enterprises should aim to create a consistent cross-platform “personality.” To achieve this, a company can employ one of many strategies.

“Some companies take a global brand strategy with a single corporate brand identity,” said Pulsipher. “Other companies, with multi-brand strategies, launch a site for each brand. This allows the individual brand, with its own personality, to speak directly with its target segments. Meanwhile, other companies create flash sale or curated sale sites to target even smaller niches. With so much customer focus, know that the personality of the brand will match the personality of the customer.”

Taking this approach delivers a clear message about the enterprise when a consumer is reading and engaging with its branded content. More importantly, tailoring the copy to fit the audience’s tone can help lift conversion rates.

Design the Page

Retailers know using design elements that create a clear, compelling and aesthetically appealing message is necessary. Color, font face, images per page and use of white space impacts the message and influences the customer’s first impression of the brand.

“When selling a design-oriented product, visuals provide impact and offer the customer a rich shopping experience,” said Stephanie Pertuit, online marketing manager for Blinds.com. “To keep a site fresh, introduce new ideas and design cues. For instance, tying a promotion to a timely event or a coupon with a holiday can generate a positive response.”

Finally, the experts agree to start with the customer and work backward. The development of

new pages begins by looking at quantitative (e.g. heat maps, survey responses) and qualitative metrics (e.g. customer emails or social media interactions). Based on this information, the designer creates a mock-up for review. Then, once the layout appears promising for accomplishing the goal, the page is developed.

Test for Results

After completing the page, make sure the design decisions achieve the desired goal while confirming a user-friendly experience.

To determine the most persuasive design, conduct A/B testing on the information architecture like Blinds.com does. This company constantly tests ways to make buying window coverings easier and more enjoyable online and only adds content, images, and design elements (e.g. inspirational room scenes, 360-degree product views or close-up images) that are useable and will convert. The general rules of thumb

is to analyze usability tests, surveys and Web analytics regularly and test constantly for effectiveness.

Net a Yes

Every customer has a mission and a set of expectations. So, address the customer’s needs using concise copy, user-friendly visual elements and adding personal touches to influence a positive response. Highlight key differentiators of either the product or the buying process that make purchasing as seamless as possible. Knowing the desired outcome will determine the appropriate CTA.

“Since visitors are in different phases of the buying process, offer multiple ways to interact with the site from buttons guiding customers to order free samples to videos encouraging a design consultation scheduling to the larger end goal of clicking ‘Buy Now,’” said Pertuit. “Infusing the site with helpful reassurances, such as tips and friendly faces using the product, shows that assistance is available throughout the process.” ■



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