

## Creating Customer Equilibrium

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The balance of good web design: creating customer equilibrium Steve Price, UK sales director at ClickTracks explains why good web design is imperative if you want to ensure that most of the first time visitors to your site turn into long term customers...

It's happened to all of us - you're surfing the Web looking for a gift for a friend, maybe a digital camera, and you come upon a website that has a fantastic price on the camera, but you are unfamiliar with the etailer. So you decide to explore the site a little bit further. What's the company's return policy? Are there testimonials from other satisfied customers? How much will shipping cost? Does the company accept PayPal? Is there any kind of warranty offered? Depending on how the site is designed, the ease with which you can find answers to these types of questions may make the difference between a purchase and a click back to the search engine to see who else sells the same product.

And whether you're selling digital cameras or generating leads for your service business, the same tenet holds true. If your web design and usability are lacking, your numbers will suffer. Websites that are company-centric rather than customer-centric (meaning that the site tells you what it wants to tell you rather than thinking about the experience from your point of view and answering your questions quickly) are frustrating for users, who have plenty of other choices within just a few clicks.

### Balance 'telling' and 'asking'

Imagine walking into a local store and being greeted by an employee shouting: "Here's our latest special on binoculars. Look, these binoculars are fantastic, and they're on special today for just 79 pounds!" If you happened to be shopping for binoculars, that may interest you, but if you're there to find a digital camera, you may be turned off. You may even wonder if you've come to the right store.

And you'd probably feel similarly confused if you walked into the same store and noticed rows of empty shelves, only to be greeted by an employee who says, 'What exactly can I help you find?' This approach

doesn't work well either. Why? Because there has to be a balance between 'telling' people what you want them to know about you and 'asking' them to tell you exactly what they're looking for.

### The right balance builds trust

Your web presence is the same way. You've got to ensure that customers have all of the information they need to make a decision without forcing them to decide before they're ready, or to decide on a course of action they aren't fully comfortable with. Take real estate sites for example, many estate agents use their sites as a method of generating leads. But forcing people to fill in their name, email address and personal phone number just so they can see the listed houses is forcing the relationship too early in the process.

Why is it too early? The visitor doesn't necessarily know the agent at this point, nor does he even know if they have a house he might like. So why would he give his personal data and potentially be signing up for a mailing list he doesn't want to be on just to get a look at some houses? Chances are he won't, and instead he'll find a different website that will let him browse to his heart's content, subtly encouraging him to make contact when he's ready.

### A holistic experience

The best websites typically are those that have members of different teams - the design team, marketing, sales and even customer support - working together to create an online experience that holistically addresses customers' needs. The sales team, for example, may understand that potential customers want information on how your company's product compares to others, so they may suggest a product comparison chart. Your customer service team may constantly field phone calls regarding shipping rates, so adding prominent 'learn about shipping rates' calls to action throughout the site may be a way to get visitors the info they need.

Finding the balance on your web site can take some time, but it's an investment that will continue to pay off. By creating an environment where you offer just the right amount information, ensure that you aren't forcing relationships too early in the process, and involve team members from throughout the company in the design process, and you're on your way to getting a larger return on your web investment.