

User experience is the basis of effective web design



Traditional usability focuses on creating intuitive, easy to use interfaces. It's not surprising then that usability was long regarded as the enemy of creativity. Perhaps unfairly, the usability professionals' role was seen as curbing the worst excesses of agencies creating engaging interfaces.

In today's more social, interactive, online environment, there's a growing acceptance that usability and user experience are complementary. We're finally abandoning the silo mentality, with usability professionals now called user experience professionals to encompass the much wider discipline of user experience.

It's no longer adequate to design just for efficiency so that people can navigate a site, find information and carry out tasks. What's more, designing for efficiency only deals with the 'can do' aspects of a site's user interface. Just because a site is easy to use doesn't mean that it will engage users. User experience also deals with how people are feeling, how they are reacting emotionally, and how they can be persuaded to act.

Persuasion, Emotion and Trust (PET)

At HFI, we've taken the concept of persuasive architecture to a new level with our web design methodology, PET design™. Persuasion, Emotion and Trust (PET) are all critical factors for creating successful online interactions. Today's web relies heavily on trust, community, and loyalty so users are looking for positive, online experiences that meet their expectations.

Email, web, and mobile have brought about a self-serve model meaning that initial relationship building is now in the hands of users. According to an IBM customer study, 79% of consumers will commit to a deeper brand relationship after a satisfying online experience.

Whether your site is ecommerce, informational or transactional, you can dramatically increase online engagement by

understanding how people make decisions. As our decisions are not made entirely rationally but also based on emotion, website design has to respond to the subtle emotional triggers that create engagement. The objective is to persuade, engage, and inspire users' trust to take the action you intend them to.

We've developed our methodology so that it goes beyond the site to highlight people's drives and beliefs, as well as identifying any barriers to their online engagement. We look at whether users connect with a site and how its design and content can change their behaviour and attitudes. When presented with an opportunity to respond in a certain way will that opportunity translate into an action?

Emotion influences perceived usability. Once users feel positively or negatively about a site, their emotional reaction influences the perceived importance of small usability issues. A minor irritation can amplify into an overall negative response to a site or product. The infamous Microsoft paperclip, for example, generated negative feelings towards Microsoft products in general for many users, in spite of their otherwise excellent design.

Seducible opportunities

As your site may well be your first point of communication with your customers, they need to be able to have an engaging conversation with you just as they would expect to in a bricks and mortar setting. This means creating a guided online path so that they receive the information they need in the right order and not overwhelming them with untimely choices.

Designing for persuasion, emotion, and trust helps you create that conversation so that you can identify when users are ready to think about your products and services and act accordingly. As our case study shows, it's about taking advantage of evidence-based, seducible opportunities to persuade your users to take the desired action at the appropriate time.

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NIGEL GRACE

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CASE STUDY: Optimising online engagement

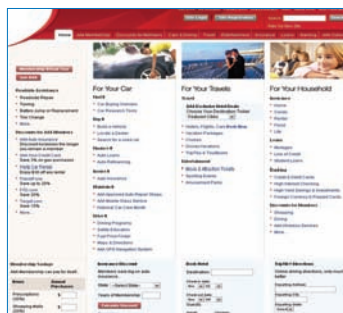
We're all familiar with the online business model of selling customers one thing in the hope they'll be enticed to buy something else. But how do you change your customers' perception of your brand to increase revenue across your product range?

A motoring organisation engaged us to help them do just that.

Recognized by 70% of people as a provider of roadside assistance and travel advice, our client's objective was to sell financial services in addition to membership.

The original cluttered site design had a 'sell everything everywhere' approach on the home page. Our eye tracking studies showed that users were overwhelmed and left the site without discovering the benefits of membership.

Participants in our usability testing were primed to think about needs and interests that matched our client's products and services. They were then asked to explore the site freely according to their personal motivations and interests.



Applying PET techniques, we found that the site did not consider the logical steps in users' thought patterns. We created a mind map showing how people cluster products and services to understand when to offer them.

A key finding was the seducible opportunity for selling related products to ensure users do not regard offers as an irritation.

The home page is now the entry point for membership and financial services are displayed where users will be more receptive to them.

Revenue from financial services has increased and the project paid for itself within the first month of the redesigned site's launch.