

IS YOUR WEBSITE DESIGNED WITH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN MIND?

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Brands today are increasingly focused on crafting an exceptional customer experience across all of their channels. The most obvious place to start is a brand's online presence. A website is where customers find information about a brand's products, services, and solutions. It's where they can make purchases, and where leads turn into customers. It's also where customers are the most likely to have a frustrating experience — a pain point in their journey. But you mitigate those chances by focusing on 6 factors that can facilitate an exceptional customer experience through a brand's website.

Simplicity and Ease of Use

If a website is cumbersome and difficult to use, or if the purchasing process is tedious or overly complex, the customer is likely to look elsewhere. In fact, one of the key voice of customer (VoC) metrics is the customer effort score (CES), which defines the effort that a customer has to exert

in order to do business with a brand. The more effort it takes, the less inclined the customer is to continue doing business with a brand. Simplicity and ease of use improve the customer experience by making it easier for customers to obtain what they are looking for.

An easy-to-use menu should be provided so that the site is navigable by someone that is not familiar with the site at all. If a customer can't find their way around a website, they aren't going to stay long, nor are they going to purchase a product or service. There should also be a search mechanism that is easy to locate and use.

David Jones, vice president, e-commerce and digital at Compass Health Brands said that the main problems were caused by slow loading pages, inefficient navigation and confusing content. The customer's negative experiences with the website were essentially causing them to place

orders over the phone rather than through the website. "The bottom line was that we needed to reduce user friction, simplify how to navigate the website, and make the experience easier and more pleasant for customers. Ease and simplicity of navigation is by far the number one impact," said Jones.

SEO contributes to ease-of-use because if a customer cannot locate a brand through a search engine, there will be no interaction between the brand and the customer. Proper SEO practices also ensure that relevant content is indexed, and when a customer visits a page by using Google search, they will arrive at a page that features the content they were searching for.

John Albertelli, senior web developer and graphic designer at VAI, told CMSWire that the biggest factors that lead to an exceptional customer experience are strong SEO, clear branding, simple messaging and language,

and frictionless navigation. “Strong SEO is the first step, so customers can easily and quickly find the website with a simple search. Secondly, the customer must be able to tell what the brand is and what products and services it offers as soon as they enter the website or else there’s immediate confusion and disconnect,” Albertelli explained. He said that the language and content on the website should enable users to easily locate tabs, pages and places on the site where they can find what they are looking for. “Finally, getting to and from those tabs and pages easily, effectively and without friction is what rounds out a positive customer experience.”

Relevant Content and Brand Voice

Miles Beckler, founder and entrepreneur at MilesBeckler.com, a marketing and entrepreneurial blog, told CMSWire that the customer experience is crucial in every stage of the B2C relationship. “Even the formatting and tonality of the copy on your landing page can be the difference between frustration and conversion. For those looking to offer exceptional customer experience, this is where you should start,” Beckler explained. “Review the copy on your website

and ask whether it factors in the customer experience.”

Not only does the content have to be relevant to that which the customer is searching for, but it has to be presented in a way that is not off-putting, mentally jarring, or overwhelming. “People are eager to learn but are intimidated by the sheer volume of content available,” Beckler said. “Customers value readability and they want the learning process to feel streamlined. That’s why I separate each line and use formatting (bolding, underlining, listing) to put across the information clearly.”

Pageload Speed

Brian Patterson, senior experience architect at Capgemini in North America, thinks that positive website experiences reinforce customer loyalty and build long-term brand relationships. “Think about the last time you had a terrible online shopping experience using a website — maybe the site was slow to load and hard to navigate,” Patterson explained. “Now think about the last time you had a wonderful, positive shopping experience. Whether the consumer is researching a product, placing an order, or merely browsing, every single online journey has the potential to leave a lasting

impression on the end-user.”

Patterson was quick to use the example of a slow loading website as one reason why a customer had a terrible shopping experience. Gone are the days where consumers will tolerate slow loading websites. The speed with which a page loads, whether it is on a mobile device or a desktop browser, also plays a large role in how Google ranks the website in its search engine results pages (SERP). Google Pagespeed Insights enables brands to test the pageload speed of any website, including their own sites — and also those of their competitors.

Although a website may appear to load very quickly to the casual eye, Pagespeed Insights will break it down into the various aspects of the loading procedure, and unless you have worked relentlessly to speed the loading of a website, using CDNs, gzip compression, etc., you may be disappointed when you test your website.

Mobile First Design

According to a report on mobile usage from Statista, in the third quarter of 2020, mobile devices (not including tablets) generated 50.81% of global website traffic. Given those numbers, it is necessary to design a brand’s

website using a mobile-first design, designing for the smallest screen first and working up to larger displays, such as those of desktop computers. Not only does it affect the display and functionality of the website on a mobile device, but Google uses it as a determining factor when indexing sites, and has a Mobile-Friendly Test page where websites can be tested.

Mobile-first web design has typically relied upon the principles of responsive design and progressive advancement. Essentially this means that the website will respond automatically to the screen size of the device it is being displayed on (responsive design), and it will use the features it is limited to on any particular browser or device, but provide additional features when they are available on other browsers or devices (progressive advancement).

If brands design for mobile devices first, with their inherent limitations of screen size, reduced bandwidth, no mouse, etc., then the website will be functional on a mobile device, and additional functionality is still available for tablets, desktops and other devices.

Website Analytics and A/B

testing

It's not enough to build a website designed with customer experience in mind and then just sit back. The process is iterative and ongoing, and a brand needs to know which methodologies and practices work best, and which are appreciated the most by customers. This is accomplished through the use of website analytics, and rigorous A/B testing.

Website analytics such as Google Analytics show which pages were visited most often by customers, as well as which pages were abandoned most quickly. Analytics inform a brand about the platforms and devices that a customer uses, where they are located geographically, and how often they visit. It also shows a brand which pages are most often used as entry points to its website, as well as how often specific pages are used as exit points. This comes in handy, because if customers are leaving from a page that, for example, explains shipping fees, it's indicative that there may be an issue with the costs (or timing) associated with shipping.

A/B testing involves the creation of two pages or areas within a website, each of which utilizes different methodologies or approaches. One page might use

incentives to increase sales, such as "buy one get one free" while the other may use "buy one today get \$20 off your next order." By testing each approach and measuring the success and failure rate, a brand is able to accurately understand which approach is more effective.

Suzi Tripp, VP of Insights, Brooks Bell, an analytics and A/B testing consultancy, spoke with CMSWire about the need for such research. Tripp said that without strategic experimentation initiatives that uncover actionable insights, today's businesses will never understand if their digital customer experiences are meeting customer expectations. "Testing reveals consumer preferences and delivering on those desires will build a better customer experience. The benefits to the business could mean increased conversion rates or higher levels of user engagement across websites or mobile applications. The benefit to the customer is infinite," Tripp suggested.

A combination of both quantitative data, such as that gathered from Google Analytics, and qualitative data, such as can be gathered through live, moderated user testing, enables brands to better understand who their customers are and what journey they are

on at any given moment on the brand's website, said Patterson. "A customer-focused web experience, driven by insight into relevant customer behaviors, can be the deciding factor in how people perceive a brand," he suggested.

Listen to the Voice of the Customer

A VoC initiative can be an effective tool for finding out what a brand's customers think about its website. VoC is a great tool to uncover the pain points in the customer journey, as well as those aspects of a brand that customers love. "Ensuring your site features a world-class customer experience means leveraging the 'voice of the customer' and following a data-driven approach across all design efforts," reiterated Patterson.

A VoC initiative doesn't just improve the effectiveness of marketing and sales copy. An Aberdeen Group report revealed that VoC initiatives have been shown to improve customer retention by up to 55%, decrease customer service costs 23% and increase revenue 48% year over year.

"When identifying ways to improve CX, we consult five levers — anxiety, mental effort, money, time and value," said Tripp. "These levers represent the most common customer pain points and when actioned upon, can create better experiences." It is challenging to understand the motivations and thought processes that customers go through as they progress through the customer journey. Quite often, getting the answer

involves directly asking customers the right questions. "Customer motivations will always be shifting, so it's important for brands to work to understand customer mindset and plan their strategies accordingly," Tripp said.

Final Thoughts

A brand's web presence is typically where customers and prospective customers learn about the brand and its products. It's also where most of a customer's pain points occur in their journey, so it behooves a brand to regularly reassess its website to ensure that it is designed with exceptional customer experience in mind.