Eight Ways to Optimize the User Experience on Your Website

Most people know little about online user experience (UX)—or so they'll say. The reality is almost everyone is a UX expert—even if they don't know it. That's because they use websites every day, impacting UX trends by the actions they take online.

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They also know when their interaction with your website is more frustrating than satisfying. Consider these UX best practices for optimizing their experience:

MOBILE FIRST/MOBILE ONLY

Chances are you do much of your information searching on your smartphone. Most people do. That's why the top user experience trend today is mobile-first design. UX experts develop web experiences starting with the smallest device and building up to the largest. It's not just a matter of chopping out key elements from the computer experience and skinnying it down for smartphones.

If you haven't optimized for mobile, you're alienating website visitors, creating a negative perception of your brand and limiting contacts and sales. *If there's one user experience improvement you make this year, mobile-first should be it.*

FLAT DESIGN

Think about the websites you really enjoy visiting. It's likely that they are designed in a relatively simple and "flat" way. That's because in today's fast-paced, mobile-dominated world, most people don't have the time or patience to wade through layers of unnecessary design to access the information they want or to make purchases online.

This is particularly true for complex products and services, such as those offered by financial and professional services companies. The content itself may be difficult to understand. Burying it in unnecessary elements and layers can make it impossible to track and comprehend.

If your website interface and design are too complicated for messages to come through, it's time to reduce the visual elements down to those that are necessary and that streamline the experience.

CONTENT FIRST

More than ever, content strategy drives design. Serving the right information (words, images, sounds) to the right visitor at the right time drives business results. Design should enhance content delivery, not control it.

If you haven't mapped the user journeys through your website and identified all the content-related touch points, you should make this a priority project. *It's the first step toward creating a user experience where design supports and facilitates the content experience.*

DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL

Many designers want to make their mark by coming up with the next great online design innovation. However, the best user experience changes are evolutionary, not revolutionary. Disruptive design is more likely to put off website visitors than to engage them or motivate them to take action. It's doubtful that they'll take time to learn something new in order to navigate your site. *It's more likely that they'll be able to adapt to an enhancement to something familiar.*

DELIGHT VISITORS

It may seem that the common UX trend of leveraging what works will result in a lot of sameness on corporate websites. That doesn't have to be the case. There are plenty of opportunities to deliver delight, surprise and serendipitous branded moments in a familiar user experience. Leverage your content, including videos, images and messaging, to present your firm's unique point of view. Use transitions from one page or section to another to bring new energy to the experience. Describe products and services in ways that make your offerings stand out from those of your competitors.

THINK CONVERSATION, NOT PRESENTATION

Financial and professional services companies tend to "talk to" their prospects and clients rather than engage them in conversation, presenting information instead of discussing it. Today, people are used to digital experiences that are dialogues, with opportunities to comment, chat and genuinely connect.

To be sure, financial and professional firms face some unique risks (especially legal and regulatory ones) when they open their digital properties to online dialogue. However, that doesn't mean they can't support online interaction. Consider adding carefully monitored comment sections to blogs or a one-on-one chat feature that uses pre-approved content. Schedule regular webinars and seminars that give prospects, clients and intermediaries a chance to discuss low-risk topics. All these things will make people feel included and more a part of your brand without exposing it to unacceptable risk.

BREAK THE GLASS SCREEN

The best online user experiences today break through the smartphone, tablet and computer screen to enter into the real world. Virtual reality is one means of doing this, but there are simpler ways to connect your virtual brand to your "real world" one. These include:

○ Raising your customer service reps' awareness of the online experiences they're completing so they can provide a satisfying end to an online journey.

○ Providing computers and tablets in office locations that offer meaningful information that enhances the sales process.

○ Using complementary images and messages in virtual and real environments so they register as seamless to your consumers.

TESTING

Testing a website as it's being designed or improved is the only way to understand whether a design or enhancement is delivering a satisfying user experience. Yet it's often the first budget line cut from a project. *User experience is more science than art, and sound usability testing is the only way to ensure your digital properties will deliver the experience—and results— you expect.*

Contact us to learn how we can take your financial marketing strategies and activities to the next level.

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