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The Mobile & Internet Performance Authority™

White Paper

The Value of Customer Experience /UX Testing

What Is User Testing?

Online businesses that don't provide an engaging, hassle-free customer experience can't convert browsers into buyers—or first-time buyers into repeat customers. The first step toward improving a Web site's conversion and customer retention rates is to understand what customers actually experience on the site and which elements most impact overall satisfaction. But it is impossible to predict customer experience without reliable, interpretable data from real people interacting with the site.

Why Is Customer Experience Management Critical?

Online customers can wield their purchase power with a simple mouse click, effortlessly jumping from one online business to another. Given such low consumer switching costs, the burden is on Web marketers not only to attract site visitors, but also to retain them by offering compelling and productive online experiences. Enterprises that fail to do so will be unable to convert browsers into buyers and retain loyalty from these customers over time. Even when the goal is not an online purchase, customer experience is a decisive factor in whether people will use the website to research information, answer customer support questions, or find out more about employment opportunities or investor relations information.

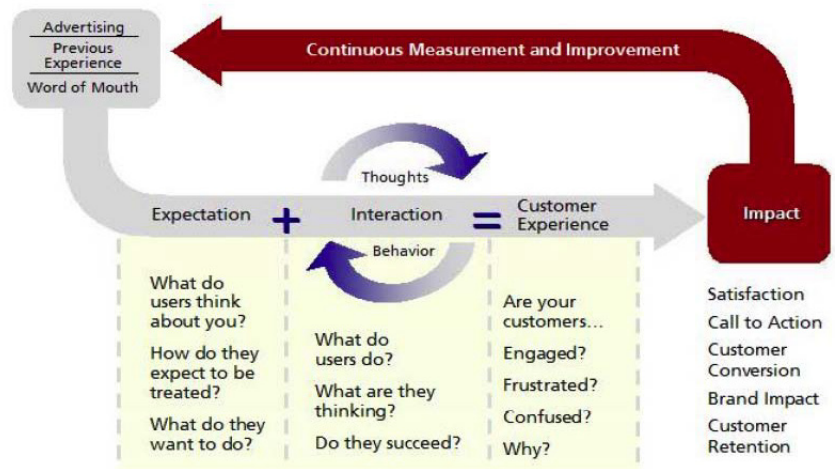


Figure 1. Customers' expectations and interactions drive the customer experience, which in turn, drive the impact and ongoing site measurement and improvement.

In order to improve their online initiatives, progressive companies are making an attempt to track customer behavior and evaluate the end-user experience of their site. But these companies are quickly realizing that clickthrough data and log file metrics are not providing the information required to make strategic business decisions. As the focus for research shifts from site information to customer information, better methods are required to understand the customer's point of view. The first step in addressing a Web site's conversion and customer retention rates is to measure what the customer actually experiences on the site and which elements most impact overall satisfaction.

Measuring Customer Experience

Customer experience on the Web is difficult to predict without reliable, interpretable data. Customer experience is composed of complex interactions between the Web site itself and the thoughts, feelings, behaviors, habits, expectations, and social references that the customer brings to the situation.ⁱ It is not the objective reality of the Web site that needs to be analyzed, but the *subjective* reality of the customer—the customer's perception and interpretation of the site. To add to this complexity, each individual visiting a site has his or her personal history, creating many different subjective realities for the Web marketer or researcher to understand.

Analyzing no obtrusive observational data, such as sales figures and server logs, cannot uncover such information. For example, with server log data it is difficult to determine whether a customer is lingering on a site because of interest or confusion. The most reliable method of capturing the actual customer experience is to have many customers try the live site and gathering both behavioral and subjective data from each individual.

A "Blueprint" of the Customer Experience

Keynote evaluation methodology is designed to provide a window into the total customer experience, reducing uncertainty for decision makers. The Keynote approach combines the best aspects of market research and usability testing techniques in order to build a blueprint of the customer's point of view, from brand awareness to ease-of-use to overall satisfaction.

This blueprint maps directly to the features, functions, and messages of the site itself, providing insights into how specific elements impact the overall quality of the experience and users' subsequent likelihood to return to the site. Thus, marketing executives discover how they should allocate resources for maximum impact, while designers gain insight into why particular features and functions are either working or not working as planned and how to best modify them.

Close-Up and Wide-Angle Views of the Customer Experience

Keynote's technology is intentionally flexible to enable clients to address a variety of research questions. For an in-depth perspective, Keynote evaluations can provide a deep understanding of specific aspects of the customer experience, such as what URLs individuals followed and why. Keynote evaluations can also reveal a broader picture of the customer experience, such as how the overall experience changed after a site redesign.

Other uses of Keynote's technology include examining what sites individuals visit when asked to research and buy a particular item; comparing the customer experience on different sites to pinpoint competitors' strengths and weaknesses; assessing design changes by evaluating the site before and after changes; and evaluating hypotheses with true experiments to develop causal theories for customer experience outcomes.

Data to Inform Decisions

Keynote evaluations provide clients with data to inform a variety of business and design decisions. Below are some of the common concerns that Keynote's methodology and technology can address:

Business Strategy Issues

- Do users understand the site's value proposition? Does their perception of the value proposition change after site usage?
- How does user experience on the site compare with competitors' sites?
- After interacting with the site, are users likely to come back? Why or why not?
- Is the actual customer experience consistent with brand positioning? Is it consistent with the offline brand?
- What features are users expecting to see on the site?
- Are particular types of users (e.g., novice users, power users) reacting differently to the site? What special needs do particular groups have?

Design Issues

- Can users accomplish critical tasks, such as searching and registering? If not, why?
- What paths do users take in accomplishing critical tasks? What dead-ends do they encounter? Where do they get lost?
- At what point in the process of pursuing specific tasks do users fail or give up? Why?
- Do users notice and make use of particular features on the site?
- How much time and effort does it take to accomplish critical tasks? How can this best be reduced?
- Do users read and make use of information provided? Do users have enough information?

Customer Experience Testing produces Actionable Insights

Site improvements from traditional usability testing are well documented. Reported improvements range from 75 percent to over 200 percent in the usability metrics of a site.ⁱⁱ Keynote evaluations expand upon this method by providing strategic information not found in traditional usability testing, without additional costs. The Keynote approach evaluates Web usability issues within the larger perspective of brand positioning, competitive intelligence, likelihood of return visits, and overall user satisfaction. This type of market research information is critical in reducing uncertainty and avoiding losses that might result from poor decision making.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ For a good discussion of the “customer’s experience,” see B. H. Schmitt, *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act and Relate to Your Company and Brands* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). For a review of the degree to which emotions affect choices and behavior, see Daniel Goldman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995).

ⁱⁱ Jakob Nielsen, *Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity* (Indianapolis, Ind.: New Riders Publishing, 2000). See also Jared Spool et al., *Web Site Usability: A Designer’s Guide* (San Francisco: Morgan Kaufman Publishers, 1998).

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Duboff and Jim Spaeth, *Why Market Research Matters: Tools and Techniques for Aligning Your Business* (New York: Wiley, 2000).