

Giving Web Site Visits Direction

With all the focus on the visitor, it is easy to overlook the fact that lack of clear business objectives also causes poor visitor experience on web sites. Company objectives set expectations and provide direction and closure for the visitor. Without that direction, visitors wander around the site aimlessly with no apparent outcome, finally leaving perhaps better informed but without satisfactory closure.

This does not mean site owners should regress to the arrogant self-absorption that ignores the visitor objectives altogether. It's just that too many web sites have lost their business direction, and lack of business direction is just as detrimental to visitor experience as self-absorption. Customer satisfaction comes from aligning customer objectives and company objectives then managing expectations. Successfully managing the intersection of company objectives and visitor objectives is what makes a web site exceptional.

Companies often talk about wanting to partner with their customers, but effective partnership requires strength and direction by both parties. Good business relationships prosper when customers are clear on the objectives and priorities of the business and determine for themselves that those objectives and priorities match their own objectives and requirements.

The job of the web site is to help the visitors educate themselves and where possible provide the means to help them act on their decisions. This includes being clear on the outcomes the company would like from the visit. It also means being clear about what the visitor *cannot* do on the site. But, being yourself can be scary, even if you are a company. What if the customer doesn't want what you really have to offer?

Two wrong reactions:

- Representing the web site (company) as something it is not (stringing the visitor along or providing suggestive bait hoping to switch their objective before they leave)
- Trying to convince the visitor that they want or need a substitute that does not meet their need (attempting a "hard sell" to hijack their objective)

The right reaction:

- Telling the visitor you can't meet their need, and if possible directing them where they can meet it

Good web sites:

- Respect their visitors by being honest and up front about what they can and can't do on the site
- Trust their visitors by letting them make their own choices
- Care about their visitors by helping them succeed with objectives that are aligned

To create an exceptional web site it is not enough to focus exclusively on the visitor side of the experience. The business stakeholders first need to be clear about their objectives for the web site, and then make those objectives clear to the site visitors. The business objectives provide the direction and structure that will be communicated through good visitor experience practices and lead to a satisfying visitor outcome.

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