



TASK DESIGN FOR THE WEB

GETTING CUSTOMERS FROM POINT A TO POINT B

A CHANGE SCIENCES RESEARCH BRIEF

LEARN HOW TO:

- 01: PRESENT THE MAIN FUNCTIONS IN PLAIN SIGHT
- 02: REDUCE VISUAL COMPLEXITY
- 03: LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT
- 04: KEEP PEOPLE ON TASK



Introduction

Potential customers come to your website with goals in mind. Whether or not these goals are accomplished depends on how well your website allows people to perform their tasks online. A website that is effective in getting people through their tasks will enjoy increased conversion rates, reduced call-center volume, and foster a favorable brand-perception.

Effective websites will:

- Present the main functions in plain sight
- Reduce visual complexity
- Let people know what to expect
- Keep people on task

01: Present the main functions in plain sight.

Getting online customers to see what you want them to see is the holy grail of website design. Customers are most likely to fall short of their goals on a website when they have to spend considerable time and effort hunting for functions needed to complete the most basic online tasks (pay a bill, add to cart, etc.).

When presenting functions on a website, it is important to note that people maintain a very narrow field of vision. Once people are focused on the main item of interest on a page (an account statement, a stock quote, a shopping cart), they will only focus their attention on links that are displayed in close visual proximity to that item. Make sure that links related to that item are prominently placed close to that item or they could be missed. Don't require people to search for the relevant links and functions in another part of the website. Don't require people to scan the entire length of a page for a function buried off to the side. The truth is that many people will give up for good if they can't find that function within a tight visual range of the area they are focusing on.

02: Reduce visual complexity.

Mental filters are on full power when people have to perform tasks on visually complex sites. Blocking out any extraneous information that may be likely to throw them off-track has become the status quo for seasoned web users. Inevitably, important links also get blocked out in a bid to weed through the often overwhelming masses of links, loud graphical treatments, and flashy promotions.

Reducing the number of visual elements on the screen can dramatically improve the customer's odds at finding what they need to complete a task. Keep in mind that every element on screen has to compete for visual attention; the more elements that are placed on the screen, the less likely people will notice

the important ones. Make sure each element has a legitimate reason for being on a page.

03: Let people know what to expect.

When designing a lengthy multi-step task, it is a best practice to let the customer know what to expect before, during, and after completion of the task.

People always fair better with multi-step tasks if they are shown beforehand what will be involved. Nobody wants to make it to the last step in a multi-page form only to find out they need to enter information they don't have on-hand. A simple bulleted list summarizing what is required to complete the process can avert these situations.

Once they are in a process, customers don't want to be made to feel that they are on a wild goose-chase, lost in a never-ending series of screens. Show them the light at the end of the tunnel by providing a status indicator showing where they are in the process (i.e. step 1 of x).

It is also important to remember that just because people can make it to the end of a multi-step task in one piece doesn't mean further problems can't arise. Customers can still feel lost and confused even if they successfully complete each step of a task. To mitigate this, tell customers what they should expect next even after the process is completed. The last thing a call-center manager needs is a surge in call volumes because the checkout process on the new website makes no mention of when they can expect their orders.

04: Keep people on task.

Once in the middle of a multi-step task, it is important not to distract customers from their main goal by supplying unnecessary links that can potentially derail the entire process. Resist the temptation to present links to side-promotions or other areas of interest especially if the process is complex and hard to come back to. Offering any distractions that may divert a customer's attention from the correct path is always a risky proposition. It is better to just supply the Next, Previous, and Cancel buttons as the only major form of navigation. This will allow people to finish what they started before considering any more options. Naturally, the more links that can throw people off-track, the more likely someone will unwittingly click on one.

Conclusion

Customers often come to websites with an idea of what they want to accomplish. Whether or not these websites effectively support their customers in accomplishing their tasks is one of the most important factors in online customer satisfaction. Customers who fail to get what they want out of a site visit are

unlikely to return. Online businesses will do well to focus more on what the customer wants to accomplish on the site while identifying and removing any barriers that prevent them from achieving these goals. This will increase the utility of the site for its customers and lead to a more satisfied and loyal customer base in the near and long term.

About Change Sciences Group

Change Sciences Group specializes in improving the customer experience of interactive applications. We do this by focusing on how customers actually use interactive services, discovering where customers get stuck, where they are successful and how they feel as they use the service.

All that adds up to satisfied customers, employees, partners, and suppliers. For our clients, this means higher revenues and lower costs. By grounding development in the real experiences of real people, Change Sciences' clients develop products that fit with their customers' lives, adding business value, and long-term brand-loyalty.

Based in New York, Change Sciences provides customer experience strategy, information architecture, and usability services for e-commerce sites, business-to-business marketplaces, intranets, and wireless applications.