

Customer Engagement

Of course it is important that your website and content are optimised to ensure you maintain a good position in search engine rankings, making sure people can find your products and services is after all the key to engaging with them. However this is only half the battle. Once people have found your site, they then need to be able to find the information they want and need quickly and easily.

From your perspective you will want them to work their way through your site building a compelling case to proceed with you over and above your competition.

The great thing about a well constructed/written site is that it will do this pre-sales job for you at virtually no cost, 24x7x365.

So there is a compromise to be reached. A site which ranks highly with search engines is not necessarily going to be the most appealing or engaging for the reader.

Equally, it is important to remember that the website is a sales and marketing tool. As such its job is to *pull people in*, **educate them**, *engage them* and then **encourage them to act**.

Everyone knows that a website should not be an online brochure, (unless of course your business is entirely online and, well brochure based!) but rather a structured and guided sales dialogue, which is engineered to ensure that the reader is lead through the sales proposition, almost as if it were a face to face sales call.

People use companies' websites to research, justify and ratify their decision to engage. That means that undoubtedly before people decide to call you or meet with you, they will have visited your site and will have assured themselves that the next step forward is merited.

When constructing the content of any site then, we need to be aware of peoples' motives and agenda for their visit.

We need to capitalise on the fact that they've visited and ensure that we capture and direct their interest and action to where we want it.

All sorts of people will make or be involved in the decision to buy from your organisation. While in many cases it will be a seasoned or educated buyer, it could just as easily be, an uneducated one. When each of these people searches for a "solution" and indeed select your website, each of them will need to feel that your company is the right company, with the right solution for them.

In order to achieve this we will need to ensure that the copy, tone of voice and terms and phrases used, resonate with each audience and each of their agendas. So while a seasoned buyer may see the value of your product or solution immediately and will recognise the terms and phrases used, the uneducated or less initiated may need to be addressed in a manner in which they feel more comfortable. People hate being made to feel stupid. And people who have been made to feel stupid or ignorant are unlikely to make the next step to engage.

Perhaps the best way to think of this is the agenda put out by "The Plain English Society".

The other consideration is what we term, the "voice of the customer". This simply means that rather than "selling" our concepts, products or solutions to a marketplace, we use the opinions of that marketplace to sell the products back to itself.

A page which says:

"...we provide innovative and engaging events to assist in helping companies develop morale and team spirit"

is a lot less compelling than one that reads:

"Fantastic! Company X has really brought us together as a team. We hold lots of events but their approach was a real breath of fresh air. We're now working much better as a team as a direct result".

People also trust their peers. So if it's right for Marks and Spencer or Coca Cola and indeed for ABC Engineering (a similar size company to "me" just down the road), then I think they may just be right for me too.

This shift in consumer attitude is being termed 'The Age of Reference'; characterising how people buy, the degree of scepticism/cynicism they now harbour about a product or service and the impact of such attitudes on the way recipients relate to any marketing message. Understanding on what basis one's target customers make their purchase decisions becomes an essential Market Intelligence requirement. It also raises the question as to whether there really is any such thing as a genuinely trusted communication these days.

In our view a website which leads people by the hand, makes them feel welcome and comfortable and speaks more from the customer perspective than the "shareholders" is likely to be efficient, effective and extremely well received.

Who's in control (really)?

Remember of course, that it is you (the company) who are really in control of the dialogue and journey the potential customer takes through your website. Far from being a random stroll or wander, your site and its content should be a structured journey which ensures your prospective customer comes out with the information required to engage.

This document forms part of a series – the others can be accessed via the Documents page of our website.

1. Websites - The Ascent of the Website
2. *Customer Engagement*
3. Websites, eMarketing - all hyped out or coming of age?

Best practice is something that should be shared, not sold.

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