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Ceonex Articles

The Power of Interactivity

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The Power of Interactivity

Since people experience their lives through interactivity, it is little wonder that we respond with the most interest and comfort when our Internet experiences feel interactive as well. Interactivity plays an important role in conversion on the web. As web technology increases, along with Internet usage, it is crucial to consider if your web site is taking advantage of today's opportunities to interact with prospects and customers.

What makes it interactive?

Interactivity is a very broad term and used with great liberty online. Ultimately it refers to the process by which a user initiates an action and receives a response based on that action.

An action often is prompted by a thought or emotion, which creates an expectation for a specific response. Should the response be as desired, the experience is positive. A positive experience naturally leads to satisfaction with the action taken, and a willingness to take additional steps. This is why interactivity is so crucial to conversion!

Yet to really “feel” interactive, the reaction must occur the way it does in the real world – in real time. According to research by usability guru Jacob Nielsen, a delay in an event must be no more than one second in order to be perceived as being interactive. For response to “feel” instant, the reaction must be delayed by no more than one tenth of one second.

Therefore, when we turn the door knob, we expect the door to open instantly – not in 10 seconds. When we press a key on the keyboard, we expect the typed letter to appear on the screen immediately, not five seconds later.

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What makes it interactive?

This creates an interesting dilemma online, where interactivity is delivered as packets traveling hundreds and thousands of miles across an Internet backbone, and possibly even through a 56k modem on a telephone line. In other words, actions on the Internet are much slower than in real life!

Yet there exists an opportunity for marketers to address this issue using tools and methods such as:

- Utilizing waiting time effectively
- Creating response times that are closer to real life by using streaming media
- Programming into the response times a certain sequence and order that creates the illusion of instant interactivity

While all the above can contribute to a highly responsive user experience, the one that can create the most impact in that arena is the creation of streaming content such as flash. Flash not only allows streaming informational content, which optimizes download time for larger files, but it can also easily add interactivity to the presentation without significantly affecting file size. Additionally, a properly planned flash interface can load all needed components incrementally, and in sequence, without the user ever suspecting that anything is missing. This creates an interactive experience that feels instantaneous.

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A tremendous opportunity to optimize user experience

Due to a number of factors, there are increasingly important reasons to examine the role of interactivity on the web today. Some issues to consider:

Too little interactivity...

Today's web users are too often presented with text-heavy sites with little or no instant interactivity other than fast loading text pages. Research has shown that people read differently on the screen than in printed form; specifically, web users read fewer words and more slowly than when reading printed material. Interactivity is a method to engage and inform visitors without forcing them to read uncomfortable amounts of type on the screen.

...or too much emphasis on "show"

Some companies make the effort to create an interactive platform for their prospects. Many of these sites, however, provide interactivity via enormous video or flash files that ignore download times, usability and purpose. When interactive features are poorly planned from a marketing perspective, it is easy for the creators and programmers to use them as a display of their creativity and technical skill. While creativity has a crucial place in marketing, it loses its power when the needs of the target audience are not made paramount, and when the core purpose is ignored.

Slow response times

Users interact with the real world in real time. Even computers respond within the 0.1 – 1 second timeframe that provides an instant or at least interactive experience. Therefore, a slow response will quickly tire or frustrate a user unless steps are taken to optimize the experience.

Since many sites have not optimized their sites on an interactive level, this creates a considerable opportunity for inventive and forward-thinking companies to set themselves apart by providing a well-planned, truly interactive user experience.

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Interactivity plays a crucial role in conversion

A truly interactive user experience makes it much easier for users to forget about external distractions and instead focus on the current website environment they are interacting with. This is due to the fact that, if the site can be as close to real-time as their current surrounding environment, their focus is less likely to shift to real-time events in their surroundings. Those surroundings can include competitive websites, email and instant messaging, as well as music playing, other people in the room and other distracting events. There are so many channels of information vying for the user's attention, that the main task at hand for conversion is keeping the user's attention – through a real-time, as well as engaging, experience.

A response must not only be fast, but also take into account the expectation that accompanied the desire to have a response. If this is properly planned based on the target audience and the user's position architecturally and mentally within the site's framework, then a highly effective response can be provided that meets or even exceeds expectations. Meeting or exceeding expectations, of course, leads to a positive experience, helping the user feel good about his experience and himself.

A user that feels good about his experience and is engaged in the site he is perusing, is a user that is ready to convert. Whether that conversion involves the user becoming a customer, or merely providing their email address to receive a newsletter, ultimately depends on where the user is at with his needs in regards to the product or service he is reading about. Yet should the user find himself in an offline discussion where a friend or colleague asks advice about a product that he or she needs, and the product the user read about fits that general direction, the user will fondly remember the positive experience provided by the site and pass along the URL.

Therefore, the benefits to a well-crafted, interactive website reach far further than just the initial visit to the site and possibly a large or small conversion (purchase or sign up for more information). They also result in repeat visits, recommendations, word-of-mouth, press and awards, as well as higher visibility online and brand recognition.

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About Ceonex

Established in the USA in 1998, Ceonex is a proven global Internet consulting and development company helping clients to create and implement full-service digital business solutions. Combining diverse expertise in business strategy, technology, usability and design, Ceonex produces highly scalable business solutions and online user experiences.

Enabling businesses to heighten brand awareness, Ceonex strengthens customers' competitive advantage and provides them with opportunities to increase revenues and enhance productivity.

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Client Quote

"...outstanding design work and timely implementation... a fabulous website that accurately captures both our mission and spirit..."

W. Michael Draper, CTO,
NetworkWorld, Inc.