

Marketing Secrets For Web Designers

A large, stylized, purple letter 'F' is positioned in the bottom right corner of the image. The background is a solid purple color with a network of white lines and circles, and several overlapping light purple circles.

Imprint

© 2013 Smashing Magazine GmbH, Freiburg, Germany
ISBN: 978-3-94454042-9
Cover Design: Ricardo Gimenes
eBook Strategy and Editing: Vitaly Friedman
Technical Editing: Cosima Mielke
Planning and Quality Control: Vitaly Friedman, Iris Lješnjani
Tools: Elja Friedman
Idea & Concept: Smashing Magazine GmbH

Preface

Marketing is an essential part of Web design and knowing its 101 helps you see your design decisions in a broader context. If you are working on a personal project such as an app, a tool or even your very own book, then marketing skills are all the more indispensable. Wouldn't it be a shame if nobody noticed that particular project that you put your heart and soul into?

Jumping in at the deep end and simply starting off with marketing can be quite daunting — and delicate. But you don't have to be a declared marketer or consider yourself a great seller either in order to present something in the proper light. With some basic know-how, thorough planning and creative ideas, you are already at a good starting point.

With these thoughts in mind, we have put together “Marketing Secrets For Web Designers”. This eBook is in no means a dry business manual that goes through every imaginable aspect of marketing, but rather a companion tailored to your specific needs as a designer. Weighing the benefits and perils of common marketing practices, it takes you by the hand as you develop an understanding of what friendly and appealing marketing is all about.

On your adventure through marketing, our Smashing authors cover topics such as shaping an innovative brand identity, implementing social media wisely and creating meaningful email campaigns. Furthermore, this eBook features valuable tips for product launches and e-commerce. Of course, analytics and metrics also get their well-deserved attention.

As you will discover, marketing is a lot more than plain conversion rates, numbers of sales and generating followers; it is part of the user experience. That's one of the secrets. Many more will succeed on the following pages — you just have to turn over!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Stop Shouting. Start Teaching.	4
If You Love Your Brand, Set It Free	14
What Successful Products Teach Us About Web Design.....	26
Social Media Is A Part Of The User Experience	33
How To Use Email To Alienate Your Users	42
How Metrics Can Make You A Better Designer	51
Keep Your Analytics Data Safe And Clean	57
It Works For “You”: A User-Centric Guideline To Product Pages.....	63
How To Launch Anything	75
About The Authors	87

Stop Shouting. Start Teaching.

BY CHRISTOPHER BUTLER 🍷

Imagine you are in a classroom. Let's say a high school classroom. You're sitting at your desk, listening to your favorite teacher — the one who inspired you, the one who got you excited about that thing you love for the first time.

You've stopped taking notes because your body just can't quite function normally when your mind is being blown. You don't feel the pen in your hand, or the surface of the desk under your arms. You're somewhere in between your body and the blackboard. That's the magic of learning; it's *transportational*.

Now, deep breath.

Back to reality.

Perhaps your learning experiences were not like this, but I hope they were. And if they were, did it ever occur to you in those moments that you were being sold something? That the moment was approaching when you'd be asked to sign on the dotted line or open your wallet? When you'd kick yourself for being fooled into thinking that your teacher was offering something to you for free? When you'd learn to stifle the desire and ability to trust someone?

Of course not. What you received came without strings attached; it was a free gift of knowledge to change you, to shape you, to edify you. Not to compel you to buy something.

After all, your teacher wasn't a marketer. Right? Or, was he?

It's worth asking at this point: What, exactly, is marketing? Here I won't quote a definition — not just because we're all capable of looking it up ourselves, but because it really doesn't matter anymore what the "official" definition of marketing is. Marketing, in its ubiquity, is something we all live and breath. We know what it is, though we may struggle with articulating it with any meaningful precision. In our culture, the distance between marketing and creativity is virtually nonexistent.

Every bit of that space has been filled with the promotional. What were once barely overlapping magisteria have become fully integrated. It's not enough that we make beautiful things, or have brilliant ideas, or even have powerful experiences anymore; they're hardly real to the world until they've been shared in some digital burst of "Here I am, you should pay attention to me."



Life and work has become noisy with marketing. And the noisier it gets, the noisier it gets, because we've bought into the lie that nothing cuts through noise better than the right kind of noise. But noisy marketing — of the parade for a naked emperor kind — is cheap; there is no there there, and we all end up feeling cheap for looking, anyway.

There is a better way, of course. But the better way requires that we get as far away from this sort of marketing as possible. In fact, it might be better that we call it something else entirely, because no one ever says, "I want to be a marketer when I grow up." So, why not call it education? If you ever experienced the free gift of education — whether or not as I dramatized it above — let that be your model for marketing. For your sake; for the sake of all of us.

Inception

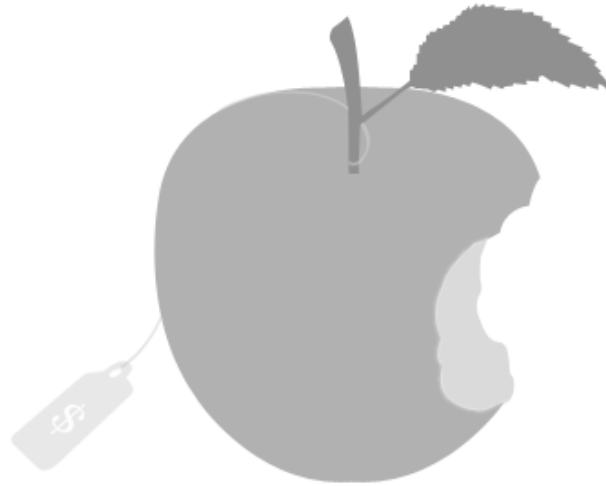
Disparaging marketing is easy, isn't it? What I just wrote came naturally; it flowed out of my experience struggling with my own value for privacy and the frequency with which it is violated, coupled with my job representing a company and the frequency with which I have to market our services. I know the kind of marketing I don't like, and to do it differently is easier said than done. Frankly, it's just far easier to do marketing than to have marketing done to you. Yet, there is no Golden Rule for marketing — market unto those as you would have them market unto you. Shouldn't there be such a rule? There can be.

It starts with doing something good.

QUALITY

There is nothing wrong with selling things, or even with making lots of money selling things. There is something wrong, though, with selling a

product or service that you know is *not* worth its price. So there are some questions we must ask if we are to follow any “golden rule” of marketing: Do I believe in what I’m selling? Is it good for people? Is it worth what I am asking people to pay for it?



Could you imagine a teacher answering “No” to any of these questions? “No, I don’t believe in what I teach.” “No, what I teach is not good for people.” “No, what I teach isn’t worth the time my class requires.” Could any teacher with integrity answer no to these questions and still manage to show up for class every Monday morning? I doubt it.

Alan Jacobs, writing for *The Atlantic* about the role of quality in the shifting sands of business success¹, had this to say:

What goes around comes around; what goes up must come down. Microsoft has been gradually drifting to the margins of our tech consciousness; Google is scrambling to find a way to compete with Facebook. Everything moves faster in a wired world, including the pace of change in business... A decade from now the landscape of the technology business will sure look very different than it does today. Maybe by 2022 Apple and Amazon will be marginal companies once again — underdogs that I can feel good about supporting.

What shifts the sands of the business landscape isn’t marketing, it’s quality. Apple rose to the top because it made outstanding products, not “just fine” ones with outstanding advertising. Microsoft, on the other hand, stumbled not because its advertising is terrible — though it really is — but because its products weren’t very good, either. And as for Ama-

1. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/03/how-to-be-one-of-the-good-guys/254557/>

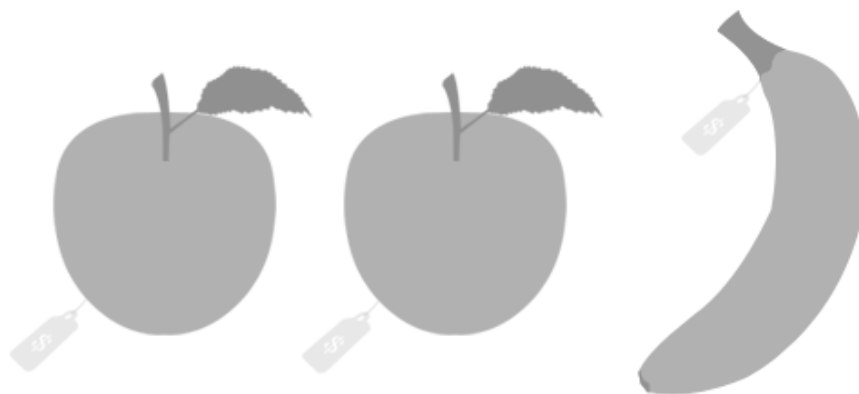
zon, Amazon rose to the top by offering a level of service that shocked shoppers: an easy to navigate store, with an unfathomably large inventory, and delivery that exceeded anyone's reasonable expectations for speed. It reset those expectations.

If Amazon fails, it will fail because either someone else comes along who can do better — unlikely as that may be — or because we decide that we don't feel comfortable with the costs of the level of service they offer. Many right now are already questioning that, whether inexpensive and immediate delivery are worth the working² conditions³ that make it possible. Marketing will probably try to change our minds. It may even work on some of us, for a little while. But if failure is to be avoided, marketing will have little to do with it.

If you can do something truly good, you won't have much of a marketing challenge. If you can keep doing something good without something bad subsidizing it, marketing will take care of itself.

POSITIONING

But what if someone else does exactly the same thing you do? What if you can't beat their price? What if you can't outserve them? This is typically where "savvy" marketing comes in. When labels carry claims that either overemphasize a non-differentiator so that it seems like one, or straight up lie.



2. <http://motherjones.com/print/161491>

3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/20/new-blue-collar-temp-warehouses_n_1158490.html?view=print&comm_ref=false

Imagine the educational corollary: “The same easy A, now with twice the History!” or “Become a Quantum Physicist, Results Guaranteed!” Preposterous.

It’s a whole lot easier to avoid resorting to manipulation if you don’t have any real competitors. Competitors force each other to make less meaningful but more manipulative distinctions between one another. If you think you’ve got the “good” thing down, consider your positioning. Are you actually different? If not, how will you survive without being sleazy?

ATTRACT, INFORM, ENGAGE

So, let’s say you’ve got the quality and positioning stuff worked out. You do something good that nobody else does. Fantastic. That is, assuming people know about you. Taking a *Field of Dreams* approach — if you build it, they will come — won’t work. If you build it, and they know about it, they will come. But even if they come, you’ve got to make sure they understand what it is that they’re coming for. And then you’ve got to make them want to stick around. This is a three-step process: attracting prospects, properly informing them, engaging with them. That is what marketing should be all about. Attract, inform, engage; not attract, mislead, compel.

If you are well positioned, attraction is much easier. Imagine three hot-dog vendors at a baseball game. Two wander up and down the stands, shouting, “Hot dogs! Get your delicious hot dogs here!” Their success is going to come down to luck — who happens to be closest to the right people. But the third vendor sticks to the low seats. He’s shouting, too, except he’s got different dogs to sell: “Low-fat hot dogs! Eat two for the fat of one!” Now who do you think will have an easier time selling hot dogs? The more specific your audience is, the easier it is to attract them.

If you can attract a specific audience, informing is easy, too. You already know something about them and what they need. If you have a worthy solution to that need, all you have to do is tell them about it. That’s where the teaching comes in: Start generally — *Introduction to Your Problem*, then *Our Solution 101* — and be prepared to give them more detail as they need it. Incrementally informing, by the way, will also take care of engagement. Give them some, they’ll want more. Ask any engaged student sitting in Advanced Trigonometry 3 why they are there and you’ll likely hear many similar answers, all having to do with being attracted and informed by someone special back in their beginner days.

KNOW YOUR ROLE

If you make things, it's difficult to avoid marketing. But if you can do it the good way — attracting, informing, and engaging — to serve that good thing you do, then that thing we've wanted to avoid no longer looks so bad. And even then, “marketer” is just one of many roles that people who make things play in some capacity. But it's a role that should always be subservient to your primary one: making and doing good things. To keep that role connected to the good things we do, I've used teaching as a metaphor.

I know it's abstract, but if there is one single characteristic of good teachers that could stand to make everything we do — as well as how we market it — better, it's caring. Good teachers care. They care about the material. They care about how they teach it. They care about their students. If we care too — about what we do, how we do it, and who we do it for — then we'll be OK.

Resisting the Dark Side

That's the setup, anyway. But caring is hard. Caring requires a commitment to resisting the very things that currently seem to drive the culture of marketing — things like haste, deception, and even your own ego.



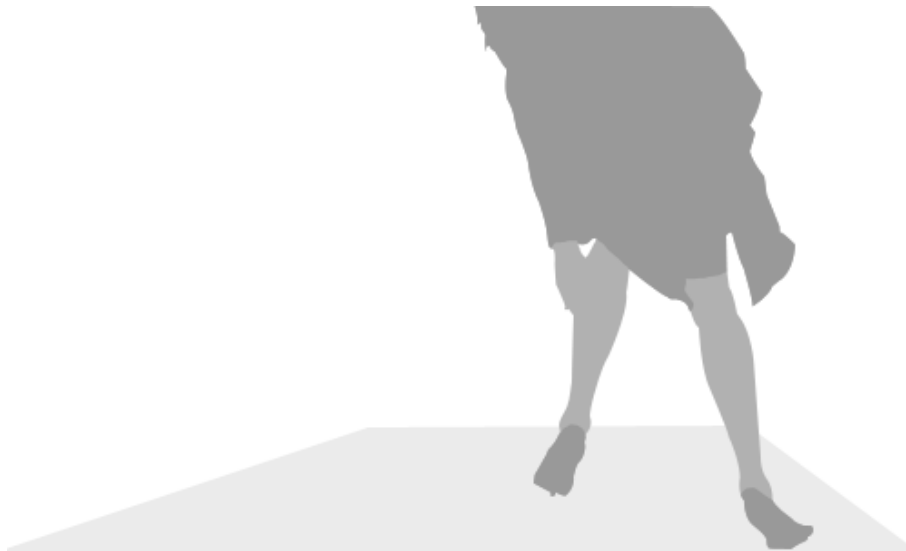
SLOW DOWN

Slow down, please. Not everything needs to be right now. One thing I like to say that usually riles people up is that there are no marketing emergencies. Really. If there are, it's because somebody screwed up or somebody's expectations are out of whack.

But that doesn't change the fact that other people feel differently. Open your email account and watch it fill before your eyes. Open Twitter and watch the nonstop flow of information push down your timeline. It's incredible how rapid-fire online culture has become, and naturally, how marketing has followed suit. As marketing has become so predominantly digital, speed has become a defining characteristic of the experience. But when your blood pressure rises and you feel the anxiety of falling behind — that you should be blogging more, tweeting more, posting more on Facebook, Pinterest, and the like — ask yourself this: How good can it be if you're producing so much of it so often?

HONESTY

Honesty is the enemy of traditional marketing. It's sad but true. It's not because honesty isn't possible in marketing, but that if companies were completely honest about their products and services — about how they're made, what they do, their flaws, their shelf life, etc. — fewer people would buy them. That's why creating illusions is so essential to marketing. But it only takes a tiny crack in the surface to destroy an illusion. As a colleague pointed out to me recently, a supermodel only has to stumble once before the illusions so central to fashion fall away and you are left with just people wearing clothes. If the quality is there, there is nothing to hide.



That's the big-picture, but I think most honesty-erosion tends to happen on a smaller scale, where the line between truth and fiction can be pretty blurry. There's a general impulse toward bending that line intentionally, one often motivated by our desire to bring attention to something we believe deserves it. Whether it's a product, a service, or even a

cause, we might be willing to “sex up the story”⁴ if doing so means bringing greater awareness to it.

This isn’t just a marketing problem, by the way. We do it when we believe the attention garnered by a thing or an idea or an injustice isn’t as big as it should be. Listen to the retraction⁵ issued by *This American Life* of Mike Daisy’s account of working conditions in Apple’s factories in China. Pay attention to how uncomfortable you feel. That discomfort is a measure of the distance between truth and fiction.

For the first year after graduating from college, I did freelance design work. I registered a business, created business cards, set up a website, the works. I wasn’t alone, either. Several classmates did the same thing, and we would often compare notes and even help each other get work from time to time. We learned all kinds of things by trial and error back then, but the one thing that left the greatest impression upon me had to do with how honest we were in describing ourselves. Every one of us made heavy use of the word “we” on our websites — though “we” was almost always just one person working from a room in a shared apartment — because we feared we wouldn’t be hired if it was clear that “we” was really “I,” a freelancer flying solo.

We believed that no matter how good our work was, we’d be ignored as individuals. So we created an illusion that we thought looked strong. “I” was just a kid on my laptop at a desk in his bedroom; “We” was a company, confident, experienced, secure. But that, of course, wasn’t true. I learned that there was no point in trying to convince potential clients of something other than that which would quickly become clear to them if they hired me. So, a simple rule: If you’re one person, never refer to yourself as “we.” That’s the kind of small-scale honesty we need to take seriously.

IN, BUT NOT OF

But let’s be realistic. Even if you change, you can’t expect everyone else to change too. It’s certainly possible that if enough people embrace a new way of doing things, the culture might shift overall, but that is unlikely to happen overnight.

The culture of online marketing is unhealthy — the lack of criticism of it is pretty astonishing to me — but the real tragedy is watching the forces of self preservation turn good people with good intentions into obnoxious, self-aggrandizing loudmouths that collect into BS echo chambers. Sometimes what you see accepted or celebrated around you

4. <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/zunguzungu/the-jimmy-mcnulty-gambit/>

5. <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/460/retraction>

is exactly what you shouldn't do. I liked how Oliver Reichenstein put it in a post-SXSW tweet⁶:

Studied the SXSW talks to find out what not to do as a speaker: 1. Don't think you're cool 2. Don't preach 3. Don't sell. 4. No false modesty.

Why do we feel that the only way to survive is to do things like everyone else does? There's no good reason for it. In fact, we're all waiting for someone to pave the way for us by having the courage we don't have, the courage to do something different. Why can't you be one of those people? When it comes to doing the right thing, don't wait for someone else's courage to stand in for your own.

GROUND CONTROL TO _____

Remember those clumsy supermodels? They do us a favor when they stumble. They bring us back down to Earth, where we're all just people wearing clothes. No matter how important we think we are, or how important we think the things we make or do are, we could all stand to stumble down the runway every once in a while. Especially when it comes to marketing.



A great example of this came in the recent blow-up over “Homeless Hotspots,” a campaign created by BBH⁷ (a marketing firm) that turned the homeless of Austin into roaming internet access points available to the throngs attending the South by Southwest conference. Needless to say, it was controversial. Plenty has been said about it – both in support

⁶. <https://twitter.com/#!/ia/status/179273216508956672>

⁷. <http://www.bartleoglehegarty.com/>

and in criticism — but amidst the noise, one comment written by Thomas Wendt⁸ resonated most for me:

In the end, everyone is full of shit — supporters and detractors — and it's all a result of spectacle and denial. The entire system creates such dissonance that we lash out against it. We're unable to reconcile the differences between image and the real, altruism and self-interest, trust and deception. So we gravitate toward poles: BBH is a charitable company or BBH is a lying capitalist institution. Of course, the truth is somewhere in between, but denial and self-deception keeps us from admitting it.

Wendt's post was titled, *Staring Down the Spectacle*, which really gets at the point: It is the culture — and the spectacle it creates — that is your adversary, not any specific action per se, nor any other person. Yet culture has a profound power to shape each of us, so just as much as we should scrutinize what we observe around us, we should bring equal scrutiny to what we observe within ourselves. When it comes to marketing, the most meaningful question I can ask at any point is, *just how full of shit am I?*

GUILTY AS CHARGED

I wrote this as an act of resistance, as a way of keeping myself from disappearing into the “dark side,” not as a prophet condemning from atop a mountain. I see myself struggling to maintain the integrity of an educational marketing model and I often don't like what I see. But, I've also discovered that we must intentionally learn from examples — both good and bad ones. The bad ones are easy to study. We're all close enough to them to do it. We're among them. We may even be one of them. The question is whether we're willing to do something about it. 🐼

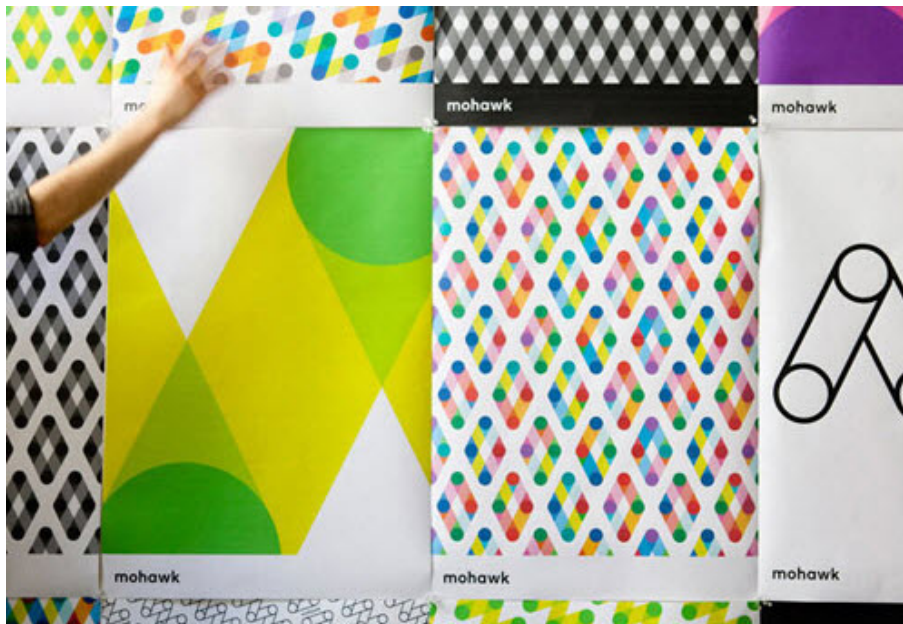
8. <http://www.surroundingsignifiers.com/blog/staring-down-the-spectacle.html>

If You Love Your Brand, Set It Free

BY JOSE MARTINEZ SALMERON 🐼

The practice of branding is undergoing a deep transformation — a change brought about by our kaleidoscopic postmodern culture, the development of communication technology and rapid globalization.

In prior decades, brand managers aimed to establish their products and services primarily by way of consistency and repetition. A brand's voice and message were to be the same, independent of marketing channel. The goal of the designer was to define identity systems that would ensure compliance and coherence in all of the brand's manifestations, as codified in brand identity style guides.



The Reasons For Brand Consistency

This approach to branding was solidified in the mid-20th century, when relatively simple printing methods and communication technologies were available, marketing and advertising practices were not yet sophisticated enough to surround the consumer in a holistic experience, communication technologies enabled only one-to-many broadcasting, and companies didn't face the customer-service challenges and scrutiny they do now.

It was a post-war time of optimism about the capability of standardization to drive progress — a notion whose origins stem from scientism, the industrial revolution and the workings of capital.

From that standpoint, it made sense for corporate identity designers to apply standardization and aim for simplicity to make the most of what reproduction and communication methods were available to them, and to ensure that their designs were defined in a comprehensive and consistent way.

From this school of thought hail historic graphic identities such as UPS, American Airlines, Mobil and Chase Bank, brought to us by Paul Rand, Massimo Vignelli and Chermayeff & Geismar.

Embrace Brand Fluidity

But we now live in a different context. As Grant McCracken recently wrote⁹ in the Harvard Business Review:

The consumer now appears to believe that the brand should earn its public attention the way all of us must. Say boring, repetitive stuff and you suffer the punishment that every bad conversationalist faces. First, we ignore you. Then, we exclude you.

Our postmodern society is more fluid and diverse — a world bursting with myriad electronic media and display capabilities. A contemporary brand identity must reach beyond its visual manifestation in print or TV, to encompass how the brand speaks across a multitude of technology platforms, how it interacts with its audience and how people experience it at an emotional level.

Therefore, consistency — while still desirable — should not necessarily be the main driver of a brand identity system. In fact, we ought to consider total consistency an unachievable ideal: it's impossible, and even counterproductive, to try to predict and codify all potential instances of a brand's current identity. The vast number of stakeholders, marketers and agencies handling brand assets for the types of projects undertaken in our dynamic business and technology environments makes it very difficult to exercise constant control over how a brand is expressed. Better to embrace executional variance in a smart way, by establishing loose parameters that nonetheless can create a familial feel for an otherwise very rich group of brand applications across media and across continents.

9. http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/08/the_logic_breathing_life_into_oreos_new_branding.html

This is not an entirely new concept. Precursors of this kinetic approach to identity design include Duffy & Partners' work for The Islands of the Bahamas¹⁰ — in its own words, “a robust brand language that is endlessly adaptable, flexible and immediately recognizable.”

The Playful, Adaptive Brand

Brands should nowadays give themselves permission to be more surprising, to flirt with their customers, to listen to what they have to say and to cater to their desires. A modern brand should take leaps of faith, abandon self-obsessions and embrace risk. Conversely, by not doing this, the brand could become irrelevant in a hurry.

Because of the dominance of social media, brand identities can now be defined more by their customers than by the companies themselves. The ideal balance, however, stems from the ability to be flexible while keeping intact the core principles and attributes that formed the brand in the first place. Without such grounding, a brand becomes a changeling — morphing its shape to any external whim and impulse.

This fresh approach to defining a brand can be liberating for designers, brand managers and the public. It tends to result in more immersive, delightful and rewarding customer experiences, and it is at the heart of a recent spate of “loose” brand identity executions whose core elements nevertheless remain. Designers have yet to exhaust the full potential of this new method, but many instances already point the way.

Examples Of Fluid Brand Identities

Consider Irma Boom's proudly “imperfect”¹¹ book designs, Hella Jongerious' organic products, Saks Fifth Avenue¹²'s Pentagram-designed puzzle identity, Microsoft¹³'s recent dynamic rebranding, the City of Melbourne¹⁴, OpenIDEO¹⁵, Sugarpova¹⁶ gummy candy, Barcelona pel Medi

10. <http://www.duffy.com/>

11. <http://www.dutchdfa.com/news/949/unfinished-and-yet-complete>

12. <http://www.pentagram.com/work/#/all/fashion/newest/223/>

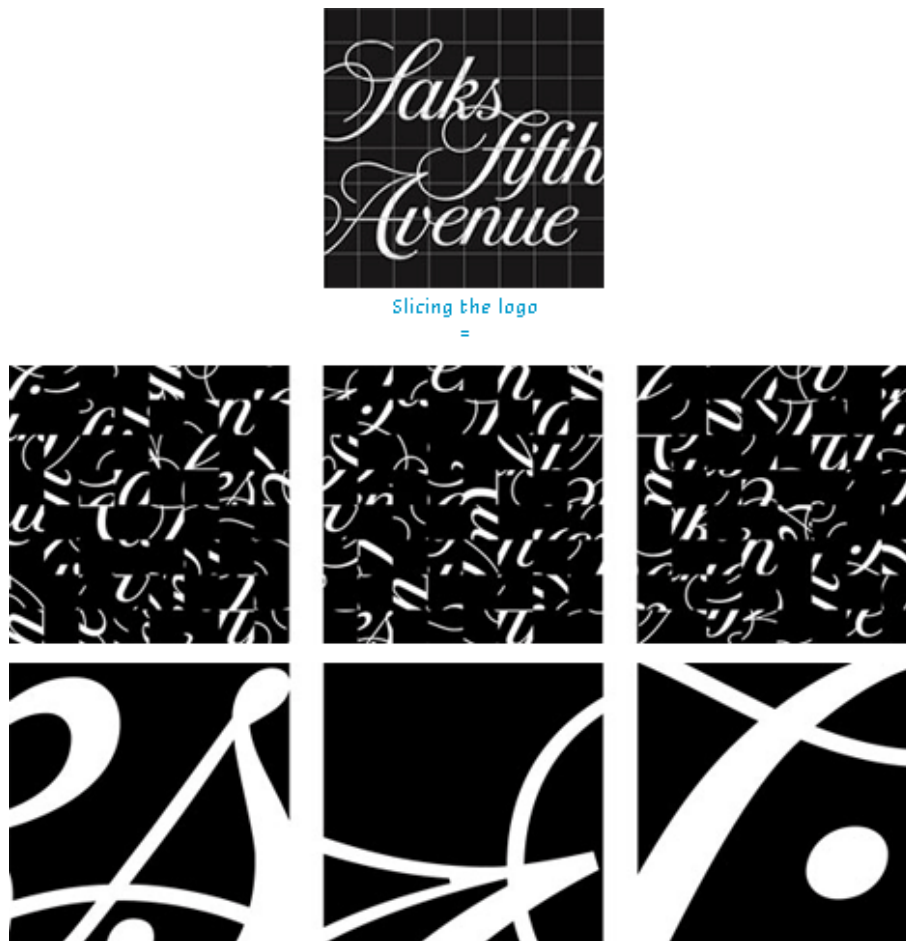
13. <http://mashable.com/2012/08/23/microsoft-reveals-new-company-logo/>

14. http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/pieces_of_melbourne.php

15. <http://www.openideo.com/open/create-an-inspirational-logo-for-openideo/winner-announced/handjob-2-changing-colors/>

16. <http://smashed.by/sharapovas>

Ambient¹⁷ and EDP¹⁸. All point to exciting new ways to approach branding and product development.



Logo for Saks Fifth Avenue and its graphic permutations based on slicing the grid. (Image: Brand New¹⁹)

¹⁷. <http://www.m-eskenazi.com/?/Idioma/CAS/Seccion/Detalle/Categoria/Todo/Ver/Imagenes/Proyecto/17/Barcelona%20pel%20Medi%20Ambient/Foto/1>

¹⁸. <http://www.sagmeisterwalsh.com/work/project/edp/>

¹⁹. http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/skns_iafeth_vaefus_puzzling_id.php



City of Melbourne logo variations. (Image: Behance²⁰)

Oreo, a particularly playful example, has been able to maintain its long-established brand idea of a happy snack time for both children and adults while successfully adapting to the fleeting social trends that surround brands in the current marketplace. With its Daily Twist campaign to commemorate its 100th anniversary, Oreo is posting 100 daily images on its social media channels of an Oreo cookie skillfully transformed to evoke a current event.

²⁰. <http://www.behance.net/gallery/City-of-Melbourne/276451>



Oreo “Daily Twist” campaign. (Images: [Huffington Post](#)²¹)

Likewise, to further distance itself from the failed Time Warner merger, [America Online](#)²² changed its wordmark from “AOL” to “Aol.”. It kept its brand equity as one of the Internet’s pioneers, while featuring an ever-changing, colorful mixed-media background that evokes the dynamic nature of the Web: photography, illustration, colorful splashes of paint — all work to surprising effect, while maintaining the familiarity of the Aol brand across the company’s websites and other communication channels.

²¹. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/16/oreo-daily-twist-customized-cookies_n_1791017.html#slide=1389690

²². http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/aol_generation_next.php



America Online's new and playful brand identity. (Image: Brand New²³)

DC Comics accompanied its recent character revamp with a brand identity redesign²⁴ that embraces the principles of variance and fluidity. The brand consultancy Landor explains its rationale for the change: “To represent DC Entertainment’s world, a place of opposing forces, we created a new visual expression that is a living identity easily adaptable to evolving characters and stories.”

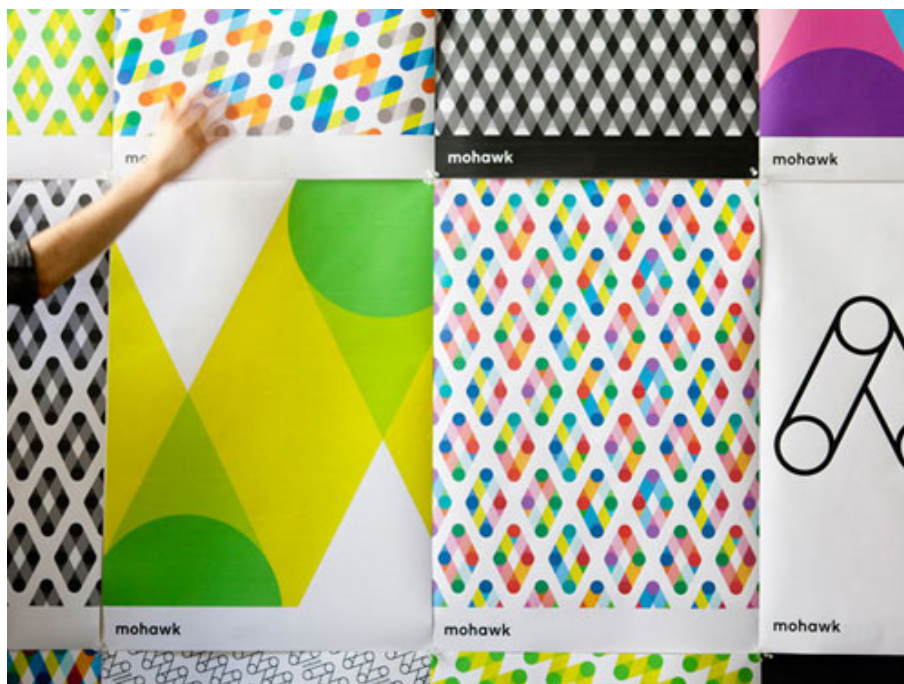
The only constant is the name and typographic treatment of “DC Comics,” while the symbol’s fixed element is a peeling “D.” Everything else changes to evoke a particular character’s costume or the setting of a comic book series.

²³. http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/aol_generation_next.php

²⁴. <http://landor.com/#!/work/case-studies/dc-entertainment/>



DC Comics' new versatile logo. (Image: [Landor](#)²⁵)



Different colorful patterns for Mohawk's new brand identity. (Image: [Pentagram](#)²⁶)

In turn, Pentagram's [rethinking](#)²⁷ of venerable Mohawk Paper relies on a solid idea – the rotating cylinders of traditional printing presses – to

²⁵. <http://landor.com/#!/work/case-studies/dc-entertainment/>

²⁶. <http://www.pentagram.com/work/#!/branding-and-identities/all/alpha/2729/>

²⁷. <http://www.pentagram.com/work/#!/branding-and-identities/all/alpha/2729/>

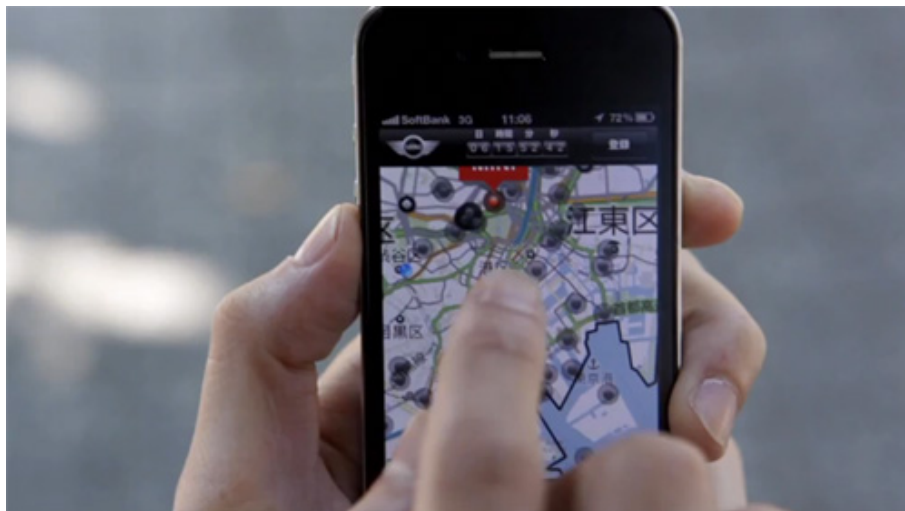
then launch into an explosion of colors, shapes and patterns that ably reflects the versatility of paper as support and vehicle for communication.

The Brand As An Ecosystem Of Interactions

Beyond formal considerations, a brand is also defined by experiential parameters (and now more than ever): how and where do customers interact with a given brand, online and offline.

The explosion of digital and social media in recent years, as well as the increased adoption of Internet-enabled mobile devices, has evolved the way brands are seen, tasted, touched and felt: Google's "New Multi-screen World" study indicates that 90% of all media consumption happens on a screen — a full 38% of which is on smartphones alone. 90% of people use multiple screens sequentially to interact with brands (shopping online, managing finances, planning a trip and more). comScore's own data establish that 61% of Internet users are online while watching TV, and do it on a range of devices — laptops, smartphones and tablets.

Consequently, smart advertisers use their TV commercials as launching pads for deeper online experiences, knowing full well that interested audiences will be able to access those sites immediately, right from their couch, and to share them with people in their social graph. Also, companies use mobile technology to take their campaigns right to the streets in a personal and highly dynamic way.



Location-based treasure hunt app for the Mini promotional campaign. (Image: [Popsop](http://popsop.com/51399)²⁸)

²⁸. <http://popsop.com/51399>

Consider popular marketing initiatives such as the Mini Getaway Tokyo²⁹ and Stockholm, in which fans of the brand used their augmented reality-equipped smartphones to search for a virtual Mini in a massive treasure hunt, literally running around the city and competing against each other in order to be the person with the virtual Mini on their screen at the end of the contest — thus becoming the proud owner of a real vehicle.

Or consider this year's launch of the Ford Fusion vehicle³⁰ (Disclosure: as part of the WPP Communications team, my employer, Ogilvy, had a leading role in this project), which was gradually unveiled using an iOS and Android app featuring a Fusion test-driving game that was unlocked by taking a picture of any Ford logo anywhere with your mobile device's camera.



Ford Fusion tablet- and mobile-optimized game promotes the unveiling of the vehicle.

(Image: AutoGuide³¹)

Other companies adopt the practices of co-creation, asking their audiences via social media what their preferences are for product customization, brand visualizations and more. Or they crowdsource the creation of content. For instance, the country of Sweden recently handed control of its Twitter account³² to regular citizens to provide an authentic, unadulterated feel for what Sweden is about to audiences all

²⁹. <http://popsop.com/51399>

³⁰. <http://www.autoguide.com/auto-news/2011/12/2013-ford-fusion-app-teases-upcoming-release-detroit-auto-show-preview-video.html>

³¹. <http://www.autoguide.com/auto-news/2011/12/2013-ford-fusion-app-teases-upcoming-release-detroit-auto-show-preview-video.html>

³². <http://thenextweb.com/twitter/2011/12/16/sweden-lets-citizens-take-over-its-official-twitter-account-this-is-either-genius-or-insanity/>

over the world. Chevy, Pepsi and Doritos asked their fans to create their Super Bowl ads³³.

A New Process To Define Brands

How does one go about loosely, yet effectively, defining a brand identity? This new approach is not an excuse to dilute the importance of brand strategy. Establishing a brand's positioning, personality and attributes remains critical to the success of the brand's identity.

Writing a good brand manifesto is also still important. It sets the vision for that brand's emotional and sensorial expressions, and serves as a reference against which to evaluate future variations from the theme. However, the design process is now more akin to generating algorithms or creating vector-defining equations than to painting pixels.

Not that generative art³⁴ is now an indispensable tool for the identity designer, but certain aspects of this practice resonate with fluid branding: the designer will need to find what makes a brand pliable, what set of its attributes lend themselves to flexibility and variance, and then organically build on those.

Furthermore, brand identity definition is no longer a one-way street, and it can't solely rest on visual aspects either. As we have seen with the Mini and Ford, the way a brand interacts with its audiences online or offline is as integral to its personality, if not more so, as the logo. For example, if a company has 10 locations worldwide – and assuming that this fact is integral to what the company is as a brand – then its logo might be graphically constructed by joining these 10 geographic points in different random configurations.

Such a brand might also promote engaging experiences that are deployed at a local level but that connect globally to a meaningful larger story.

Designers need to pick a few graphic elements or parameters that can nevertheless effectively represent a brand, and then let additional considerations vary accordingly: Are the company's name and a single color enough to build an identity around – while elements like mark, typeface, illustration, texture and editorial voice adapt incessantly to the context they inhabit at any given time?

Allowing such a succinct and flexible identity to further evolve according to the brand's interaction with customers is an approach that

³³. <http://www.fastcompany.com/1802674/chevy-pepsi-and-doritos-turn-fan-made-super-bowl-ads-brand-buzz>

³⁴. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generative_art

applies the notion of “minimum viable product³⁵” to the process of designing brands.

A simplified set of parameters such as those described above will greatly enhance the ease of use of brand guidelines (or style guides). These documents can thus be relatively brief and inspirational, while still ensuring an appropriate level of consistency. Style guides can set designers free to experiment, adding to the richness of the brand while reinforcing its inner coherence and staying power.

After all, the best way for a company to differentiate itself is to be subtle within the visually heavy landscape that currently surrounds us, to provide a cone of silence amidst ubiquitous noise, to bend when every other brand is trying too hard not to break, and to adopt an organic feel and a human scale. 🐼

³⁵. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_viable_product

What Successful Products Teach Us About Web Design

BY YIANNIS KONSTANTAKOPOULOS 🍷

Web design is a craft that is constantly evolving and yet also sometimes sabotaged. The moment a design is released, a new version is born. In the beginning, like a baby, it seems vulnerable and weak, but in time it grows up and becomes self-sufficient. Redesigning a website for its own sake doesn't prove anything; quite the contrary, it reveals a lack of effectiveness on the part of the designer.

Product design is a craft in which new versions come to life with increasing difficulty. We can learn a thing or two from it when designing for the Web. First, let's look at some examples.

- How many designs for the iPhone has Apple released since 2007? The answer is one, with only two tweaks. How many Motorola phones for Android can you find on the market right now? Thirteen, not counting the old models.
- How many designs of the Mini Cooper do you know of? Just that one brave design that has continually evolved since 1959! How many Toyota Corolla models can you count since 1967? Nineteen.
- Zippo lighters have retained their appeal since 1933!

Forget marketing, technical specs and hardware. Products such as the iPhone, the Mini Cooper and the Zippo lighter have become wildly successful because of their outstanding design. Such massive success springs from three sources: the designer, sticking to the scope and iteration. These aspects can help us in Web design, too. In this chapter, we'll look at what we can learn from successful product design.

The Ability Of The Designer

Do you trust your instincts? You should! Because when you see a design, you judge its attractiveness in less than a second³⁶. We all know what we like, even if we can't always explain it. It's about aesthetics. Aesthetics is a child of harmony, and harmony is not magic. It can be

³⁶. <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/visual-decision-making/>

achieved when the designer embraces certain principles, such as balance, contrast and dominance. Becoming a fantastic designer, though, requires more than pure technique. It requires that you see the context and make decisions accordingly.



Zippo lighters have remained elegant and reliable through time. (Image: [cell105](http://www.flickr.com/photos/cell105/2652288685/)³⁷)

A couple of comments by [Karim Rashid](http://www.karimrashid.com/)³⁸, featured in the documentary [Objectified](http://www.objectifiedfilm.com/)³⁹ are fascinating and revealing. First, Rashid talks about a stereo that he loved as a teenager:

It was a white kind of bubble stereo with these two bubble white speakers. And it was probably very inexpensive – it was a real democratic product, and it had a turntable and the whole thing built in. It was a beautiful thing. Looking back and thinking why it was a beautiful thing, it was very self-contained, and the message was very strong and very simple, and at the same time it was very human. There was a quality about it.

See? A democratic, self-contained, human, simple thing with a strong message.

Here is Rashid again on thinking outside the box:

Why do we feel like we need to keep revisiting the archetype over and over and over again? Digital cameras, for example, [whose] format,

³⁷. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cell105/2652288685/>

³⁸. <http://www.karimrashid.com/>

³⁹. <http://www.objectifiedfilm.com/>

proportion, the fact that they're a horizontal rectangle, are a model of the original silver film camera. So, in turn it's the film that defined the shape of the camera. All of a sudden, our digital cameras have no film. So, why on earth do we have the same shape we have?

How is it that Karim Rashid extracts such clear conclusions? What hinders us from doing the same? And not just in theory. Let's do it for real. The next time you are about to make an important design decision, stop and ask yourself, What would I do if I were Dieter Rams⁴⁰ or Jonathan Ive⁴¹ or — since you're a Web designer — Douglas Bowman⁴²?

Asking this kind of question briefly expands our skills of judgment and makes us ultra-alert. Doing it regularly can drastically heighten our perception, values and actions as designers. Is this enough? No, but it is the beginning of a beautiful relationship with design.

And the Zippo lighter? It looks both friendly and solid, a comrade that needs your attention in order to keep working. It has its own scent; it's windproof; and above all, the sound when you flip open the lid is distinctive. And if you've owned a Zippo for a while, you must have noticed that it learns how you touch it when you light it.

All together, a Zippo is a product of craft — just as our designs for the Web should be. This is as simple and as hard as it sounds.

Focusing On The Scope

Let's go back to cars for a moment. As noted earlier, the Corolla models of Toyota are nothing spectacular in their design. But what is a Toyota car known for? It's a reliable, relatively cheap family car. Is Toyota successful? You bet!

What's a Mini Cooper? It's a beautiful small car that appeals mostly to young people. Is it successful? Of course, it is.

Cars are complicated machines. They do more than transport people. If a Toyota were as fancy as the Mini, then it wouldn't be affordable. If a Mini were reimaged as a family car, then it would lose some of its charm. Oversimplification? Perhaps. But you get the point.

There's a scope behind each product. As long as the scope is met, the product will be effective and remain on the market. The same happens in Web design.

^{40.} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dieter_Rams

^{41.} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Ive

^{42.} <http://stopdesign.com/>



Once a Mini, always a Mini. (Image: [Shelley Gibb](#)⁴³)

Consider a metaphor. The closest physical product to a website is a periodical. Take [Wired](#)⁴⁴ magazine (the physical magazine, that is, not the website or iPad app, which have slightly different characteristics). I've been reading it for more than 10 years, and if I had to describe it succinctly I would say "forward-thinking and cool." Wired reinvents itself every once in a while and persistently fine-tunes the design, but the scope remains the same. Excellent design and illustration, superbly written long articles and a ton of clever short ones serve the main purpose: to introduce its audience to a new era. Audiences change over time, and new eras dawn, but Wired remains. Why? Because it has always respected a higher purpose. Sure, many magazines are well designed, and enough of them have great content. But you rarely find one with a unique identity, an identity that can't be easily copied.

Your probably less complicated Web project needs to perform similarly. You must define the objectives. The design must promote them. Good content should prevail. You know the rules; make sure to follow them. Moreover, know where to stop. If it's a new idea with vague potential or yet another feature or a last-minute change, just say no.

Websites are like breathing organisms. They evolve; new features are added and others are dropped, but they never stay still. Or at least they shouldn't. Thus, while a promising fresh idea shouldn't be discarded, it should be held until the next major update.

⁴³. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shelleygibb/2960661847/>

⁴⁴. <http://www.wired.com/>

Big, ambitious, well-funded websites often seem to lose focus. Their owners try to satisfy *all* requests. This is a recipe for disaster, because it creates unnecessary friction between everyone working on the project. It dulls the impact of the best features and, above all, the scope. Tension fills the air. The worst days are ahead.

Such practices have led to the infamous concept of design by committee⁴⁵. Simply put, if everything is important, then nothing is important.

Iterations



Is what Apple does magic? I think not. (Image: Jon Rawlinson⁴⁶)

Let's talk Apple. Apple's iconic design and its founder's exceptional way of thinking have been overanalyzed lately.

No matter how many words we write about Steve Jobs, we still seem to explain away his success as being a kind of magic. But that's plainly wrong. People are inclined towards the least complicated, least demanding explanation to a conundrum. It is written in our genes. We think more deeply only when there's a serious reason to do so. (But I digress.)

So, let's do away with what Adrian Slywotzky refers to as the "Eureka" myth⁴⁷:

⁴⁵. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_by_committee

⁴⁶. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/london/129181467/>

⁴⁷. http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/08/steve_jobs_and_the_myth_of_eur.html

Apple would love us to believe it's all 'Eureka.' But Apple produces 10 pixel-perfect prototypes for each feature. They compete – and are winnowed down to three, then one, resulting in a highly evolved winner. Because Apple knows the more you compete inside, the less you'll have to compete outside.

If Apple iterates so painstakingly, why shouldn't we?

Inspiration for a great design roars when it comes. And implementing the idea brings a rush of enthusiasm. And our eyes sparkle when we anticipate outstanding success. And yet it rarely works that way. Why? Because ideas and their execution are seldom free from flaws. You know the old cliché, “There is always room for improvement.” It still stands. There is always room for improvement, and accepting that your idea is the one that needs improvement takes courage. Demolishing your next great product in order to make it better takes nerve and self-discipline. But it also makes you wiser, and can dramatically improve the product.

Iterating extensively and in detail doesn't depend on a certain type of project or a certain budget. It's a tricky thing, because it forces us to confront our imperfect nature as human beings. To embrace our inner flaws is to walk the road of truth and maturity, silently, without making a show that we're doing it.

This weight might feel a little heavy on our shoulders. If it does or if you dismiss Apple's success, consider what Oliver Reichenstein, head of Information Architects⁴⁸, says about the iterations⁴⁹ that his team makes in each development phase (this quote appears in the comments section):

It's often almost impossible to explain easily why things look like they do, because we went through so many iterations, that it feels like explaining a chess game with all the ifs and whats.

The same goes when designing for the Web: there's no excuse to avoid making as many iterations as we can.

Final Thoughts

When successful designers are asked where they seek inspiration, they often say something like, “Everywhere – I go for a walk and observe the world around me.” And it's true. But what they don't often say is that

⁴⁸. <http://www.informationarchitects.jp/en/>

⁴⁹. <https://plus.google.com/115711522874757126523/posts/PoPTYdVFYyt>

they also know what to observe and how to ignore the noise of the world.

There are many beautiful well-functioning products around us. Each has a story to tell, a story that is strongly attached to its design, its scope and the iterations that the designer took before releasing it to the world.

Take the Dyson vacuum cleaner. Its design is at least impressive, and its scope is clear (to suck dirt better than other cleaners and, thus, to make your environment healthier), and it took hundreds of prototypes for the designers to figure out how to make it work without a bag. The first Dyson vacuum cleaner was sold in 1970! To explore further and find similar products, just search for our three key words: “design scope iteration.”

Creating a lasting website is no easier than creating a lasting vacuum cleaner. But neither is it impossible. It requires a holistic approach, focus and maturity, just like the products we’ve looked at here. Not to mention, it requires a paradigm shift⁵⁰. 🐼

⁵⁰. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradigm_shift

Social Media Is A Part Of The User Experience

BY PAUL BOAG 🍷

The term “social media guru” has almost become a dirty word within the Web community. In fact, despite most of us being early adopters of social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, we consider social media the purview of marketers.

It certainly isn't our responsibility — we build websites, we don't run marketing campaigns. But are we justified in this point of view? Is social media really somebody else's responsibility?

In my opinion, social media is very much our concern. That is because social media is firmly a part of the user's experience, and we are user experience designers. The user experience does not occur within a single channel (such as a website or Facebook page). Users move between multiple channels and so all of these channels need to be designed as one consistent user experience.

At the moment, we largely fail to integrate the various channels through which we communicate with our users. Although most social media channels are great at driving traffic to our websites, few websites return the favor to anything at that same level.

There is a reason why marketers are increasingly including the Web address to their Facebook Page in ads rather than the website itself — it is because if they drive traffic to the website, it rarely makes it any further. This is because as Web designers our thinking about social media rarely moves beyond slapping a “share this” button on the bottom of each page.

Going Beyond “Share This”

I recently booked some travel insurance for an upcoming trip. While filling in the online form I came across a “share this page” link at the bottom. Why would anybody share a travel insurance form? Even if they did, would any of their friends look at it? Of course not!

Get a Quote

Policy Type * [?] Single Trip

Travellers * [?] Select

Destination * [?] Select
Country Search

Winter Sports
We will only provide this cover if you have paid the extra premium and you are under 65. If you have chosen the annual multi-trip cover including winter sports, you will automatically be covered for up to 17 days' winter sports cover in a year. ☐

Departure Date * [?] 12 May 2012

Return Date *

Post Code *

NEXT

Copyright © 2010 Tesco Personal Finance plc

[Web accessibility](#) | [Security & legal](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Site map](#) | [Contact us](#)

Would anybody really share a travel insurance form?

The problem here was that the “share this” option had been applied indiscriminately across the whole website. No thought had been put into its application. Admittedly, this was probably due to technical constraints. However, just because something is easier technically is no excuse for compromising the users experience.

Compare that to an environmental website I visited. While reading a blog post on their website I came across the following shocking fact:

Only 1% of the 560 million city residents living in China are breathing air that would be considered safe according to EU guidelines.

This was a piece of information worth sharing and the author knew it. Instead of the quote being buried in the copy, it was displayed in a magazine style pull-out. Directly under the quote was the option to share it with my friends on Facebook. This website got it right:

- It was specific. Instead of a blanket “share this page,” it identified specific content worth sharing.

- It made sharing easy. Inline with Steve Krug’s mantra of “Don’t make me think⁵¹”, this website told the user what to share and made the process of sharing as easy as clicking a single button.

This is the level of thought we should all be putting into our “share this” links. However, it is not just these links that require attention, but also our “follow us” buttons.

Why Should I Follow You?

Otherwise well-designed websites seem to abandon the principles of user interface design when it comes to their “follow us” buttons.

Take for example an ecommerce website I visited. I was looking to buy a new DSLR camera, but upon arriving at the website, one of the first things I saw was a “follow us on Facebook” button. Because this button was styled with Facebook branding rather than that of the website, it stood out like a sore thumb.



Sometimes follow us icons can be a distraction from the user’s primary task.

From my perspective this was a distraction. I had come to the website to buy a camera, *not* to follow the retailer on Facebook. This “call to action” was distracting me from my task and also from fulfilling the website’s business objective of taking my money.

I completed my purchase and ended up on the “thank you” page where I was presented with the inevitable option to “continue shopping”. Who clicks on this link anyway? Why would I continue shopping? I had just finished shopping, why would I start again?

Instead of this redundant link, now was the time to ask people to follow. I had completed my goal and fulfilled the website’s primary busi-

⁵¹. <http://smashed.by/steve-krug>

ness objective. Therefore, now was the perfect time to go for a secondary call to action.

The “ask” would have been even more powerful if they gave me a reason to follow them. With so many brands, celebrities and others asking me to follow them, why should I follow this ecommerce website? What was in it for me?

If instead of asking me to simply “follow them” they added some copy, such as:

Follow us on Facebook for useful advice on how to get the most from your new camera.

I may have been more inclined to follow them.

There are no shortage of ways we can closely integrate our websites with social media beyond “follow us” and “share” options. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn all offer powerful APIs, but they also offer some easy-to-implement widgets too.

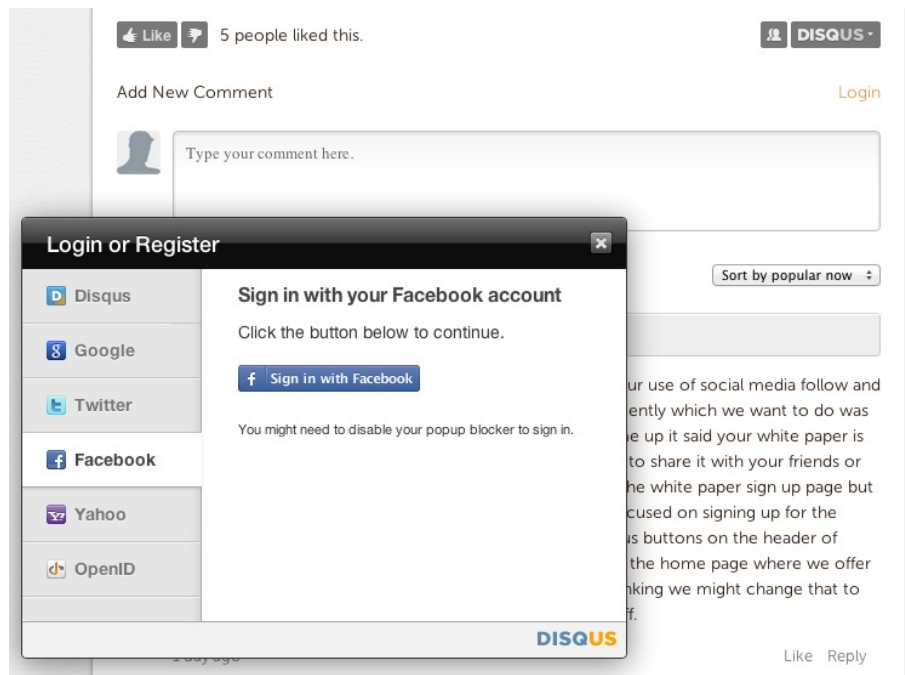
Going Beyond Share And Follow

Making greater use of social media on our websites doesn’t need to be technically challenging or expensive. All the major social networks are bending over backwards to make it easy.

For example, Facebook offers easy-to-implement social plugins⁵². These include:

- An entire commenting system driven by Facebook.
- An activity feed that allows users to see what their friends have been doing on your website.
- A recommendation plugin that gives users personalized suggestions for pages on your website that they might like.
- A live stream that lets users share comments in real-time during a live event on your website.
- A registration plugin that allows users to easily signup to your website using their Facebook account.

⁵². <http://developers.facebook.com/docs/plugins/>



Tools such as Disqus commenting integrates not just with one social network, but with many.

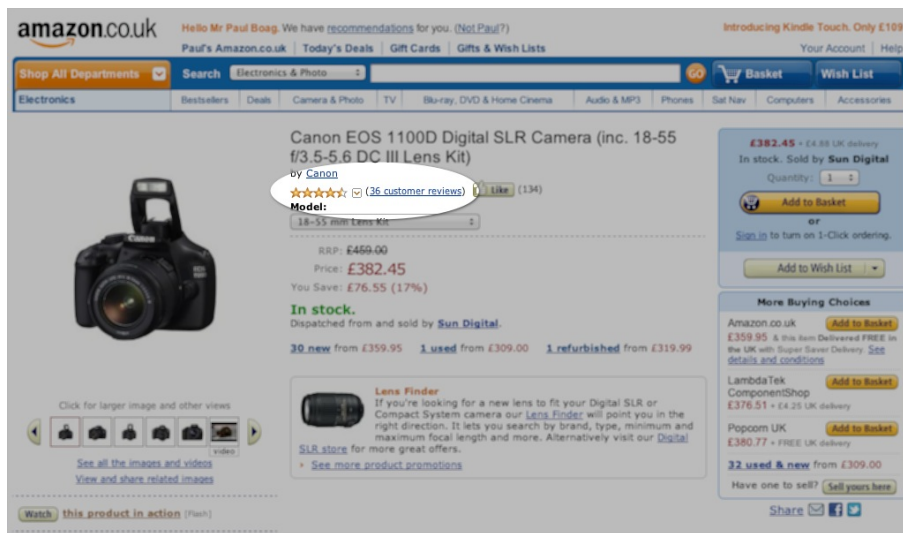
With so many tools available to add social functionality, we have no reason not to. However, adding these basic tools to our websites is just the start. I believe that the real power of social media is only just beginning to be tapped.

Social By Design

At Facebook they have a phrase: “Social by design.” This refers to their commitment to put social at the heart of everything they do. For them, their network is not just about the content generated by users, but about the interaction between those users.

I believe that this principle extends beyond social networking and can be applied to many other websites as well. We are social animals. So much of our behavior and decision making is dictated by others. This is well understood in marketing and something we need to take seriously in Web design.

Whether we are considering what car to buy, where to eat out or what school to send our kids to, we like to ask our friends. Online too, we are social creatures. When purchasing from Amazon, we tend to value the reviews more highly than the products official description. Equally we are more likely to complete a call to action when we see many others have done so before.



When it comes to purchasing, we put more weight on consumer reviews than marketing material.

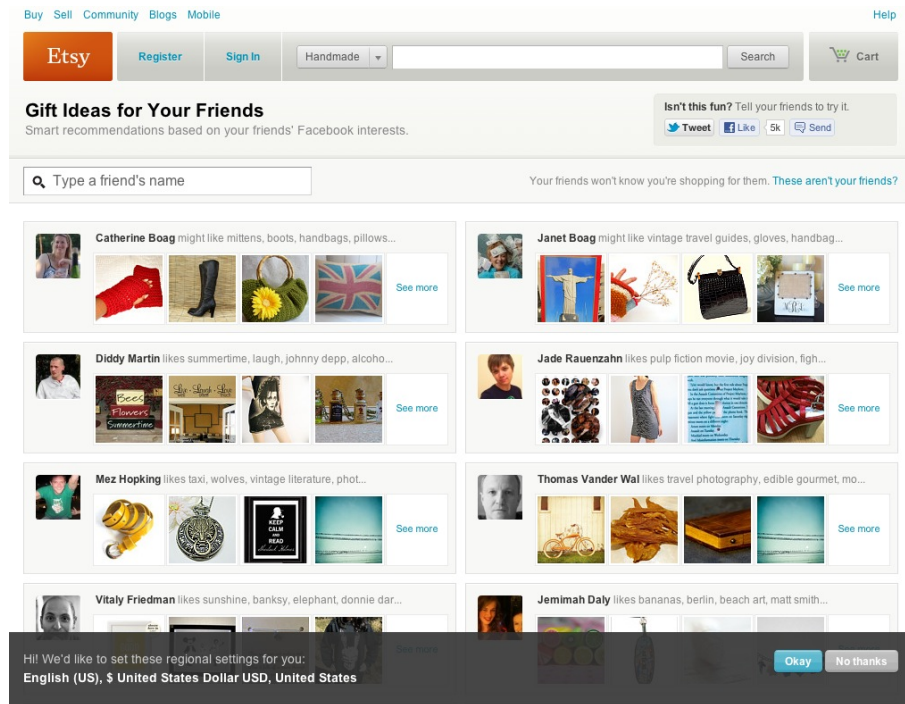
The possibilities for harnessing this social component of our personalities are only just beginning to be explored. For example, although it is great that Amazon lets you read the reviews of other purchasers, it would be even better if the reviews of trusted friends (say, your Facebook friends) were floated to the top. A review from a stranger is one thing, but a review from a friend is quite something else.

Remember the environmental website I mentioned earlier? Allowing me to share that specific quote with my friends was great. However, I would be even more likely to share the link if below the share button it had told me that some of my friends had already shared that quote with their networks. I trust my judgement of my friends, so if they had shared that quote, then it must be worth sharing.



If I can see one of my friends has tweeted something, I am more likely to do the same myself.

Some websites are already beginning to harness our friendship networks. One example is [Etsy](http://etsy.com/)⁵³, a company that sells handmade goods. You can login to Facebook via their website and it will suggest appropriate products for your friends based on their interests. Although the suggestions are not perfect, they are a lot more powerful than generic suggestions of “gifts for him” or “gifts for her”.



Etsy uses Facebook to suggest gifts for your friends.

Imagine for a moment if Etsy didn't stop there. Imagine if they used that Facebook data to identify gaps in what they sold. This knowledge could be used not just to improve user experience, but suggest future products. Social by design has the potential to alter the direction of an entire business.

This doesn't need to be limited to ecommerce websites. A website like Smashing Magazine could use tweets and comments on an article as an indication of popular topics that could be covered in more depth. You could even go so far as to asking users to directly suggest ideas for posts, product ideas or new services they wanted. Traditionally this kind of audience research and product development has been an expensive business. Social media offers the ability to get this kind of feedback for free.

As you can begin to see, social by design is not just about allowing us to draw on our friendship networks, but has the power to do much

⁵³. <http://etsy.com/>

more. However, to achieve this we need to integrate social into the very fabric of our website rather than bolt it on as an afterthought.

The Problem With Bolt-On Social Media

Too many of our websites are social by happenstance rather than social by design. A new piece of social technology comes along and we bolt it onto our website without considering the bigger picture.

Take my own [website](http://boagworld.com/)⁵⁴. Like many, this website has evolved over a number of years and I've added more social functionality to it overtime. Because my community is so important, there are lots of ways to contribute, dependent on preference for social network. You can:

- Comment on a blog post.
- Contribute to a forum thread.
- Join the Facebook page.
- Talk to my via Twitter.
- Even comment on audio posts I release.

With so many options, nobody could accuse me of not having a social website. The problem is that the conversation is fragmented — those postings on Twitter will not see the contribution from those who post on Facebook. Equally, commenters on my blog will miss the in-depth discussion found in the forum.

This is because I have bolted on the technology, rather than integrating it to create a more complete community. Imagine instead that my website had been designed with social in mind from the start. When I release a new blog post this could create a thread on the forum. Comments posted to the blog post would appear on the forum and vice versa.

Equally, when the post is released it could also be posted to Twitter and Facebook. If somebody replied on either of those social networks the reply would be captured and folded into the comments on the website. Although not perfect (for example Twitter users still wouldn't see comments made by Facebook users without visiting the website), it is a step forward. It makes the website the hub for your community, rather than having separate siloed discussions.

⁵⁴. <http://boagworld.com/>

The Role Of The Website

That is the main point I want to leave you with. Your website should be the hub of social interaction, not sitting on the sidelines. It has the potential to draw together conversation across multiple networks and allow users to interact with friends, whether buying a camera or sharing an inspirational quote. 🐦

How To Use Email To Alienate Your Users

BY PAUL BOAG 🐉

Spam! Monty Python may love it⁵⁵, but the rest of us are not so convinced. But what is spam? Are you spamming users without realizing it? And is there any place in the world for email marketing?

Most of us have a love/hate relationship with email. It's one of those necessary evils. Nowhere is our relationship with email more confused than when it comes to spam.

For a start, spam is hard to define. Google defines it as:

Sending the same message indiscriminately to (large numbers of recipients) on the Internet.

But what does that actually mean? The truth is, what one person considers acceptable, another could hate with a loathing.

Without a clear definition of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, it becomes easy for email marketing to alienate users, rather than win them over.

Should we, therefore, give up on email as a marketing tool entirely? Absolutely not.

The Benefits Of Email Marketing

Done right, email marketing can be a wonderful tool, not just for you but for your subscribers, too.

Email marketing does not all have to be about pushing readers into completing a call to action (although it is very effective at that). It is also about keeping your brand in their mind so that when they do need your services, they will think of you and not your competitors.

Email communication has the potential to be a great way to build a lasting relationship. It's a chance for a more personal level of interaction than a website normally provides. You can ask questions, encourage discussion and gather feedback. Good email marketing is a dialogue rather than a monologue.

⁵⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anwy2MPT5RE>

Good email marketing doesn't just benefit the sender. It should also provide real benefit to the reader, too. It should help them solve problems, keep them informed and provide tangible value. After all, that is what they expected when they signed up.

The problem is that often subscribers do not make a conscious decision to sign up, and they don't really want the emails in the first place.

“Why Am I Getting This Email?”

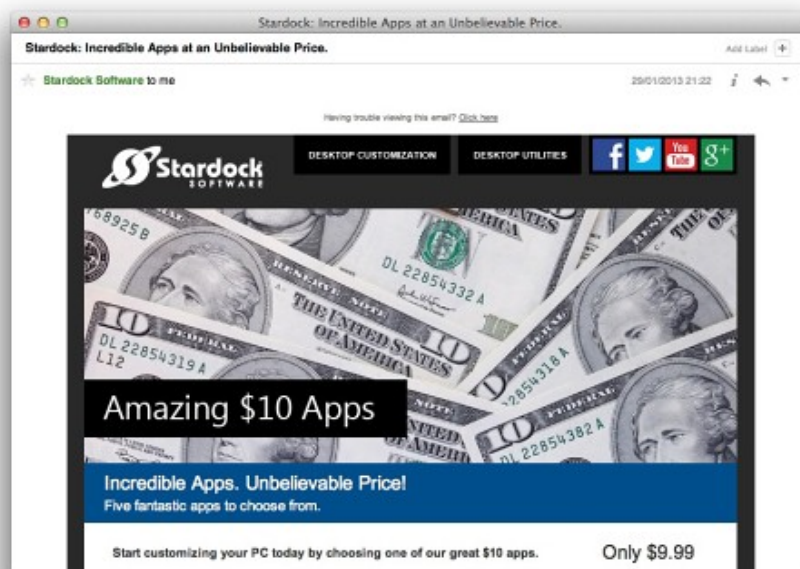
Notice that I am presuming that some level of consent has been given by subscribers. I hope you know better than to email people unsolicited.

That said, the term “unsolicited” can be interpreted in many ways, and you may have strayed into a gray area without even realizing it.

First, let me be clear: buying an email list gathered by a third party is, in my opinion (and I suspect the opinion of those on the list), unsolicited email. If you don't want to alienate people, don't go down this path.

Secondly, just because someone has signed up to your service doesn't mean they have agreed to receive email from you.

This is an important distinction. As part of the sign-up process, you may have indicated that you will email them, or you may have even provided an option for them to opt out. However, if the user didn't spot this, then you will still alienate them, despite being entirely within your rights. The email is still unsolicited in their eyes.



I have no memory of agreeing to an email subscription when I bought a Stardock app, but I still regularly receive email from the company.

Notifications, which have become increasingly popular, are another example of this gray area.

“I Don’t Want To Be Notified”

On the face of it, notification emails seem innocent enough. It makes sense that if a friend signs up for the same service as I have, I would want to know. Equally, if someone comments on something I have done, then being informed of that via email would be useful.

Unfortunately, these emails have increasingly had little to do with helping the user and everything to do with pushing them to re-engage.

When someone signs up for your website, service or app, remember that if you wish to send them notifications, then you need to make this transparent and allow them the opportunity to opt out.

How you handle the addition of notification emails at a later date is also important. Recently, Twitter started emailing people with a summary of their Twitter stream. I imagine Twitter thought this to be a useful tool that would encourage users to participate more. Instead, all it did was alienate them.



Twitter started sending out notification emails without specifically asking people to opt in. This alienated many users.

Many people had old Twitter accounts they no longer used and suddenly found themselves getting unsolicited email from Twitter. To make matters worse, unsubscribing proved to be extremely difficult.

“I Just Want To Unsubscribe”

Enabling users to unsubscribe from email updates should go without saying. Not offering this option means that users will mark your email as spam, and that could ultimately get your emails permanently banned.

However, just because an email has an unsubscribe option doesn't mean it won't alienate users. Take the Twitter example again. You had an option to unsubscribe from its emails but only once you had logged into the service. If you are receiving email notifications for a defunct account, chances are you cannot remember your log-in details.



I would love to unsubscribe from Twitter's notification digests, but I cannot because I don't know my log-in details.

Unsubscribing should be as easy as clicking a link. Anything else, and you risk annoying the recipient even more.

Of course, what you really want is for users not to unsubscribe in the first place. A good way to avoid this problem is to stay on topic.

“This Isn't What I Signed Up For”

When people do subscribe intentionally, they do so with certain expectations. Meeting those expectations is important if you do not wish to alienate them.

Keep a consistent tone across all of the digital channels through which you communicate. If your website strikes a formal, conservative tone, while your email is much more conversational, the contrast will unsettle users. The “story” and “character” need to be consistent. Social media, email and your website should all speak in a single voice and with a consistent message.

People have expectations not just about how you speak to them, but about what content you deliver.

For example, people who sign up for my newsletter expect the latest Web design-related news. That is what I told them they would get, and that is what I have to deliver. If I start pushing my Web design services instead, they are going to feel lied to, and I would alienate them.

Remember, it is rare that a user will subscribe to email updates purely to be sold to. They almost certainly have other expectations. Just receiving sales pitches holds little value to them.

Having trouble viewing this? [shop by phone: 1-800-593-4361](#)

see our weekly ad and enter our sweepstakes

TV & Home Entertainment MP3 & Audio Computers & Office Cameras & Camcorders Car & Mobile Video Gaming Home, Toys & Gifts Movies & Music Repair & Installation

free shipping on orders \$24 & up or choose 24-minute in-store pickup

Red Hot Deals

shop now

Catch these deals while they last—ends Saturday

gift cards buy a gift card

Circuit City Rewards credit card learn more

store locator find a store

weekly ad see this week's deals

[circuitcity.com](#) • [privacy policy](#) • [customer support](#) • [unsubscribe / preferences](#)

Three convenient ways to shop: online, in stores, or by phone at 1-800-593-4361
 Circuit City Stores, Inc. | 9950 Mayland Drive | Richmond, VA 23233-1464 | This is a commercial email.
 Remember to add circuitcity@email.circuitcity.com to your address book to ensure our emails reach your inbox.

cybertrust
secured site

All offers valid 8/7/08 - 8/9/08 11:59 p.m. ET.

©1996 - 2008 Circuit City Stores, Inc. All rights reserved. Circuit City® and the Circuit City logo are registered trademarks of Circuit City Stores West Coast, Inc. and are used with permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies and are used with permission.

Users rarely want email subscriptions to be nothing more than endless sales pitches.

In many ways, a subscription to your mailing list is a contract. The user entrusts you with their personal contact details, in return for something of value. They will tolerate some degree of departure from that topic to hear your sales message, but it is easy to take things too far.

What they will not tolerate is continually being pressured into following the same call to action.

Even if a user has signed up to, say, a charity newsletter, that newsletter should consist of more than constant appeals for donations. The emails also need to share success stories, educate the audience and provide some sense of value.



The RSPCA animal charity's newsletter is a good mixture of appeals and informational content.

Providing value is so important not only because it will keep the audience engaged, but because it shows you are putting the subscriber's needs ahead of your own.

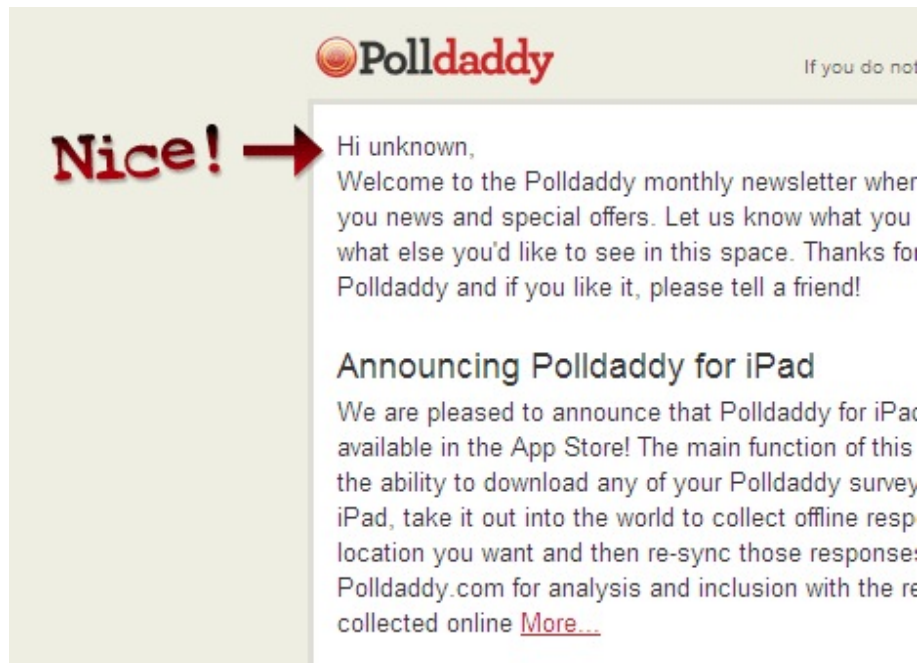
“You Obviously Don’t Care About Me”

Too many mailing-list owners are so busy pushing their agenda and maximizing click-throughs and conversions that they show little interest in subscribers.

Their emails are read for what they are, mass broadcasts. I work long and hard to make the emails I send out each week sound personal, as if I were writing to just one person.

To keep our subscribers, we need to treat them as people and not as open rates or click-through statistics.

This can manifest itself in two ways. First, our emails need to avoid marketing jargon and instead read like any other personal email. The writing style of your average marketing email is fascinating; you would never write like that if you were writing to just one person.



Marketing copy and poor personalization really can make a subscriber feel completely unappreciated.

Secondly, email is supposed to be a two-way medium, and we need to treat our marketing emails in that way. This means allowing users to reply, and not sending emails from addresses like **no-reply@company-name.com**.

We should be actively seeking to engage our subscribers in discussion. We should ask their opinion, encourage comments and post the occasional poll. By doing so, we demonstrate that they are more than an email address to us.

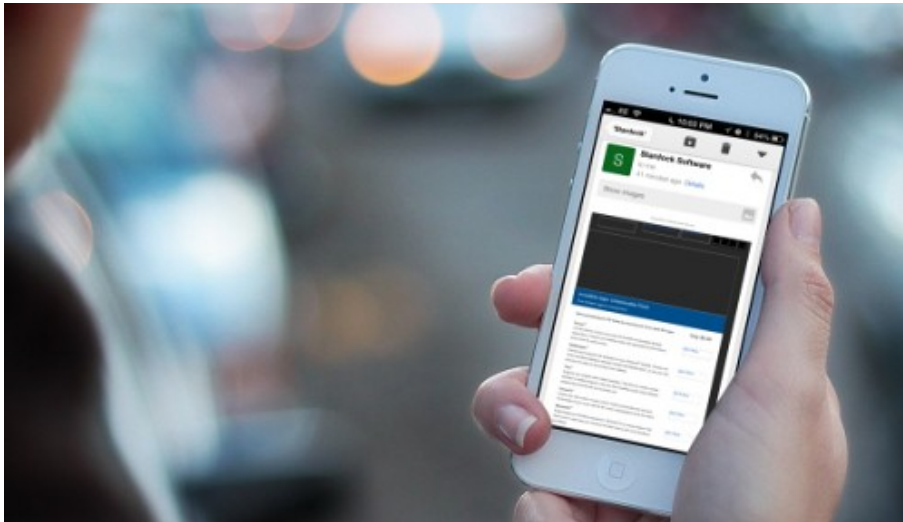
This, of course, all depends on whether they can read our email in the first place.

“This Is Impossible To Read”

In their enthusiasm to increase email conversion rates, many mailing-list owners resort to ever more elaborate email designs. Unfortunately, this all too often leads to unreadable emails that send recipients instantly to the “Unsubscribe” (or, worse, the “Spam”) button.

Unlike many Web designers, I see nothing wrong with HTML email. It does statistically generate a higher conversion rate, and that cannot be ignored. However, HTML emails do take work to get right, and they need to be tested thoroughly.

To make matters more complicated, it is now vital to consider mobile devices. A huge percentage of users now access their email on mobile devices, and the email clients on these devices don’t display HTML email particularly well.



Too many HTML emails are not tested on mobile devices and, consequently, are unreadable.

Fortunately, you can make HTML email responsive, and companies such as MailChimp⁵⁶ even provide tools to do so with no programming knowledge required.

Of course, if all else fails, a plain-text version should be available to those subscribers who want it.

“I Just Want Some Respect”

Ultimately, the secret to not alienating subscribers is simple: treat them with respect.

⁵⁶. <http://mailchimp.com/>

You can't go far wrong if you follow the old adage, "Treat others as you would have them treat you." If you hate being signed up for stuff without your permission, being constantly sold to, and not being able to easily unsubscribe, then others likely feel the same way about your content.

No matter how important you feel your emails are, they are probably like any others to your subscribers. 🐼

How Metrics Can Make You A Better Designer

BY LAURA KLEIN 🐼

Metrics can be a touchy subject in design. When I say things like, “Designers should embrace A/B testing” or “Metrics can improve design,” I often hear concerns.

Many designers tell me they feel that metrics displace creativity or create a paint-by-numbers scenario. They don’t want their training and intuition to be overruled by what a chart says a link color should be.

These are valid concerns, if your company thinks it can replace design with metrics. But if you use them correctly, metrics can vastly improve design and make you an even better designer.

First, when I talk about metrics, I’m talking about making use of a couple of very specific tools:

- User analytics,
- A/B or multivariate testing.

User analytics are what you might get from [Google Analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics/)⁵⁷, [KISS-metrics](http://www.kissmetrics.com/)⁵⁸ or [Mixpanel](http://mixpanel.com/)⁵⁹. They tell you things like which pages users have viewed the most, which call-to-action buttons they’ve clicked, and how many tasks they’ve performed while using your product. They can also show you where people drop out of critical flows, such as registration and purchasing.

A/B and multivariate testing involve looking at how changes affect key metrics such as revenue and retention. When you run an A/B test on a change, you’re comparing user behavior with the new design to user behavior with the old design in order to answer the rather important question of “Which design caused the user to do more of what I wanted and less of what I didn’t want?”

⁵⁷. <http://www.google.com/analytics/>

⁵⁸. <http://www.kissmetrics.com/>

⁵⁹. <http://mixpanel.com/>



Shopping Cart Abandonment Infographic by KISSmetrics⁶⁰

By incorporating analytics and A/B testing into their process, designers can not only improve the business outcomes of their redesign projects, but also become better at design.

Metrics Tell You Where Design Is Needed Most

Unless your resources are unlimited, prioritizing design changes can be tricky. For example, if you're working on an e-commerce website, who's to say whether optimizing the sign-up flow is more important than re-vamping the check-out flow or rebuilding a product page or simplifying the navigation? Any of these could be pretty good ideas.

Metrics are fabulous for making these decisions. For example, analytics can show exactly how much of a drop-off your shopping cart is getting. It can show you precisely how many visitors aren't converting into signed-in users. It can pinpoint how many people bounce right off of product pages.

Metrics tell you where your biggest business problems really are, so that you can use design to fix them.

Of course, metrics can't tell you how to actually fix the problems. Your job as a designer is to learn why users might be having problems in certain areas of your product and come up with brilliant solutions.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS?

When deciding on your highest design priority, examine your product's analytics to identify where your biggest problems are.

⁶⁰. <http://blog.kissmetrics.com/shopping-cart-abandonment/?wide=1>

Metrics Help You Track Real User Behavior

How many times have you been designing and thought something like, “I wonder how many products people have in their shopping carts on average when they drop out?” Or, “What is the average number of friends a user has in such-and-such a social network?”



(Image: [Adriano Gasparri](http://www.flickr.com/photos/4everyoung/)⁶¹)

Answers to questions like these can have an enormous impact on the way you design. After all, depending on whether users have no more than a few friends or they tend to have more than a hundred friends, the interaction for selecting from a list can be quite different.

Metrics and analytics free the designer from having to guess the answers to questions like these.

Again, knowing the answers doesn’t tell you how to design the product, but it does give you a lot more insight into the real problems you’re trying to solve.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS?

The next time you’re debating with someone about where users are dropping out of a flow or how many users are watching a video tutorial, remember that these questions are easily answered by metrics.

Or if you’re trying to decide what sort of widget to use to access some data, remember that the right solution often depends on how much data there will be, and that question is entirely answerable as well.

61. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/4everyoung/>

Metrics Tell You Which Changes Are Most Effective

Let's be clear. Your job as a designer is to improve the customer experience in some measurable way, right? If you do a complete redesign, and every designer you know loves it, and it wins awards from experts, but every single one of your users hates it and leaves and stops giving you money, then that's a failure for the company.

Design changes — like code changes, marketing changes and customer service changes — should eventually make a company more money, because that's how the company will stay in business and pay the designer's salary.

With metrics, you can learn exactly what sort of an effect your changes will have on the numbers you care about.

Let's say you've been obsessing over the navigation of your website. You feel it's confusing for users and is frustrating them and causing them to leave. So, you revamp the navigation and run an A/B test so that half of users see the old version and half see the new one. After a few thousand people have seen both versions, you have a very good idea whether changing the navigation has resulted in good things like increased revenue, time on site, and the number of users who would recommend you to a friend.

Of course, not every change you make will have a direct and significant impact on revenue. But knowing that any major change you make is having a measurable influence on the things you care about is very nice.

As a bonus, once you've made a few demonstrable improvements to revenue, asking for a raise or for more design resources becomes a lot easier.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS?

Get into the habit of A/B testing your design changes.

Obviously, you can make a few changes that you know will negatively affect certain metrics because they're part of a larger strategy. But at some point you need to put a stake in the ground and say, "If we make the following design changes, then important metrics such as revenue and retention will improve."

If you test all of your design changes against the status quo, you should eventually see those key metrics go up as a result of your work.

Metrics Give You The Freedom To Take Design Risks

Big design changes can involve big risks. After all, if what you're proposing has the potential to vastly increase revenue, then it also has the potential to vastly decrease revenue.

Knowing that all of your changes will be A/B tested gives you a tremendous amount of freedom to try new and potentially dangerous things. If they pay off, you'll find out immediately. If they cause problems, you can identify and fix them quickly.

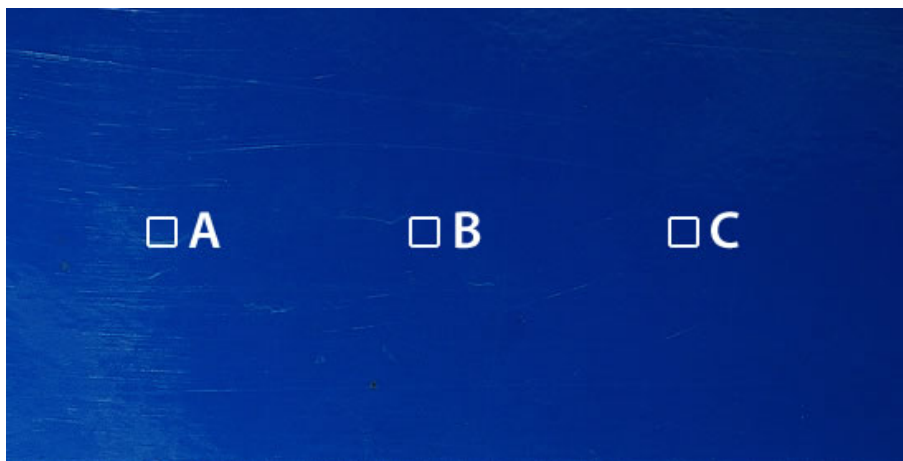
You no longer need to worry that some change you've made will mysteriously ruin everything. And if you weren't worried about that before, you probably should have been, because even very small design and text changes can have an enormous impact on user behavior.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS?

Be bold! The next time you're inclined not to make an important change because you're concerned it might have a negative impact, go ahead and try it. Roll the change out to 10% of your users, and get real data on whether it helps or hurts the product.

What Metrics Won't Do

A lot of the push-back I get on measuring design is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of A/B testing and analytics. Some designers hear about Google testing dozens of shades of blue, and they feel that design shouldn't be reduced to that level. After all, design is more than about picking a shade of blue.



Which blue is better? (Image: [visualpanic](http://www.flickr.com/photos/visualpanic/2376601734/sizes/l/in/photostream/)⁶²)

62. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/visualpanic/2376601734/sizes/l/in/photostream/>

In fact, metrics are terrible for a lot of things that design does well. For example, metrics can't tell you how exactly to improve a design. They can only tell you whether your design is better or worse than another. They can tell you exactly what users are doing, but they can't tell you why they're doing it or how to make them stop.

Metrics can be an incredibly powerful tool, but they don't replace design or make it irrelevant. In the end, the designers are still the ones making the decisions. They're just making them with better information. 🐼

Want To Get Started?

- ["Vanity Metrics vs. Actionable Metrics"](#)⁶³
- ["5 Big Mistakes People Make When Analyzing User Data"](#)⁶⁴
- ["7 A/B Testing Resources for Start-Ups and Solo Developers"](#)⁶⁵

⁶³. <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/blog/2009/05/19/vanity-metrics-vs-actionable-metrics/>

⁶⁴. <http://usersknow.blogspot.com/2010/03/5-big-mistakes-people-make-when.html>

⁶⁵. <http://mashable.com/2010/11/04/a-b-testing-resources/>

Keep Your Analytics Data Safe And Clean

BY DANIEL WAISBERG 🍷

Whoever works with analytics on a day-to-day basis knows how important it is to have a continuity with the data. Any slip might be fatal: data can disappear, trends misunderstood and jobs lost. Losing data can have long-lasting consequences, as very often it isn't possible to re-process the data — so what is lost cannot be recovered.

For this reason, it is essential to have a place where you can test changes to your settings and configurations. It is also important to keep track of changes in a way that they can be used to provide a context for analysts, so that when you are looking at incomprehensible spikes in past data, you can check whether any changes were made to the data collection methods (or if an offline campaign was in place during the period analyzed). Having such a process in place will help to *keep data safe* from loss and clean from inaccuracies.

As Neil Mason describes on his presentation about Data Discovery⁶⁶: “all data is dirty and needs to be cleaned and transformed, this is the heavy lifting stage.” Below I describe four techniques that will help analysts and marketers to ease the burden of inaccurate data usage Google Analytics⁶⁷. I provide examples on how this can affect the data, and share tips on ways to make them happen.

Google Analytics Accounts And Profiles

The Google Analytics code site⁶⁸ offers an in depth explanation of the hierarchy used by the tool to manage report access and data collection. There are three important levels that we need to be aware of:

1. **Account**

An account is the mother of all Web properties and profiles, and has a unique account ID that can be used to track multiple websites.

2. **Web Property**

The web property has a unique ID, which is a combination of the ac-

⁶⁶. <http://online-behavior.com/emetrics/data-discovery-1073>

⁶⁷. <http://www.google.com/analytics/>

⁶⁸. <http://code.google.com/apis/analytics/docs/concepts/gaConceptsAccounts.html>

count ID and additional digits. Since different Web properties have different IDs, their data cannot be merged.

3. Profile

The gateway to the website reports. It determines which data from your website appears in the reports. Filters can be applied to profiles in order to segment the data; for example, it is possible to create a profile only with visitors from USA, only from new visitors, etc. Since profiles use the same account and Web property IDs, data for multiple profiles can also be seen in aggregate.

Below is part of the scheme provided on the code from the website mentioned above. The image well represents the possibilities of data collection and management.

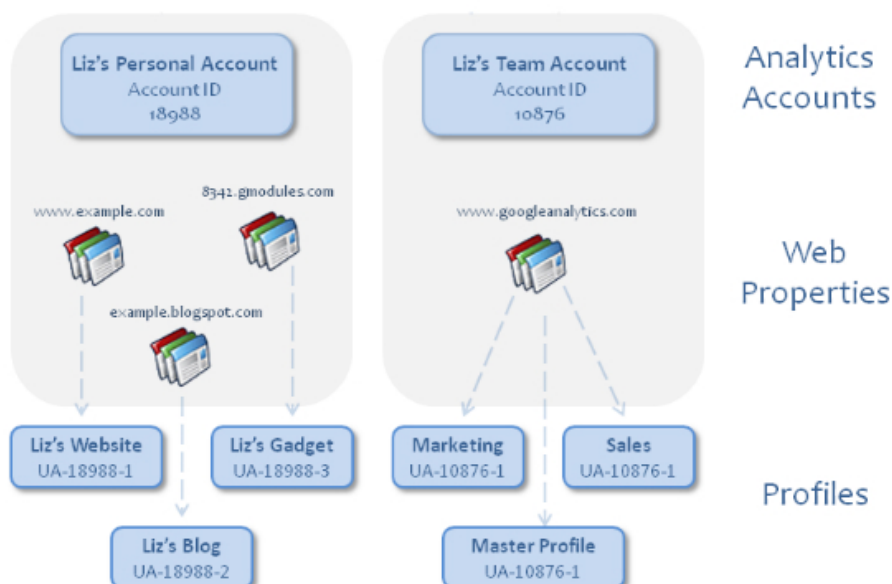


Diagram showing the possible Analytics account configurations.

Important to note that Google Analytics still misses the mark on an important feature related to account configuration: report level access. This means that the lowest access that can be given to a user is a profile, so it is not possible to provide access to reports. As I wrote in an article about [Google Analytics Perception & Reality](http://marketingland.com/google-analytics-enterprise-perception-reality-5730)⁶⁹:

As of today, Google provides just two options when it comes to providing access: Administrator (who can access anything in the account) and Viewer (who can access specific profiles). This division is far from

69. <http://marketingland.com/google-analytics-enterprise-perception-reality-5730>

good. In any mid-sized company, the data needs to be more modular (i.e. enable showing different reports to different people).

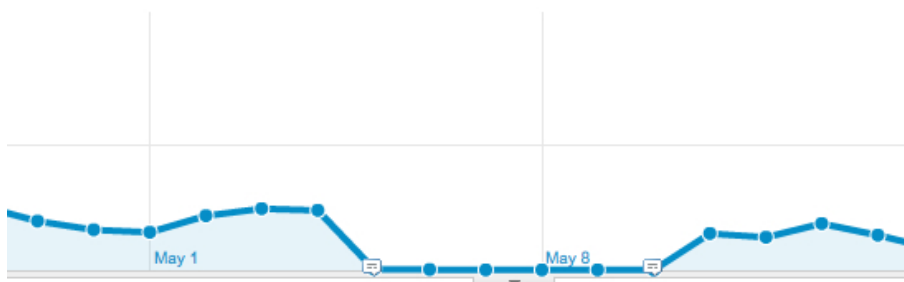
CREATING AN ANALYTICS STAGING PROFILE

Let's suppose you read in a random blog that you should create a filter to lowercase URIs for all of your profiles (if you don't have one yet, check point five on this [implementation checklist](#)⁷⁰). And suppose you have no idea how this can impact your data.

The best way to learn how filters affect your Google Analytics data would be to have two profiles with the exact same settings (the real profile, and the test profile) and apply a new filter only to the test profile. Once it is applied, you can check the data and compare the number to learn if anything went wrong. Here is an article from the Google Analytics Help Center on [how to create profiles](#)⁷¹.

CREATING AN ANALYTICS STAGING ACCOUNT

If you work in the Web Analytics field long enough, you have certainly experienced data loss as a consequence of bad implementations. It happens, and the best we can do is to have a [Web Analytics Process](#)⁷² in place that will help us avoid it. Not long ago, I implemented the `_trackPageLoadTime()` method (now deprecated) for a website, and as a result from a lack of attention, I lost six days worth of data (yes, I didn't log in quite enough to Analytics during this week!) See graph below:



Example of how a bad Google Analytics implementation can affect data collection.

The story above illustrates the fact that code changes should be dealt with carefully. Since most websites do have a staging site where changes are tested before going live, I suggest having a different track-

⁷⁰. <http://www.advanced-web-metrics.com/blog/2012/01/03/google-analytics-implementation-checklist/>

⁷¹. <http://support.google.com/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1009714&topic=1009620&ctx=topic>

⁷². <http://online-behavior.com/analytics/web-analytics-process-measurement-optimization>

ing code used for those environments to test code changes on the Google Analytics script (i.e. a new Google Analytics account). This technique is very similar to the one proposed above to check filter changes – it only goes one step further.

Tracking Profile Changes & Configurations

When it comes to both external and internal changes, context is one of the most important factors for analyzing data. For this reason, it is crucial to have a log of changes that affect your data, as well as changes in marketing campaigns and other company efforts. Below I present two ways to keep this data in an accurate and accessible way.

KEEPING TRACK OF INTERNAL CHANGES

Changes are constantly made to Google Analytics profiles by users: website goals, improved filters, new features, and others. Every change may impact data in several ways, even when not expected. For this reason, I propose a method that will help to keep track of those changes, especially in large organizations where more than one person is involved with Google Analytics. Even when one person is involved, this is important as employees usually do not work with just one company “to infinity... and beyond!”

In order to make this task easy and centralized, I propose using a Google Docs form. Using such a form will facilitate the collection and sharing of the changes made to a Google Analytics account. The form should be created so that multiple teams will be aware of all changes. These will then be aggregated for historical knowledge that can be used by the whole team (and future teams members).

Below is an example of such a form with fields that you might want to create ([learn how to build a Google Docs form⁷³](https://support.google.com/docs/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=87809)).

⁷³. <https://support.google.com/docs/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=87809>

Change in Google Analytics Settings

This form should be used for any change in Google Analytics profiles, filters and goals. For code changes, please contact the CEO.

What is the nature of your change?

☐ Profile

☐ Filter

☐ Goal

☐ Other:

Which profile(s) was affected by the change (profile name)?

Describe below the change performed, including the old setting. Please also write a few words about its objective.

When was the change implemented? Please use format January 29, 1980

Example of a Google Docs form that can be used to track Google Analytics changes.

KEEPING TRACK OF EXTERNAL & OVERALL CHANGES WITH ANNOTATIONS

Back in 2010, The Analytics team had announced a feature which in my opinion is one of the most important features of the tool: Google Analytics Annotations. This feature allows website managers to provide context for where the numbers live (the graphs on the interface), allowing for richer analyses. Here are some important occasions when you should use this feature:

- New offline marketing campaigns (e.g. radio, TV, billboards).
- Major changes to the website (e.g. design, structure, content).
- Changes to tracking (e.g. changing the tracking code, adding events).
- Changes to goals or filters.

While annotations can – and should – also be used for technical changes to the website (as mentioned above), it is important to keep them at a high level. This means that you shouldn't add too much information about your changes, just the overall picture; otherwise the an-

notations will quickly become overcrowded. Therefore, the use of both methods described above (form and annotations) should create an optimal mix. Below is a video explaining how to use the Annotations feature:



Video explaining how to use the Google Analytics Annotations feature.

Closing Thoughts

In this chapter we discussed ways to avoid bad implementations — by putting into place a process that requires users to report on changes made to their Google Analytics accounts. This not only helps in avoiding mistakes, but also helps find the source of problems, and solutions for fixing them quickly.

Google Analytics is a great tool, and one of its greatest qualities is that it makes Analytics ubiquitous — most people in any organization can use it; from Management to Marketing to IT. This means that many hands must deal with the tool, which requires an easy way to deal with the changes to those tool settings and configurations. Hopefully this chapter has provided some ideas on how to do it. 🐼

It Works For “You”: A User-Centric Guideline To Product Pages

BY SARAH BAUER 🐼

Product pages for e-commerce websites are often rife with ambitions: recreate the brick-and-mortar shopping experience, provide users with every last drop of product information, build a brand persona, establish a seamless check-out process.

As the “strong link in any conversion⁷⁴,” product pages have so much potential. We can create user-centric descriptions and layouts that are downright appropriate in their effectiveness: as Erin Kissane says⁷⁵, “offering [users] precisely what they need, exactly when they need it, and in just the right form.”

Beyond that, a user-centered creation process for product pages can help brand the information as well as reduce the content clutter that so often bogs down retail websites.

User-centric product copy garners positive results because it anticipates the user’s immediate reaction. As Dr. Timo Saari and Dr. Marko Turpeinen, authors of “Towards Psychological Customization of Information for Individuals and Social Groups⁷⁶” suggest, individual differences in processing information implicates dramatic variances in type and/or intensity of psychological effects, such as positive emotion, persuasion, and depth of learning (2).

We can describe products in various ways. Highlighting certain aspects of a product will elicit different reactions from various users. Gearing product descriptions to a particular audience encourages those users to effectively process the information, heightens persuasion, and increases the potential to predict what the users want (but didn’t know they needed). The effort required of user-centric product descriptions demands that we understand how certain descriptors, contexts and inclusions of details affect the target user, and that we then put our discoveries into action.

⁷⁴. <http://sixrevisions.com/user-interface/product-page-design/>

⁷⁵. <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/a-checklist-for-content-work/>

⁷⁶. http://www.hiit.fi/files/admin/sab/SAB04/material/DCC/20_CHIPersWorkshopBookSaariTurpeinen.pdf

This chapter offers a user-centric guide to producing product pages and provides examples of successful e-commerce websites that present user-centric approaches to product page descriptions and layouts.

Get To Know Your User

Approaching product page description and layout from a user-centric perspective demands that we have a rich understanding of the target user. As Saari and Turpeinen suggest, Web customization starts with some type of model, be it individual, group or community. With your user models in place, you can best assess what they need and how to write for them.

In her book *Letting Go of the Words*⁷⁷, Web usability expert Janice Redish suggests these strategies for getting to know your target user:

- Scope the email responses that come through the website’s “Contact Us” form and other feedback links. Consider the profiles of the senders. You can discover commonalities in lifestyle, technological capability, education level and communication preference through these channels.
- Talk to the customer service or marketing employees at your company. Don’t approach them with a broad demand to describe the typical client. Rather, ask questions about their interactions with clients. Who is calling in? Who is stopping by the office? What queries and complaints are common?
- Offer short questionnaires to visitors to the website. Redish suggests asking people “a few questions about themselves, why they came to the site, and whether they were successful in finding what they came for.”
- If possible, acquire a sense of the client simply by observing the people who walk through the front doors of the business. This is a great way to pick up on key phrases, jargon, emotional behavior and demographics.

Once you’re able to confidently brainstorm the major characteristics of your target user or group, then developing the models to guide the writing process comes next.

Keep in mind that gathering and compiling this information can take as little or as big an investment of time and money as you (or the client) can afford and still be effective. As Leonard Souza recently noted⁷⁸, even stopping in a nearby coffee shop to engage five to ten people

⁷⁷. <http://www.redish.net/books/letting-go-of-the-words>

⁷⁸. <http://uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com/2011/12/06/effective-user-research-transforming-minds-of-clients/>

in your target demographic can yield useful insight. With a bit of flexibility, you can find learning opportunities that are convenient and on the cheap.

The models created from your user research can be fashioned into personas, which Souza describes as “tools for creating empathy among everyone in the project.” Use personas to guide user-centric copywriting by establishing very specific user goals and preferences.

A persona is a fictional person amalgamated from the characteristics of your target user. You can get creative here with the persona’s name and image, but not too creative. The persona must be mindfully constructed according to the age, education, family status and other personal details culled from your research.

Now that you have a persona to please as you construct a product description and layout hierarchy, staying user-centric is that much easier. Take a look at the product description from [Lululemon](http://shop.lululemon.com/)⁷⁹, a British Columbia-based yoga-wear retailer:

why we made this

Scuba diving in the chilly waters of British Columbia taught us valuable lessons about the benefits of a deep hood and a well-fitted jacket. We designed this cozy hoodie to keep us toasty post-dive or pre-Downward-Dog.

key features

- feel loved and cherished in the thick **Cotton Fleece**
- the deep hood and high scuba collar keep your head and neck warm
- ribbed stretch side panels give you the perfect fit
- fitted ribbed waistband to stop cold gusts
- park your zipper in the **zipper garage** to keep it from scratching your chin
- **thumbholes** keep sleeves down and make layering easy
- don't scrounge around for a rubber band, your **emergency hair tie** is on the zipper
- the fabric is preshrunk before the hoodie is sewn so you don't get any surprises in the wash

tech specs

- **designed for:** to-and-from
- **fabric(s):** **Cotton Fleece**

Product description from [Shop.lululemon.com](http://shop.lululemon.com/)⁸⁰

The product description assumes that the reader knows a specific set of jargon: How many non-yoga participants would know what downward-dog means? Or “pipes”, as the “Key Features” section refers

⁷⁹. <http://shop.lululemon.com/>

⁸⁰. <http://shop.lululemon.com/products/clothes-accessories/scuba-central/Scuba-Hoodie-33051?cc=9978&skuId=3429122&catId=scuba-central>

to arms? This content drives right to the needs and preferences of a very specific user. She wants warmth (four of the “Key Features” note the thermal quality of the product), convenience (pre-shrunk fabric, easy layering), and motivation for an active lifestyle (she recognizes the yoga jargon and enjoys giving her “pipes some air time”).

A rich understanding of the user has made this product page effective and delightfully specific to both the user and the brand.

Master S.M.A.R.T. Content and Layout

Without specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and trackable user goals driving the copy on the product page, the information will sag. I draw here from Dickson Fong’s enlightening article “[The S.M.A.R.T. User Experience Strategy](#)⁸¹” to suggest that care should be taken to develop user goals that guide the writing process for product pages.

The S.M.A.R.T. formula will keep you on track as you plot out product details and decide what descriptive angle to use.

Fong provides an excellent user goal for a product page: “I want to learn more about this product’s design, features and specifications to determine whether it fits my budget, needs and preferences.”

This will help you create a checklist when assessing what to present first and what to offer as optional information when structuring the layout of the page (more about that in the “Create Information Hierarchies” section below). It provides direction when you’re writing content and helps you focus on the benefits to the user. And as Darlene Maciuba-Koppel suggests in *The Web Writer’s Guide*⁸², “In copywriting, your end goal is to sell benefits, not products, in your copy.”

For users, benefits and accomplished goals go hand in hand. A product that doesn’t fit their budget, needs or preferences offers them little benefit. So, in order for S.M.A.R.T. goal-driven product pages to serve user-centric purposes, the text must follow suit. Fong suggests presenting relevant content details that are specific to the consumer of that product type.

Let’s take Fong’s S.M.A.R.T. user goal for product pages and assess the specifications at play on the following two pages from Dell:

81. <http://uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com/2011/09/13/the-s-m-a-r-t-user-experience-strategy/>

82. <http://www.amazon.com/Web-Writers-Guide-Darlene-Maciuba-Koppel/dp/0240804813>

Lead the charge.

★★★★★ (2 Ratings) [write a review](#)

Dell Price **\$2199⁰⁰**

As low as **\$661** / mo | [Apply](#)

[Select >](#)

Introducing the **New Alienware™ Aurora**. Capture the high ground with Alienware's most advanced desktop.

- **Stunning graphics for your games:** Achieve game-winning performance from your graphics — the new Aurora can support dual graphics cards up to 2GB GDDR5 AMD Radeon™ HD 6950².
- **Ultimate power under your control:** Hurl yourself into the action with the powerful processing capabilities of the new Aurora, featuring the Intel® Six Core™ 3000 series CPUs.
- **Amazing chassis at your command:** With a huge capacity for upgrades, brilliant internal component layout and liquid cooling for a high-performance processor, you can take charge of this gaming powerhouse and make it your own.

Like 1k 16 0 16 +1 100

[Design](#) [Tech Specs](#) [What's New](#) [Customer Ratings](#)

Product page for Alienware⁸³ on Dell.com

Featured on Alienware, Dell's computer subsidiary for high-performance gaming, the description for this desktop computer has been tailored to the primary browsing goal of a very specific user. The needs and preferences of the user have already been predicted in the bullet-point outline, highlighting optimum graphics and top-notch liquid-cooling capabilities, thus harmonizing the checklist of features with a checklist of benefits for the user. A number of the product's features could have been highlighted, but for optimal ease, the specifics most likely to help the user accomplish their goals are featured.

With the next Dell desktop computer, another goal of the target user is covered in the description:

⁸³. <http://www.dell.com/us/p/alienware-aurora-r4/pd>

Everything you need with a little color.

★★★★★ (458 Ratings) [write a review](#)

? [Have questions? Get answers here.](#)

Dell Price \$299.99

As low as \$20.1 / mo | [Apply](#)

Select >

Everything you want and nothing you don't. The Inspiron™ 570 desktop gives you the power to personalize everything down to the chassis color. Plus, it features VISION Technology from AMD, a combination of cutting-edge processing and video power.

- Complement your style with a choice of vibrant colors
- [Genuine](#) Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit
- Store more with the optional 1TB hard drive and up to 8GB memory²

Great financing offers on all new c
Limited time offer. For new and existing qualified Dell Preferred Account™ custo

[Customer Ratings](#) [Design](#) [Tech Specs](#) [The NEW Inspiron 620/620s](#)

Product page description for Inspiron 570⁸⁴ on Dell.com

With a noticeable absence of technical details and a heavy emphasis on product personalization, this description plays to a user with very different needs than the Alienware shopper's. Even the tabs have been rearranged to best meet the user's goals. The Inspiron 570 page shows "Customer ratings" as the first tab, while the Alienware page offers "Design" first and then "Tech specs."

These decisions are all geared to accomplishing very specific user goals: find the required information and assess the benefits.

Use Personal Pronouns

Consider again Dell's description of its Inspiron 570:

Make It Yours

The Inspiron 570 desktop is everything you want and nothing you don't. Available in vibrant colors, so you can complement your style or stand out from the crowd. Plus, you can build your desktop according to your needs with a choice of multiple AMD processors and NVIDIA ATI graphics cards as well as other customizable features. So whether

⁸⁴. <http://www.dell.com/us/p/inspiron-570/pd>

you are surfing the Web, emailing friends and family, downloading music and photos or blogging about it all, the Inspiron 570 desktop can handle it.

Your wants, *your* style, *your* needs, *your* friends and *your* Internet past-times. Including the title, eight instances of “you” or “your” turn up in this 86-word segment!

Personal pronouns in product descriptions are perfectly appropriate and quite effective at engaging users, because, as Redish states, “People are much more likely to take in [messages] if you write with ‘you’ because they can see themselves in the text.”

With Dell’s content, the personal pronouns target a specific user (one who is savvy enough to download music and email and who is interested in customization and feeling unique), while also managing a broad gender appeal.

Outdoor equipment retailer REI⁸⁵ employs personal pronouns in its online product descriptions, creating dynamic scenarios aimed at a specific user:

Garnished with a few little extras, the Old Town Saranac 146 XT green canoe offers a fun and friendly way to navigate that picturesque waterway you've recently noticed—gear up and explore!

- Additional width boosts your stability, making this recreational canoe ideal for photography, fishing or family paddling
- Flat bottom provides excellent initial stability; straight sides increase security for beginning paddlers
- Moderate rocker offers a good balance between maneuverability and tracking
- Thermoformed polyethylene offers excellent stiffness, high durability and light weight at an affordable price
- Center bench seat features storage area, a cup holder, a 6 in. dry hatch and a molded-in rod holder
- The Saranac 146 XT canoe features padded seats and backrests
- Molded seats provide daylong paddling comfort and feature paddle rests, cup holders and storage trays
- Molded handles at bow and stern facilitate 2-person transport, and molded-in flush mount at bow accommodates a rod holder, not included

Product description for REI.com⁸⁶

⁸⁵. <http://www.rei.com/>

⁸⁶. <http://www.rei.com/product/824877/old-town-saranac-146-xt-canoe-green>

The description asserts that this canoe will help you navigate a waterway that “you’ve recently noticed,” anticipating a specific user reality (or dream).

The product showcase is devoted to the user’s needs and showing how the user will benefit from purchasing the canoe. Using “you” is the clearest and most direct way for this retailer to grab the user’s attention and to convince them, at any time of the year, that this canoe is the right buy.

Angie King backs this up in her article “[Personal Pronouns: It’s Okay to Own Your Web Copy](#)⁸⁷.” She suggests that using first- and second-person pronouns helps users connect with the content, and “reflect[s] the way real people write and speak,” fostering an immediate connection.

For a product description to speak directly to a specific user or group, the “you’s” should flow freely.

Use Information Hierarchies

Adopting a user-centric approach to the layout and copy of product pages helps you tackle the challenge articulated by Kean Richmond⁸⁸: “How do you cram so much information into a single Web page?”

In addition to technical specifications, shipping information, item details and preference options (and don’t forget that compelling product description), product pages must also list every describable service that the product performs for its user, including customer benefits (as Darlene Maciuba-Koppel explains, too).

By all means, provide the user with every last detail possible. Answer every conceivable question, or make the answer visible for discovery. Do so with information hierarchies that are based on a rich understanding of targeted users. This will keep each page tidy and drive users to complete your business goals.

In a structure in which, as Kean Richmond states, “all the important information is at the top and [the rest] flows naturally down the page,” details that might not be a top priority for the target user can be tucked into optional tabs or presented at the bottom of the page. The key is to gauge the structure of the page with the sensibilities of the targeted user in mind.

⁸⁷. <http://blog.braintraffic.com/2010/03/personal-pronouns-it%E2%80%99s-okay-to-own-your-web-copy/>

⁸⁸. <http://sixrevisions.com/user-interface/product-page-design/>

LOOK AT USER CONTEXT

Here's where you become a mind-reader of sorts. Erin Kissane points to the approach of content strategist Daniel Eizan⁸⁹ in understanding what specific users need to see on the page in order to be drawn into the information. Eizan looks at the user's context to gauge their Web-browsing behaviors. Eizan asks, What are they doing? How are they feeling? What are they capable of?

Establishing user context aids in planning an information hierarchy, and it is demonstrated by small and large e-retailers. On the big-box side, we have Walmart:

The screenshot shows a Walmart product page for "Nature Valley Sweet & Salty Nut Cereal Granola Bars, 16 ct". The page layout includes a header with the product name and a "Print" button. Below the header is a navigation bar with three tabs: "Buy from Walmart", "Shipping & Pickup", and "When will I get this item?". The "Buy from Walmart" tab is active, showing the online price of \$14.54 and a quantity selector set to 1. To the right, there is an "Add to Cart" button and links to "My List", "NEW!", and "My Registry". Below the navigation bar is a section titled "About this product" with links to "Item Description", "Specifications", "Product Reviews", "Q&A Exchange", "Gifting Plans", and "Financing Offers". The "Item Description" section is expanded, showing bullet points: "Energy from pure and natural ingredients" and "1.5 oz bars". Below this is a link to "Ask a question". The "Specifications" section is also expanded, showing a table with the following information:

Specifications	
Model No.:	SN42067
Shipping Weight (in pounds):	1.535
Product in Inches (L x W x H):	7.5 x 5.5 x 4.0

By making the price and product name (including the unit number per order) immediately visible, Walmart has anticipated a possible user context. A Walmart visitor searching for granola bars has perhaps purchased the product before. With the unit price made visible, perhaps the anticipated user is judging the product based on whether this box size will suffice.

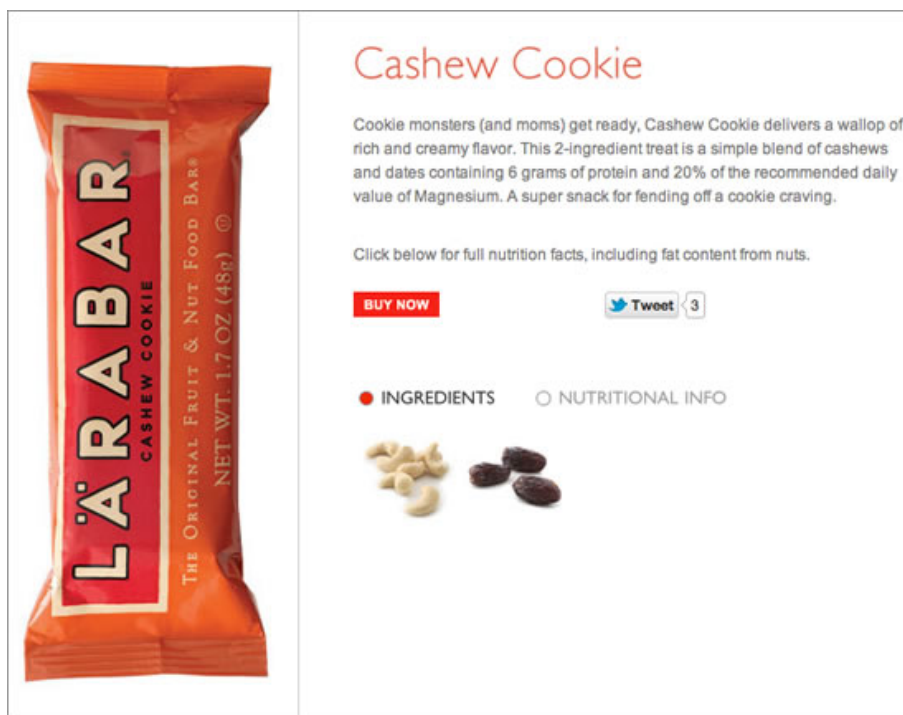
Details such as "Item description" and "Specifications" are options that are convenient to the user who is making a large order of a familiar product.

⁸⁹. <http://www.slideshare.net/danieleizans/context-as-a-content-strategy-creating-more-meaningful-web-experiences-through-contextual-filtering>

The user’s context shapes the hierarchy: the user seeks a quick calculation of units per product versus price. The targeted user does not immediately need an ingredients list, allergy information or a description of the flavor. But if they do, they are available in a neat options-based format.

Walmart has built its reputation on “Everyday low prices,” and the brick-and-mortar philosophy has crossed over to its website. Walmart anticipates users who have some familiarity with its products and who have expectations of certain price points. These factors play into the information hierarchy across the website.

Now look at the product page of a different kind of retailer, nutrition bar manufacturer [Larabar](http://www.larabar.com)⁹⁰:



Cashew Cookie product page from [Larabar.com](http://www.larabar.com)⁹¹

Here is an online presentation of a retail product that is similar to Walmart’s Nature Valley granola bar (though some might argue otherwise). However, the information hierarchy clearly speaks to a different user – a specific user, one who might be looking for gluten-free snack foods or a vegan protein solution. The Larabar user’s context is much less urgent than the Walmart user’s. The product page does not reveal pricing or unit number. Ingredients are visible here, with simple im-

90. <http://www.larabar.com/products/cashew-cookie>

91. <http://www.larabar.com/products/cashew-cookie>

ages that (when scrolled over) provide additional nutritional information.

The anticipated user has more time to peruse, to browse several varieties of product, and to read the delightful descriptions that help them imagine the tastes and textures of the bars.

This user might be very much like the targeted Walmart user but is likely visiting the Larabar website in a different context. This product page offers more immediate information on nutrition and taste, selling to a user who is perhaps hunting for a solution to a dietary restriction or for a healthy snack alternative.

However, the red-boxed “Buy Now” is positioned in a memorable, convenient spot on the page, leaving no guessing for the user, who, after reading a description of this healthy bar full of “rich and creamy flavor,” will likely click it to find out the purchasing options.

With these two pages for (arguably) similar products, we see two completely different ways to structure product details.

Both are effective — for their targeted users. A person seeking gluten-free snacks for a camping trip might be frustrated having to search through the hundreds of granola bar options on Walmart’s website. But they wouldn’t be going there in the first place; they would use a search engine and would find Larabar.

Information hierarchy solves the content-overload challenge that can overshadow the process of constructing a product page, and it is an opportunity to bolster user-centric copy and layout. As mentioned, the key is to gauge the user’s context.

Conclusion

While a user-centric consideration of product pages is not the only way to go, it does provide a focused approach that has appeared to be effective for some pretty successful e-commerce players. Consistency in product pages is key, especially when building a brand’s presence; a reliable guide can ease the writing process. The user-centric method does require some primary research, but this lays a sturdy foundation by which to gauge every bit of content on the page according to how it benefits the user.

As Maciuba-Koppel says, as a content writer or designer, your goal should not be to sell products, but to sell benefits.

Now watch the conversions multiply. 🍪

References

- *Writing for the Web: Creating Compelling Web Content Using Words, Pictures And Sound* Lynda Felder (New Riders: 2011)
- “The S.M.A.R.T. User Experience Strategy⁹²” Dickson Fong (Smashing Magazine)
- “Personal pronouns: It’s okay to own your Web copy⁹³” Angie King (Brain Traffic)
- “A Checklist for Content Work⁹⁴” Erin Kissane (A List Apart)
- “Writing Copy that Works for a Living⁹⁵” Erin Kissane (A List Apart)
- *The web-writer’s guide* Darlene Maciuba-Koppel (FocaPress: 2004)
- “*Letting Go Of The Words*”: *Writing Web Content that Works*. Janice Redish (Morgan Kaufman Publishers)
- “Anatomy of an Effective Product Page Design⁹⁶” Kean Richmond (Six Revisions)

⁹². <http://uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com/2011/09/13/the-s-m-a-r-t-user-experience-strategy/>

⁹³. <http://blog.braintraffic.com/2010/03/personal-pronouns-it%E2%80%99s-okay-to-own-your-web-copy/>

⁹⁴. <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/a-checklist-for-content-work/>

⁹⁵. <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writingcontentthatworksforaliving/>

⁹⁶. <http://sixrevisions.com/user-interface/product-page-design/>

How To Launch Anything

BY NATHAN BARRY 🍷

Launching a new product — especially your first — can be incredibly daunting. Even knowing where to turn for help can be hard. So many blog posts are full of free advice on how to successfully launch that I almost didn't write another one. But many of the posts I read for my first product launch didn't help me very much. The material was too fluffy, the marketing ideas were vague, or the advice didn't apply to my tiny business.

Having launched five new products in fewer than nine months, I've turned product launches into a science. And while they never go perfectly, these ideas have helped me generate over \$200,000 in revenue from online products, starting from scratch.

Let's jump in.

Starting From Scratch

In July 2012, my blog had 100 subscribers. Two months later, I made \$12,500 in sales in just one day. It turns out that you can start without an audience and still find success. I'll assume you are starting from scratch, like I did.

A PRODUCT

The first thing you'll need is a product or, rather, an idea of what your product will be. Waiting until your product is finished before marketing it is a terrible plan. For most products, the marketing should start as — or even before — the product is being developed.

Defining the product, with a tentative title, enables you to start identifying your target audience and putting together a marketing plan, which we'll cover in a minute.

EXPERTISE

For a year, I wrote a meandering blog about nothing in particular. There were a few posts about design, some more on productivity, and the rest were random thoughts that didn't fit any category. That year of posting was basically wasted because I came out of it with only 100 regular readers.

I was just a designer writing about random topics.

Then, in July 2012, I announced my first book, *The App Design Handbook*, and something changed. Just by announcing the book with a landing page, I suddenly had a purpose to my writing — to teach iOS app design. More importantly, everyone else’s perception of me changed as well. I wasn’t just another designer writing about anything that came to mind; I was an expert in designing iOS apps, writing a book to teach others to do the same.

My skill level hadn’t changed; I’d been a pretty good designer all along. But just announcing that I was writing a book completely changed the perception of my skill level and expertise.

TAKE INVENTORY: WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

When my brother-in-law Daniel was 13 or 14, I would often find him walking out of a random room in the house. Confused as to why he was in there, I would ask him what he was doing. He would casually shrug and reply, “Just taking inventory.”

And he was. Later during a dinner conversation, someone would mention that they were looking for batteries, and Daniel would jump in and say, “Oh, you have some. They are on the top shelf of the closet.”

It was a strange habit, but also very helpful at times.

You need to take inventory of everyone and everything that could help you with this product launch: friends with popular blogs, an existing following in social media, and forums or communities you are a part of.

I may have felt like I was starting from nothing, but when I really took inventory, I saw that I had a few things going for me: 100 blog readers, 400 to 500 Twitter followers and a few influential acquaintances.

Start Teaching

When I learned about marketing in college, there was always one question I never got a good answer to: How do you get potential customers to pay attention to you? I knew about buying ads, building brand loyalty and running focus groups, but what if you didn’t have the time or budget for any of that?

ANOTHER WAY

Back in 2006 I was spending all of my time getting better at Web design — particularly CSS. I was pretty good at coding cross-browser layouts, and I considered myself an intermediate Web designer.

At the same time, Chris Coyier started writing [CSS-Tricks](http://css-tricks.com)⁹⁷. I remember reading his first articles and thinking, “Oh, I know that already. What qualifies Chris to teach when he doesn’t know any more than I do?”

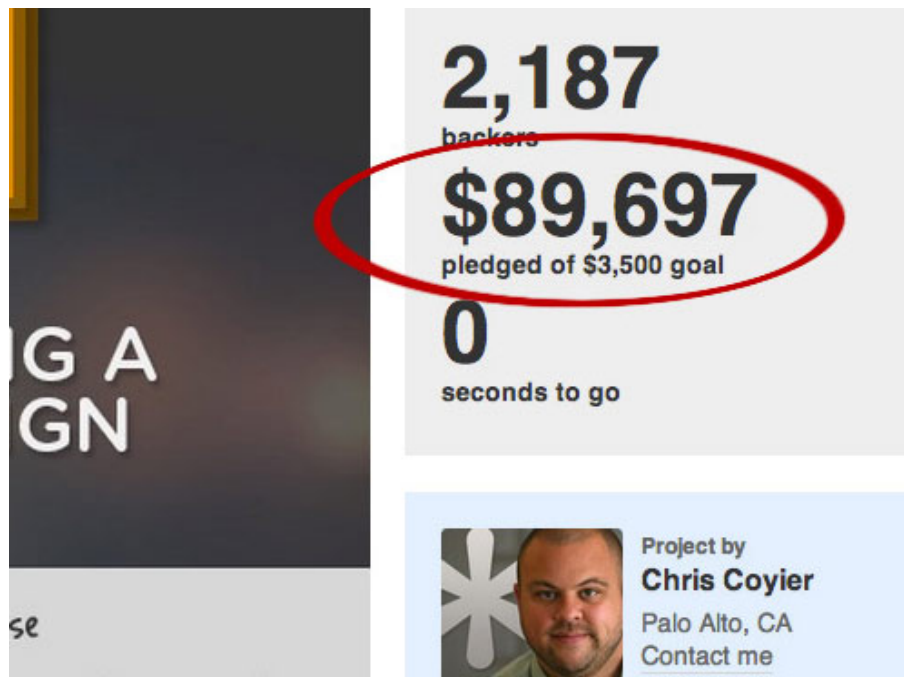
I was a bit arrogant.

But Chris kept putting out CSS tutorials, and I kept patting myself on the back for already knowing the skills he was teaching. But then, as my friends started asking me questions about CSS, I found myself linking to Chris’ articles, not just because they saved me the effort of having to explain myself, but also because they were really well written.

Fast forward another year or two, and I was consulting his articles myself, sometimes just for reference, but other times to learn new skills. While we started at the same level, Chris had improved much more quickly than I did. The difference was that he was teaching.

None of that shocked me. The real surprise didn’t come until July 2012, when Chris decided to redesign [CSS-Tricks](http://css-tricks.com)⁹⁸. In order to take some time off to work on the redesign, Chris launched a Kickstarter project, in which his fans could donate to the project and, in return, get exclusive access to a series of tutorials that he planned to record throughout the redesign process. His goal was to raise \$3,500.

When the project closed, he had raised \$89,697.



⁹⁷. <http://css-tricks.com>

⁹⁸. <http://css-tricks.com>

HOW WERE CHRIS AND I DIFFERENT?

Chris and I started at the same skill level. Sure, he got a bit better at CSS over time, but what was it that gave him the ability to flip a switch and raise \$89,697, when I couldn't?

Clearly it had nothing to do with skill in CSS. It had everything to do with the fact that he taught everything he knew, and I kept my knowledge to myself. Through teaching, Chris built an audience that benefited from his work and that was eager to pay him the moment he gave them an opportunity.

TEACH EVERYTHING YOU KNOW

Teaching is how you get people to pay attention to you and your product without spending money on advertising. By giving away useful information, you will attract potential customers — and get them to trust you — because you've helped them so much.

Then, when it comes time to ask for a purchase, you will have become a trusted advisor, not a random company selling something on the Internet.

Announce Your Product

It's now time to announce your product to the world. If you have a rough idea of the product and a working name, then you have everything you need. The second biggest mistake I see with product announcements is that the creator has waited too long to start generating interest.

A LANDING PAGE

In order to announce your product, you'll need a landing page. You can make this with LaunchRock, a WordPress plugin, some simple HTML code, or [ConvertKit⁹⁹](https://convertkit.com/features) (my own product). Either purchase a new domain name (yourproductname.com) or use a subdirectory, like I do for my books (nathanbarry.com/authority). Either works. Just decide and move on.

LANDING PAGE ELEMENTS

The page should lead off with a headline, preferably something that speaks to the pain you are trying to solve ([CopyHackers](https://copyhackers.com) has a guide on

⁹⁹. <https://convertkit.com/features>

this¹⁰⁰). Beyond this, I like to include a paragraph or two that goes into detail, and then a screenshot or graphic that quickly gives the viewer an idea of the product. For books, I have a 3-D mockup of the book cover, a screenshot inside an iPhone (to represent an iOS app), and a screenshot inside a browser (for a Web application).



THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT

I mentioned earlier that launching late is the second biggest mistake I see on landing pages. What's the first biggest mistake? Not using email.

It's common to see landing pages that don't offer a way to follow along with the progress. Sometimes the best option a visitor has is to follow the product on Twitter or Facebook.

Compared to email, Twitter and Facebook perform very poorly. Getting open rates over 50% on email is quite possible, whereas engagement on Facebook is often well below 15%. Most people deal with every message in their inbox, but they'll miss your message on Twitter if they don't sign in at the right time.

The most important element on your landing page is the email opt-in form. Your message could just say, "Enter your email address to follow the progress and be the first to hear when [product name] launches."

100. <http://copyhackers.com/how-to-write-a-headline/>

If you are interested in self-publishing (and value your time) enter your email address to learn more.

I'll keep you informed of the book progress along with plenty of self-publishing tips. No spam ever. I promise.

First Name

Email Address

Keep me updated

Plenty of tools will help you capture email addresses. AWeber, MailChimp and Constant Contact all work just fine, but I created ConvertKit for exactly this process.

START SHARING

Once your page is live, you can start promoting it. Start by sharing in social media and in any relevant communities you are a part of. Ask friends to share, introduce yourself to authors of relevant blogs, and ask for a link in relevant email newsletters.

The Blog Posts

A well-done landing page will get shared on its own if the product is engaging, but landing pages typically aren't educational.

To get people in your industry to really advertise your upcoming product, you need to teach. Blog posts are a great way to do that. But don't write posts like "Five Ways to Do X" or "13 Reasons You Should Care About Y." Those fluffy list posts don't convey expertise.

Instead, write a few definitive, in-depth posts on your topic. Each should stand by itself by including all necessary information. Could each article be a chapter in a book? If not, rewrite it until it is of that quality.

That's the kind of content that will be shared and that will build an audience. This is the time for quality over quantity if you want your industry to really take notice.

CAPTURE EMAIL ADDRESSES

In each post, make sure to link to and talk about your upcoming product. I like to do this briefly at both the beginning and end of the post, and in between wherever it makes sense. Just remember that you are teaching, not selling.

Then, at the bottom of every post, include an email opt-in form so that readers can hear more about your upcoming product. This will put the subscriber on the same email list as your landing page form.

THREE POSTS

I think three posts is the minimum to establish expertise and to maintain a good relationship with your subscribers. Many more and you probably aren't putting enough effort into each one. Fewer than three and you won't have enough content to build an email list.

Keep in mind that the goal is to get people who are interested in your product to sign up for the email list. Don't worry about selling up front. Always start by teaching.

Stay In Touch

A visitor will come across your landing page soon after it is published, sign up and then move on with their life. When you email them in three months to say that your product is ready, do you think they'll remember who you are?

Probably not.

Not only that, but they'll wonder how you got their email address and will be tempted to hit the "Mark as spam" button. You don't want to find yourself in that situation.

HOW NOT TO KILL YOUR EMAIL LIST

Email lists don't last forever. Any subscribers who haven't been contacted in the last month start to go cold. After three to six months, your list is nearly dead.

Of all the assets in my business, my email list of 7,000+ engaged users is the most valuable. Letting anything bad happen to it would be foolish. Just never let the list go cold in the first place.

The easiest strategy is to provide valuable information on a regular basis. Luckily for you, those blog posts you've been writing are great content.

Let's say you are able to get 50 subscribers just from your landing page being shared around the Web. (Don't forget to ask your friends to share!) Send your first blog post to that list. Because they are interested in your product, they will be interested in your post as well. In that email, include a quick update on your progress with the product. Also, ask your subscribers to share this latest post.

RINSE AND REPEAT

That new post should get you more subscribers because you will have an opt-in form at the bottom. Now it's time to write a second post. Let's say you now have 100 subscribers, 50 from the landing page and another 50 from the new blog post. Send out the second blog post to all 100 subscribers, along with two things: a quick update on the product and a request to share the post with their friends and network.

Can you guess what's next? Yep, repeat the process again. Write another detailed blog post, send it out to your now longer email list, update them on your progress, and ask them to share the post.

OTHER SOURCES

Sharing on social media isn't the only way to draw attention to a product. Your landing page and each blog post can be shared on Hacker News, Reddit, Inbound.org, Designer News and StumbleUpon and in email newsletters (especially the ones that just aggregate links). These sources can all drive a lot of traffic.

Hitting the home page on Hacker News alone, which is not too hard with good, relevant content, can bring over 10,000 visits. These visits could turn into hundreds of email subscribers.

Make sure to share each post and your landing page individually with every relevant source.

Launch Sequence

Did you know you could do everything right up until this point and still have a failed launch?

I once launched a new workshop to a list of 5,000 designers and didn't sell a single seat, all because I sprang it on them suddenly. There wasn't any build-up or sequence to build desire or demand.

Remember how we sent blog posts to the email list as they were published, each with an update on the product? That's part of the launch sequence, and it is insanely important. But that's only part of it. You also need to communicate all of the dates and product details well in advance.

COMMUNICATE EVERY DETAIL

While talking a few months ago with a friend who was about to launch a product, I asked one important question, "Does everyone on your email list know that your product is launching tomorrow?"

He'd actually had a great launch sequence up until that point — a large email list and regular updates — but he had failed to mention the

exact launch date. The next day his subscribers were going to get an email that they weren't expecting, an email that asked them to hand over their hard-earned cash.

I always send a pitch email the day before a big launch. I want potential customers to have all the information they need to make a decision the day before they have an opportunity to buy. Then, on launch day, I send a simple announcement email. Most of those who received the launch email decided the day before whether to buy. Then, it is just a matter of getting out their credit cards to complete the purchase.

Whenever I receive an unexpected sales pitch, I try to decide right then whether I am interested. Even if I am interested, I may put off the purchase for a bit (maybe my credit card isn't handy right then) or do some more research. Soon, I'll have forgotten, moved on with work and never come back to buy.

That's why sending all of the details, including the exact launch time, the day before is so important. Do that well and people will be actively refreshing your page to be the first to make a purchase!

FRIENDLY ADVICE

So, that's what my friend did to complete his launch sequence. Right after we finished speaking, he wrote an email to his list saying that the product would be available the following morning at a specific time. It would have been better had his readers been able to look forward to a launch date for a few weeks, but I'm sure announcing the day before had a big impact on sales.

Launch Day

We've been talking about product launches for about 3,000 words now, but we're just now getting to the actual launch. Does that tell you anything?

I hope you've learned that the most important aspects of a launch happen long before launch day.

A SIMPLE EMAIL

Once the scheduled launch time rolls around, hit "Publish" on your sales page. Ideally, this will just replace the landing page that has been up for the last few months. Then, send the announcement email. It doesn't need to be anything fancy. Aim for clarity above all else: "The product is live — get it here." Include a short testimonial or two if you feel inclined.

The goal is to get your audience from the email to the sales page.

If the whole launch process has been done properly, you should get at least a few sales immediately. All three of my books had over \$1,000 in sales within the first 10 minutes of the announcement email going out.

CONTACT EVERYONE

Now, spend some time looking beyond your email list. Contact every person who has helped you with the product. Thank them for their help, give them free access to the product, and ask them to share the sales page. Many will.

Then, submit your website to any news aggregators or blogs that write about you, and post in any communities that you've been a part of. Tweet, post to Facebook, and ask all of your friends to do the same.

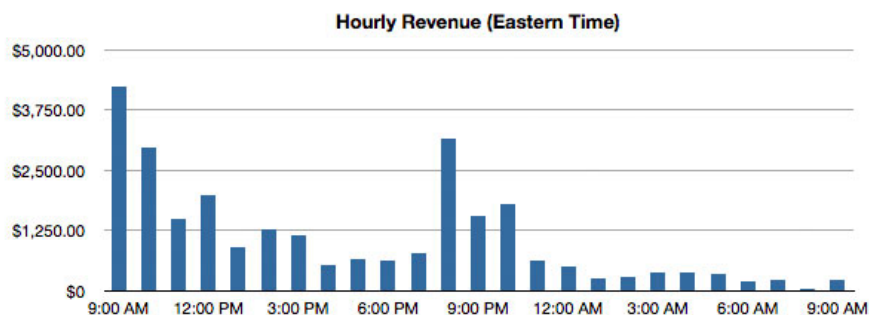
Did anyone ask about your product in the last few months? (I hope so!) Email them to let them know it is now ready and waiting for their credit card number.

Then, take a break from the computer. You'll need it.

ONE MORE EMAIL

This last email is optional, but it tends to print money, so you may want to incorporate it.

I like to run a 20%-off launch day sale, first, to reward my early buyers for trusting me and being so eager, and secondly, to have a reason to send a reminder email at the end of the day saying that the sale is ending. A lot of people had intended to buy upon receiving the first email but, for whatever reason, didn't. Looking at the sales hour by hour, can you tell when the second email was sent?



My second spike is pretty obvious. Sending that email made me at least an extra \$4,000.

Let's Review

Your sales will die down. Nothing will be as big as a proper launch, but just know that you went out with a bang and hopefully made some money in the process.

As a short review, here's what you are going to do to launch your next product:

1. Figure out what you can teach potential customers.
2. Announce your product, with a landing page, as early as possible.
3. Ask visitors to subscribe to an email list to stay up to date.
4. Share the landing page everywhere possible online.
5. Write an excellent blog post, and ask people to subscribe to hear about your product.
6. Send this blog post to your email list, along with a product update.
7. Share the post everywhere and with anyone who would find it relevant.
8. Repeat steps 5 to 7 with two more blog posts, each time sending the latest post to the larger email list.
9. Announce the launch date and other details as early as possible.
10. Send an email the day before telling all subscribers to expect the launch the next day and telling them everything they need to know to make their decision.
11. Send a simple announcement email.
12. Work like crazy to promote your newly launched product.
13. Send a follow-up email near the end of launch day telling your subscribers that the sale is ending and that they should purchase right away.

That's it! You can do plenty more for an even more successful launch, such as write guest posts or form partnerships, but if you cover the basics outlined above, you are most of the way there.

A FREE COURSE ON PRODUCT LAUNCHES

I don't want your launch education to end here, so I've put together a free three-week course called "Mastering Product Launches¹⁰¹." There will be some overlap between that content and this chapter, but the

email course will walk you through each aspect of launching a product.

🐼

101. <http://nathanbarry.com/launch>

About The Authors

Christopher Butler

Christopher Butler is the Chief Operating Officer at [Newfangled](http://www.newfangled.com)¹⁰², a Web development firm specializing in agency partnerships. He has written articles on the current and future state of the Web for [Print](http://printmag.com)¹⁰³ and [HOW](http://www.howinteractivedesign.com)¹⁰⁴ magazines, [Newfangled.com](http://www.newfangled.com)¹⁰⁵, and is the author of *The Strategic Web Designer*¹⁰⁶. You can follow him on Twitter [@chrbutler](http://www.twitter.com/chrbutler)¹⁰⁷, or find him on his [blog](http://www.newfangled.com)¹⁰⁸ and on [newfangled.com](http://www.newfangled.com)¹⁰⁹.

Daniel Waisberg

Daniel Waisberg is the Analytics Advocate at Google, where he is responsible for fostering Google Analytics by educating and inspiring Online Marketing professionals. Both at Google and his previous positions, Daniel has worked with some of the biggest Internet brands to measure and optimize online behavior. Daniel is also the Founder of online-behavior.com¹¹⁰. You can find him on [Google+](https://plus.google.com/+DanielWaisberg)¹¹¹ and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/danielwaisberg)¹¹².

Jose Martinez Salmeron

Jose Martinez Salmeron is Executive Creative Director for Social@Ogilvy at Ogilvy Washington where his work spans brand identity, content marketing and Web design. He writes periodically about the intersection of creativity, business and technology. You can follow him on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/jamsalmeron)¹¹³.

¹⁰². <http://www.newfangled.com>

¹⁰³. <http://printmag.com/Author/Christopher%20Butler>

¹⁰⁴. <http://www.howinteractivedesign.com/author/christopher-butler>

¹⁰⁵. http://www.newfangled.com/website_topics_for_designers_and_marketers

¹⁰⁶. http://www.newfangled.com/the_strategic_web_designer

¹⁰⁷. <http://www.twitter.com/chrbutler>

¹⁰⁸. <http://chrbutler.com/>

¹⁰⁹. http://www.newfangled.com/chris_butler_blog

¹¹⁰. <http://online-behavior.com/>

¹¹¹. <https://plus.google.com/+DanielWaisberg>

¹¹². <https://twitter.com/danielwaisberg>

¹¹³. <https://twitter.com/jamsalmeron>

Laura Klein

Laura Klein is a user experience and research expert in Silicon Valley, where she teaches companies how to get to know their users and build products people will love. She blogs about UX, metrics, customer development, and startups at [Users Know](http://usersknow.blogspot.de/)¹¹⁴. Her book, *UX for Lean Startups*¹¹⁵, was published by O'Reilly in 2013. You can also follow Laura on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/lauraklein)¹¹⁶.

Nathan Barry

Nathan Barry is the founder of [ConvertKit](https://convertkit.com/features)¹¹⁷, an email marketing application, as well as the author of *The App Design Handbook*¹¹⁸ and *Designing Web Applications*¹¹⁹. His latest book, *Authority*¹²⁰, teaches authors how to profit from self-publishing.

Paul Boag

Paul Boag has been working with the Web since 1994. He is now co-founder of the Web design agency [Headscape](http://headscape.co.uk/)¹²¹, where he works closely with clients to establish their Web strategy. Paul is a prolific writer having written the *Website Owners Manual*¹²², *Building Websites for Return on Investment*¹²³, *Client Centric Web Design*¹²⁴ and numerous articles for publications such as .net magazine, Smashing Magazine and the Web Designers Depot. Paul also speaks extensively on various aspects of Web design both at conferences across the world and on his award winning Web design podcast [boagworld](http://boagworld.com/podcast/)¹²⁵. Website: [boagworld](http://www.boagworld.com)¹²⁶. Twitter: [@boagworld](http://www.twitter.com/boagworld)¹²⁷. You can also find Paul on [Google+](https://plus.google.com/104773474799178830141/posts?rel=author)¹²⁸.

¹¹⁴. <http://usersknow.blogspot.de/>

¹¹⁵. <http://www.amazon.com/UX-Lean-Startups-Experience-Research/dp/1449334911>

¹¹⁶. <https://twitter.com/lauraklein>

¹¹⁷. <https://convertkit.com/features>

¹¹⁸. <http://nathanbarry.com/app-design-handbook>

¹¹⁹. <http://nathanbarry.com/webapps>

¹²⁰. <http://nathanbarry.com/authority>

¹²¹. <http://headscape.co.uk/>

¹²². <http://boagworld.com/websiteownersmanual>

¹²³. <http://boagworld.com/books>

¹²⁴. <http://boagworld.com/books/clientcentric/>

¹²⁵. <http://boagworld.com/podcast/>

¹²⁶. <http://www.boagworld.com>

¹²⁷. <http://www.twitter.com/boagworld>

¹²⁸. <https://plus.google.com/104773474799178830141/posts?rel=author>

Sarah Bauer

Sarah Bauer is a freelance Web content writer and music journalist, because she's crazy about both and can't pick just one. She contributes all over the place, including [Navigator Multimedia](#)¹²⁹ and [BeatRoute BC](#)¹³⁰. Website: www.sarahbauer.ca¹³¹. Follow her on Twitter [@sarah-fayebauer](https://twitter.com/sarah-fayebauer)¹³².

Yiannis Konstantakopoulos

[Yiannis](#)¹³³ is a Web designer, developer and author from Greece. He likes tweaking ideas and he fancies talking with smarter people than him. When he'll grow up he would like to be as good as his son. Also, he [tweets](#)¹³⁴ regularly.

¹²⁹. <http://www.kelownawebdesigns.com/>

¹³⁰. <http://beatroute.ca/?s=Sarah+Bauer&submit=Search>

¹³¹. <http://www.sarahbauer.ca>

¹³². <http://https://twitter.com/SarahFayeBauer>

¹³³. <http://porcupinecolors.com/>

¹³⁴. https://twitter.com/yiannis_k

About Smashing Magazine

Smashing Magazine¹³⁵ is an online magazine dedicated to Web designers and developers worldwide. Its rigorous quality control and thorough editorial work has gathered a devoted community exceeding half a million subscribers, followers and fans. Each and every published article is carefully prepared, edited, reviewed and curated according to the high quality standards set in Smashing Magazine's own publishing policy¹³⁶.

Smashing Magazine publishes articles on a daily basis with topics ranging from business, visual design, typography, front-end as well as back-end development, all the way to usability and user experience design. The magazine is — and always has been — a professional and independent online publication neither controlled nor influenced by any third parties, delivering content in the best interest of its readers. These guidelines are continually revised and updated to assure that the quality of the published content is never compromised. Since its emergence back in 2006 Smashing Magazine has proven to be a trustworthy online source.

¹³⁵. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com>

¹³⁶. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/publishing-policy/>