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Ceonex White Papers

Building Enticing E-Commerce Sites Through Contextual Relevancy

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Ceonex, Inc., 189 Beaver St., Suite #204, North Adams, MA 01247

Creating an effective, enticing, user-friendly website is essential if you want to connect with your audience. Contextual relevancy is the biggest factor when it comes to commercial websites. By using an appropriate color scheme, a clear visual hierarchy and an intuitive navigation structure, it's much easier to connect on an emotional level with your target audience. The goal is also to allow consumers to connect with your product or service as effectively as possible. What makes an enticing, user-friendly website? Let's find out.

Visually Enticing Websites

A site that is enticing makes you want to do more than look at it it makes you want to use that site, dig in and look around, and end up buying something eventually (or at the very least sign up for a newsletter, request more information etc.).

Contextual relevancy is the biggest enticement factor when it comes to commercial websites. If you do not connect with your target audience, no matter how nicely designed the site is, it will not "entice" people to interact with it. The only exceptions to that are sites that are appreciated aesthetically as works of arts online, that people visit "just to get a look." Yet those exceptions are not very relevant to commerce online, unless the uniqueness is used just as an additional factor to spread worth of mouth to get traffic to the site.

In addition to contextual relevancy, a visually enticing site is one that makes the experience effortless for a visitor so they can just concentrate on what they want to see or do, rather than on trying to figure out where to go or what to look at. Some methods of achieving this include a clear visual hierarchy, which helps visitors to effortlessly decide what to look at and what to click, as well as a well-thought-out site architecture, including an intuitive navigation structure.

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Choosing The Right Color Scheme

Picking a color scheme for a website is a crucial step to conveying your brand and establishing the emotional responses you wish to elicit from your target audience. Contextual relevancy is again very important here. Colors need to be based on emotions and visual references that need to be evoked to properly connect with the target audience.

Colors have a lot of intuitive meaning to people, across generations and cultures. Some colors are energetic, vibrant, inspiring. Others are soothing and calming. The trick is to understand the emotions that will be most appropriate for your target audience to feel while visiting your site, and then provide those colors, along with appropriate visual imagery, that prompt those feelings.

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Simplify Navigation

You *never* want to throw everything at your visitors and make them figure it out. If you tell them to sink or swim, they'll just go to your competition's pool which is only a click away.

While making your site so user-friendly that your visitors never have to think just click, click, click right through the entire purchase process is a daunting one, it will make all the difference to your conversion rates. Furthermore, you not only enjoy increased sales as a result, but you also actually owe it to your loyal customers to make their experience with you as easy and enjoyable as you can possibly make it.

Perfecting your site's usability requires several things. First, you want to make use of established best practices. Next, you'll want to have a clear understanding of your target audience and their needs, their Internet user levels and their emotional mindsets. Finally, you'll need to test, adjust, and test again. We developed a method called Quantemo (www.quantemo.com) to test the mental effort required to navigate a site, as well as the emotional responses triggered by that site. Quantemo studies as well as other usability studies help show how simplifying navigation is a priceless step to take to increase conversions and user satisfaction.

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Research and Analysis

Quantemo and other usability studies have revealed a great deal of best practices applicable to any industry, such as how people respond to colors and imagery (and that their responses to those are stronger than you might think), and how navigation structures that are seemingly obvious to a company end up absolutely confounding their users. When we've conducted our own studies, we've seen executives from our client companies flinching with agony watching study participant after study participant passing their gazes *right* over the button they are supposed to click, all because it wasn't in the place they *expected* it to be.

We can point out needs that the customer may not have thought of, and when properly communicated and pointed out, in a way you CAN entice and otherwise indifferent customer. Most indifferent customers are indifferent because they are too busy with their own things to go out and look for something new they may need especially if the site is hard to use and wastes their time. So overall getting them engaged and then making it easy to evaluate a product can entice an indifferent customer.

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Enticing Indifferent Consumers

You cannot, or at least should not, sell something that a consumer completely doesn't need. You can and should, however, effectively point out needs that a consumer may not have considered or thought of. A good example would be for products that address spyware, keyloggers and similar Internet nuisances and dangers, which many consumers are completely indifferent to since they are not educated on the issues. If they are educated to understand how spyware not only intrudes on their privacy, but also affects their computer's performance, they may find that they are in fact quite interested in solving that problem with a product designed to protect them from it.

The goal is to allow consumers to connect with your product or service as effectively as possible, at the point in time when the consumer is ready, or getting ready to purchase. Making the process as easy and as enticing as possible can then facilitate additional sales through repeat purchases or referrals.

So again, we can point out needs that the customer may not have thought of, and when properly communicated and pointed out, in a way you CAN entice and otherwise indifferent customer. Most indifferent customers are indifferent because they are too busy with their own things to go out and look for something new they may need especially if the site is hard to use and wastes their time. So overall getting them engaged and then making it easy to evaluate a product can entice an indifferent customer.

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"Great" Ideas That Don't Sell

Perhaps the most common mistake we see that sounds good to the company but just isn't is putting too many products on the home page just because they are "all great products" or "highly profitable." Yet overwhelming the visitor is not going to sell products, no matter how cool or profitable they are. A good site architecture will help visitors find what they want, not what the site want to shove down their throats (not an effective way to convert customers anyway!).

Also, a lot of companies sit down and say "Okay, we're going to be different, let's figure out how we're going to be different." And being different from your competition is indeed what your brand is all about. But some companies go down the wrong path and try to mess with established best practices instead of focusing on differentiating their products or identities. Doing things like having your navigation appear on a picture of a cheeseburger on your home page isn't different, it's just silly, and it gets in the way of a pleasant and effortless experience for your users.

Another thing we see a lot is companies trying to be everything to everyone. While you could argue that some companies have managed it Amazon.com comes to mind most companies are not going to be able to stand out in the crowd with no clear brand identity. Picking a market, and then working to dominate that, is the best way to increase revenues and conversions.

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Exemplary E-Commerce Sites

Amazon.com (www.amazon.com) is not "the" standard of E-commerce sites for nothing. They have managed to make the shopping experience there truly interactive, with reviews and personalized recommendations that are quite often right on the money. Some things are still overwhelming such as overview pages and some navigation yet still handled quite well considering the stunning amounts of products they are offering for sale.

Though it is not strictly an E-commerce site, we are also very impressed with the Samsung (www.samsung.com) site. The architecture is top-notch, and shows the incredible amount of thought that was put into the visitor's mindset and needs at each point. An enormous amount of information is offered without being overwhelming in any way, and the layout and navigation is intuitive throughout.

In conclusion, when designing an E-commerce site, contextual relevancy plays a vital role. Through research, analysis, and testing of your sites visual appeal, visual hierarchy and navigation structure, creating an enticing, user-friendly website is at your fingertips.

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About Ceonex

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

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

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Client Quote

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

W. Michael Draper, CTO,
NetworkWorld, Inc.