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IT SOLUTIONS WEB SITE

A Site to Behold

Software for tracking a Web site can produce raw numbers, but it won't give a company insight into who is visiting its site and what users are doing once there.

Tracking unique visitors to a Web site certainly is a common practice, but those statistics don't always tell the full story about a user's experience. As Berkshire Life Insurance developed a new Web site for its disability income customers, the carrier turned to a Web developer that could pinpoint who the visitors were and how those users felt about the experience of visiting Berkshire's site.

Berkshire Life chose Ceonex to build the site after a vendor search and a series of interviews. In addition to building Web sites, Ceonex offers a solution it calls Quantemo (quantifying emotional connection) to study the Web site's usability. "I told Ceonex what we wanted to do was twofold," explains John Broderick, creative director for Berkshire Life. "One, we wanted to see what users' experiences were—did the site work and how were [visitors] using it? But also we needed to establish some sort of foundation for data reporting. We needed to apply real statistics to some research so we could use [the data] internally."

Ceonex set up a lab with a computer logged on to Berkshire's Web site. "We asked users [enlisted for testing purposes] to conduct tasks, and we monitored their experience," says Broderick. Monitoring the experience included eye movement and facial expressions. Broderick reports the full tests, which Berkshire has held off for now, can check brain waves and skin temperature of a user to gauge the user's physiological response to the Web site.

Ceonex normally contacts profiled users—people who represent a typical customer—for the tests, but Berkshire instead recruited people the carrier thought represented its customers.

Berkshire is proud of the way its Web site looks. Broderick describes it as "three dimensional, intuitive, pretty powerful, and exciting." But no matter how great technology presents itself, Broderick believes it still comes down to the fundamentals. "What we discovered [from the tests] was in many ways our information was flat, especially on the navigation bar," he says. "But you need to explain correctly what the person is looking for, such as the difference between 'apply now' and 'sign up.'" It was important to determine whether the Web site was communicating correctly and quickly enough, Broderick notes. "We found some flat spots in the site," he says. "And even if we found just one, it would be successful for me because I would be able to illustrate that one point to the [business] people involved." The second objective, according to Broderick, was the internal discovery. "People have no idea how sophisticated you can get with data reporting—recording information and coming up with real data," he says.

The Web site analysis is only a part of Berkshire's mix, Broderick indicates. "The overall objective of our site was to create a thin marketing site," he says. "We did not believe in the full, if you will, Web site mall. If you go to many companies, especially large insurance companies, their sites sort of accommodate everybody. We don't think our product approach works that way. We are very specifically oriented toward audiences, so we have a thin site."

After completing the initial testing of the Web site, Berkshire is taking the data and its business and marketing plans and is developing the next-generation Web site. "The general objective is to build it out—make it a little fatter—but not too much," says Broderick. "We don't want people to stay on the site. We want them to come to the site, learn a little bit, and get out. We intend to make it a little more sophisticated, and when we've really polished it toward the audiences we're after and have a good back end to the Web site where we can record and monitor behavior, then we'll come in with the full Quantemo study to see, based on the objectives of the site, if it is paying off."

Broderick believes the idea is to force technology into the basics of marketing. "You've got to do some research, you've got to execute, and then you've got to study," he says. "We intend to continue to study. This truly is what technology is supposed to be able to do. It's not just about tracking; this is very much about the human interaction with the tools of business."

— ROBERT REGIS HYLE