

Web Site Development: Tools for Integrating the “Voice of the Customer”

It is critical that businesses understand how customers and stakeholders interact with their Web site to ensure return on investment. Organizations are no longer willing to invest in a Web effort without justifying its value. Now there are tools and techniques that evaluate customers' and stakeholders' expectations of, and satisfaction with, particular Web sites.

In the early days of the Web, organizations scrambled to create a “presence.” At that time, the objective was to have a beautifully designed Web site—often at the expense of navigation and architecture. Little thought was given to the customer's access to information, services, and products. Beginning in the late 1990s, the “e-commerce phase” of Web development began; that phase was characterized by extremely rapid innovation and experimentation fueled by explosive investment.

Until recently, Web site usability (i.e., designs based on user preferences) was largely ignored. Instead, Web site development was often driven by technology, organizational structure, and business objectives that do not include the “voice of the customer.” Research by User Interface Engineering, Inc., found that people cannot find the information they seek on Web sites about 60 percent of the time.

Now that Web development is slowing, organizations are focusing on the effectiveness of Web sites, the appropriate use of the Web for certain business processes, and return on investment. Organizations realize that competition on the Internet is fierce; if customers' expectations are not

met, they will simply switch to a different Web site. Organizations must understand their customers' expectations and preferences. Toward that goal, there are many Web site evaluation tools and tactics. ICF Consulting leverages these and other tools to evaluate and then redevelop Web sites.

- **Usability Testing.** This tool evaluates how users interact with a site or site concept. While relatively inexpensive, usability tests help determine if a Web site is useful and usable for the intended audience.
- **Qualitative Measurement.** Focus groups and one-on-one interviews help determine how the Web can complement business and communication goals. Although ineffective for testing usability, these techniques help uncover both articulated needs and “exciting” needs—needs that will delight a customer if fulfilled.
- **Quantitative Online Surveys.** Online surveys can be used to test goals and objectives as well as site organization and categorization. The results can be generalized to the larger population.
- **Workgroup Exercises.** Multidisciplinary work-groups that develop use scenarios and employ taxonomies and disaggregation/aggregation exercises help ensure a more diverse viewpoint when evaluating and designing a site.

By considering the “voice of the customer” using the tools above and implementing changes to address their needs, organizations will experience greater customer satisfaction and increased return on investment

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