

Exceptional experiences: The key to customer engagement

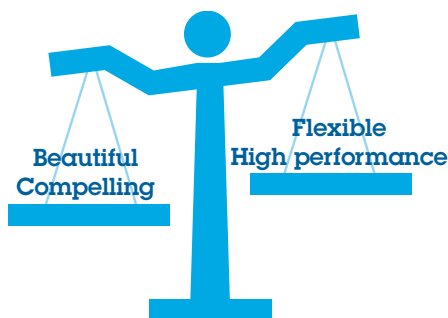
IBM's vision for driving next-generation web experiences



A compelling web experience isn't everything—it's the only thing

The Internet continues to grow, with nearly two billion people and billions of devices already connected. In response, most companies now rightly focus much of their marketing energy on getting the most return from all Internet channels. The online world is one vast opportunity for growing your business. But it's also easy to get lost in all of the noise when trying to balance the success factors. The problem is that companies often make sacrifices, resulting in web sites that are beautiful and compelling, or sites that are flexible and high-performance.

Looking ahead, both analysts and industry leaders agree that an exceptional experience will be the key to dazzling, acquiring and retaining customers. As a result, sacrificing the capabilities that drive experience will be more costly than investing in them since compelling experiences keep visitors from quickly clicking away to competitors' sites—helping to increase customer satisfaction and convert site visits into sales.



Outstanding experiences require a careful balancing of site attributes.

Experience killers: What sends customers packing?

Frustrated customers, lower satisfaction, declining loyalty and plummeting sales are all potential consequences of a poor online experience. And the reasons for poor experiences can vary widely.

- The interactions through some channels may lack expected capabilities. For example, some sites may just push information on visitors when visitors expect an open dialogue.
- Sites are often one size fits all rather than customized to users' preferences and behaviors, in addition to factors such as age profiles.
- Sometimes poor usability or other factors inhibit “moments of truth” in which customers feel like they've found what they needed or accomplished a goal.
- Customers using multiple devices or channels to interact with a given company may have wildly different experiences during each interaction, frustrating them.



Savvy customers may turn away from websites for any number of reasons.

So how did we get here? And, more importantly, how can you move your company's online experience in the right direction? Although many companies have tried to turn the Internet and associated channels into profit centers, pulling together the needed disparate capabilities in support of Internet strategies takes a lot of time and effort. Unfortunately, customer experience is often overlooked in the face of other challenges. For example, as multiple branding owners within a company have developed websites using different technology foundations and approaches, many companies find themselves with an array of websites, resulting in an inflexible approach that cannot deliver a premier and consistent online experience.

In other cases, companies have attempted to improve online customer interactions but made the mistake of overly focusing on either site attractiveness or integration capabilities—versus striving toward an overall strategy that properly addresses both challenges. Now, they may be struggling to integrate the social- and rich-media capabilities that customers expect. Moreover, the inability of business users to manage content or to create new offers or campaigns without the help of IT slows time to market.

Finally, organizations with web experiences created to address one-off customer or competitive situations find that, by the time they add all of the capabilities they need, they are left with a platform that is both unwieldy and difficult to support.

In the face of these types of challenges, what's needed is a way to foster a consistent, truly interactive, context-aware experience. Developing a complete picture of your customers, including their preferences, buying patterns, preferred channels and even social networks, is key.

Meet expectations with exceptional experiences: A comprehensive vision

IBM Project Northstar is IBM's vision and multiyear road map for helping you create differentiated, exceptional web experiences that attract and retain the best customers, improve brand loyalty, and lower operational costs. IBM shaped the vision—which is focused on providing businesses and organizations with all of the capabilities needed to support an exceptional experience—from the results of thousands of customer engagements and interviews with business leaders around the world. It is based on the idea that capabilities must evolve in “Internet time” as well as the following tenets:

Context is key. The best experiences feel custom fitted to users' preferences, device, locations, social networks and behaviors.

Social is everywhere and everywhere is social. Meaningful interactions with customers must be socially infused, supporting true dialogue with, and among, customers.

Visuals and flexibility matter. You don't need to sacrifice scalability, flexibility and manageability to create a beautiful, persuasive and responsive experience.

Integration must be easy. Interactive, context-aware experiences must leverage and extend existing data sources such as customer relationship management systems, social media sites and back-end applications, as well as the future products and cloud-based services you acquire.

Measurement is the key to advantages. Success requires the use of analytics and other tools and measures to determine if you are meeting business objectives and engaging customers.

Why IBM?

IBM is one of the few vendors with all of the technology, innovations and services needed to support a truly exceptional online experience. Web content management tools. Social and real-time communication capabilities. Search. Personalization. Marketing tools. Integration capabilities. Mobile device support. Real-time and predictive analytics. And more. With our technology, integration expertise and industry expertise—including industry templates—we can help you deliver gorgeous sites with the scalability, flexibility and manageability needed for today's fast-changing planet. If you're ready to take your online experience to the next level—and keep it there—look no further than IBM.

For more information

To learn more about exceptional online experiences, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: ibm.com/northstar



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