



2007-01-01

Website engagibility

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Recommended Citation

Fitzpatrick, Ronan: Website engagibility. eMetrics Marketing Optimization Summit, Stockholm, October 29-30, 2007.

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Website Engagibility
eMetrics Marketing Optimization Summit
Stockholm, October 29-30, 2007

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Think engagibility not usability

The manner in which visitors engage with the power of a website is different to the manner in which software applications and systems are used. Websites offer empowering opportunities and our understanding of this empowerment is still only at the dawn of a paradigm shift. In addition to surfing and website mining, visitors can contribute to the content of the website, manipulate configurators in order to configure product for purchase at an eCommerce website and generally interact through the activities that are provided by the website owner. Websites also provide opportunity for visitors to communicate with other individuals in real time worldwide. Groups of website visitors can create communities who experience a real sense of belonging. As website owners seek competitive advantage from their investment new empowerment opportunities that they would want to offer visitors are continuously manifesting themselves. Website's that support this empowerment are increasingly becoming the expectation of website visitors. In tandem with visitors searching out empowering websites, website owners are searching for strategies that will retain their hard won visitors [Cutler & Sterne 2003; E-Metrics 2003].

With this empowerment comes accountability and responsibility. Website visits can be abused in ways that software applications and systems could not previously. Offences by way of sexual crime, harassment, plagiarism, incitement to hatred, computer crime and extortion are just some of the examples of responsibility issues that impact visitors to a website. Duty of care has an important new significance for website owners. So, a website has different opportunities and presents different responsibilities to the use of software applications and systems. A website visit is different to conventional usability and is concerned with engagement, and for the software quality professional this is styled engagibility.

Engagibility is one of a set of website quality factors and is defined as the extent to which a visitor achieves a complete experience at a website [Fitzpatrick 2000]. It is concerned with three sub characteristics – navigability, interactivity and appeal and can be considered to be a step beyond usability [Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2005].

Engagibility – a step beyond usability

End user interaction with a system has traditionally been styled usability and ISO 9126-1 (2001) defines this in terms of effectiveness, productivity, safety and satisfaction. These are considerations that very much impact the user but while using a system the user could not significantly influence the nature of the interaction that could occur. In the main, the nature of the interaction was limited to system-to-user communication that was dictated by the system. The user-dictated communication with the system was not really a consideration and typically was limited to configuring the user interface to suit personal

preferences. Successful eCommerce is different and has additional requirements. Companies who have significant investment in their websites seek to retain visitors and to keep them fully engaged in order to secure increased sales. The strategy of this engagement is two way. In addition to the system communicating with the user or visitor, the visitor might also need to communicate with the website or with other visitors. For example, visitors might need to contribute to the content of the website. This contribution might simply be through a mailing list where email communication becomes part of the archived content of the site. Or, the communication might be the full posting of product for sale as in the auctioneer's portal model. Another example of website visitors having a more engaging visit is their ability to configure product that they wish to purchase to suit their own requirements. Visitors are further engaged through the quality of the navigation provided by the website and by the general maturity of the eCommerce functionality. Interactivity is impacted by the nature and extent of the activities provided, and the competitive ability of the site to attract visitors also contributes to the visitors' engagement. Readers will be aware that the quality of some websites can be negatively impacted by the ability of visitors to leave and surf to competitor sites. So, the website is not simply a software artefact to be sold to a purchaser, it is now a strategic sales and marketing tool with significantly different quality requirements. In the context of the World Wide Web the term usability limits the user's experience. What needs to be addressed is engagibility, which is a step beyond usability (Fitzpatrick, Smith & O'Shea, 2004). In the same way that usability is a significant issue of software quality, engagibility is a significant issue of website quality.

(From Fitzpatrick, Smith & O'Shea, 2005)

The challenge of website engagibility measurement

Website measurement is significantly focused on quality-of-use metrics which rely on the existence of the artefact. A significant challenge for the software engineering community is to devise methods for deriving website metrics based on the quality of a website design. Such methods will include website criteria for which baseline metrics can be established. Armed with such metrics and using methods like benchmark comparison or some validated prediction formula, website owners and designers would be supported in their efforts to predict the engagibility of a website design.

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